The Kids Are (M)all Right: Youth Culture and Shopping Centers in Late Twentieth Century America

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Abstract

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Priya Kumar

This thesis explores the era in which shopping centers reached the zenith of its growth and pop cultural relevancy in the United States in the late twentieth century. By tracing the shopping center from its inception as an enclosure that served the needs of the developing and sprawling suburbs to the entertainment complexes that came to define them in the late twentieth century, it can be argued that malls turned away from serving their communities in favor of promoting a type of conspicuous consumption. This thesis also explores the parallel rise of the so-called "teenager," a demographic that was named to complement the commercial culture that came to define them. This thesis focuses on self-described mallrats in the late twentieth century, and particularly how the two phenomena—mall culture and youth culture—dovetailed under an increasingly deregulated neoliberal regime. This thesis, therefore, delves into the implications of a generation that came of age within the windowless walls of the shopping mall.

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Rome was not built in a day and no shopping mall was built by one individual alone. There are many people I would like to acknowledge for their contributions to this project.

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Introduction

But it remains the case that, on the level of consumption, the preeminence of the twentieth century was indisputable: nothing, in any other civilization, in any other epoch, could compare itself to the mobile perfection of a contemporary shopping center functioning at full tilt.

—Michel Houellebecq

In 1984, the *Los Angeles Magazine* published an article entitled "Mall Rats," which promoted itself as an exposé that revealed what teenagers were really doing while they were spending all their time inside "the indoor shopping palaces."[1] The piece's author, Karen Lansky, posed as a combination of journalist and mall anthropologist. She chatted with and interviewed various groups of teenagers across Southern Californian malls; in food courts, in arcades and perched on risers outside of stores, from "seating areas to empty corridors."[2] "Mall Rats" is about mall culture as much as it is about youth culture, and, by the mid-1980s, both cultures were bleeding into one another. Lansky writes:

> The more time I spent with them, the more it became clear why they come to the mall. Because it's there, for one thing. Malls have gobbled up neighborhood shopping districts like Pac-Man, creating, instead of marketplaces that reflect the tastes of individual communities, huge, homogenized structures that cater, like TV, to the most common middlebrow denominator.[3]

To teenagers, Lansky continues, "the mall is just the one place to sate them."[4] In her somewhat scathing assessment, Lansky has characterized both shopping centers and the teenagers who fill them as a symptom of a society in decline. While the article gives the interviewed teenagers a platform to express themselves, even to defend themselves, Lansky is far from an empathetic interviewer. There is an accusatory tone to the article, one in which the teenagers are presented as posturing without much substance. Teenagers' affinity for the mall is reduced to "boredom and voyeurism."[5] Whenever they speak, Lansky often writes that the teenagers "complained" or "pouted" and, at one point, likens them to "lost kittens."[6]

Lansky is anxious about the children who were seemingly being reared in the "placeless space" of the mall and blames parents for treating the mall as a "babysitter cum warehouse."[7] She calls these children "Mall Rats" (but often, rather patronizingly, she refers to them as "kids") and charges the shopping center as "the only structure in some of their lives."[8] The article also sheds some light on how teenagers were received by the shopping centers: "[I]t's the kids—the ones who need the mall too much—whom the mall owners don't like."[9] Lansky writes of the resentment store owners had toward these mallrats: resentment toward the limitations owners had to set to keep them in check, resentment toward their parents for seemingly failing to control them, and resentment toward the teenagers themselves "who don't bring much cash into the mall but drain its resources instead."[10] To Lansky, teenagers' unwantedness existed in conjunction with a delusion that they owned a space in which they were unwelcome:

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[1] Karen Lansky, "Mall Rats," *Los Angeles Magazine*, August 1984, 254.
[2] Ibid., 257
[3] Ibid., 254.
[4] Ibid., 254.
[5] Lansky, "Mall Rats," 494.
[6] Ibid., 496.
[7] Ibid., 255-56.
[8] Ibid., 257.

> …the shopping mall is essentially antichild because it is what it is—a business. At the mall, not surprisingly, an unescorted child's value is judged in terms of what he can give—money—rather than in terms of what he needs—love, acceptance, nurturance. It just *seems* the other way around.[11]

Lansky's article paints a bleak picture, one in which teenagers really were lost kittens pawing at the glass doors of the shopping centers. Perhaps, however, teenagers' presence in shopping centers challenged the mall from being "what it is" and forced it to live up to what it *seemed*.

By the 1980s, malls were reaching a zenith in terms of their physical presence but also in terms of their cultural significance. By comparing shopping centers to Pac-Man and to television, Lansky and the *Los Angeles Magazine* are pointing to a trend that defined the excesses of the 1980s and the consumer landscape of the late twentieth century: the virtue of entertainment. At one point in the article, Lansky comments on two teenagers who share "a passionate belief in entertainment," suggesting that the dominance of entertainment—from television and video games to amusement parks and themed mega-malls—was not simply a fad of the late-capitalist era, but that it was a dogma in and of itself.[12] Lansky posits that these teenagers came of age under the religion of entertainment, a sect of the religion of consumption. Lansky's incredulity toward teenagers' unabashed presence in shopping centers was not unique in the writings from this time period. The general antipathy many felt toward mallrats was a manifestation of the anxiety that they felt about mall culture in particular and consumerism under neoliberalism in general.

In this thesis, I seek to analyze the shopping center of the late twentieth century and particularly the teenagers who called these malls their home away from home (and school). The late twentieth century, which I discuss interchangeably as the late capitalist and neoliberal era, was defined by a series of deregulations, downward mobility and a general disenfranchisement of the so-called American Dream, whose detrimental effects were veiled by the rhetoric of individualism and consumerism. Within this context, the shopping center evolved into an entertainment mega center, competing for Americans' dollars and attention against the glitz of television and celebrity culture. In this period, children were coming of age with fewer options for civic participation coupled with more and more commercial enticements. The deregulation of television's content, for example, enabled children and adolescents to be inundated with a heavy stream of advertising while the privatization of space left them with nowhere else to go but shopping malls. These teenagers both internalized the market's message of supposed unfettered capitalism while also resisting its attempts to define them as purely consumers. The shopping center was one place in which teenagers could conform to their codified roles as consumers—by engaging in transactions, either through labor or through purchases—but it was also an arena in which their resistance could be enacted. By "hanging out" in shopping malls, which might not have involved the consumption of the goods and services malls were selling, teenagers carved out a space for themselves in a time when almost all space had a price.

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[9] Ibid., 257.
[10] Ibid., 257.
[11] Ibid., 491. Emphasis in original.
[12] Lansky, "Mall Rats," 496.

This thesis is divided into four chapters and is book-ended by this introduction and a conclusion. This introduction will survey the historiography on which my research is built and will provide a brief history of shopping centers until the later-twentieth century. Chapter one will continue the discussion of the history of the shopping mall by chronicling the rise of shopping centers as entertainment destinations, which culminated to the rise of mall culture as popular culture. By the 1980s, shopping centers appeared to be reaching a point of oversaturation and malls, therefore, needed to appeal to its patrons' desires to be entertained in order to stay relevant. This chapter, therefore, examines malls' increasingly fantastical role against the backdrop of the excesses of the 1980s. Chapter two describes the rise of the youth market and the ways in which this ascension both paralleled and helped entrench youth culture. This chapter attempts to situate the concept of "teenager" within a consumerist framework in order to trace how teenagers found themselves in shopping malls at all. Chapter three will delve into the mallrats culture, exploring representations of mall culture on television and in film. This chapter also considers why many teenagers chose to spend their time at malls as well as the implications of that choice. Chapter four explores how youth culture attempted to define itself against the youth market, particularly how mallrats appropriated the shopping mall to act out their own identities. This chapter will pay particular attention to the ways in which teenagers utilized the malls against the design and intent of the mall, but also the ways in which teenagers' presence in malls challenged and transformed the space itself. Together, these four chapters seek to complicate our understanding of late twentieth century consumerism. Finally, I conclude my thesis by tracing the discussions about mall and youth culture to the present. The time period about which I am writing is part of our recent past and its effects are still viscerally felt. My conclusion, therefore, attempts to make sense of aspects of our present by looking to our very recent past.

A Brief History of Shopping Malls

The invention of the shopping center is indelibly connected to post-WWII suburban development. The massive suburbia development project in the immediate postwar years attracted (primarily white and newly upwardly mobile) city dwellers into spacious, cookie-cutter homes that were being abundantly built off the newly constructed networks of highways. The creation of the suburbs not only transformed agricultural land into enclaves of white picket fences, but it also transformed it into a "landscape of mass consumption."[13] Embedded within the promotion of the suburbs was the promotion of the ideology of consumption itself. As the Second World War was winding down, ads that promoted the return to normalcy increasingly depicted the detached, single-family house as the realization of the so-called American Dream.[14] The suburban home fueled a postwar consumer economy not only because owning a house is a "quintessential mass consumer commodity" but also because homeownership stimulates the demand for related commodities, such as cars, appliances and furniture.[15] One 1957 *Redbook* advertisement entitled "In the Suburbs," which was aimed at targeting the magazine's potential sponsors, recognized and emphasized the purchasing power of the new suburban dwellers. The advertisement proclaims that, "It takes a while for a young couple to realize all they are in for when they buy a home. They come into their purchasing stage and are off on a wild nonstop ride. It's a happy-go-spending world, reflected in the windows of the suburban shopping centers where they go to buy."[16] The single-family home, therefore, and the suburban land on which they were built, helped promote a particular version of the American Dream, a dream realized through the purchase of commodities.

In *The Consumers' Republic*, Lizabeth Cohen highlights that the suburbs were manufactured through a mix of public investment and private enterprising. Many of the suburban housing developments, such as Levittowns, were heavily subsidized in order to meet a growing demand. Additionally, the 1944 Servicemen's Readjustment Act (better known as the G. I. Bill) provided myriad forms of financial assistance to returning soldiers that enabled these soldiers and their families to move into the brand-new housing tracts. Federal investment into the developing grid of highways through the 1956 Federal Highway Act was also instrumental in solidifying the mass migration to the suburbs. Historian Christopher Klemek calls the period from 1949-1974 the "golden age" of suburban development, writing that "federal and state governments certainly poured enormous monies into the suburbs in the form of transportation improvements and mortgage subsidies," but adds that "it was private developers who determined the shape of the landscape that was carved out around U.S. cities."[17] This dance between private business and public spending quite literally made the suburbs in America and laid the foundation for a consumerist economy. "The suburb itself was a product," writes urban historian and theorist Margaret Crawford, and one that promoted a particular type of conspicuous consumption.[18]

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[13] Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 6.

[14] Ibid., 12.

[15] Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 194.

[16] "In the Suburbs," *Redbook Magazine* (1957), *YouTube*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kuiw3JETefg [26 February 2021].

The suburbs also promoted a type of privatization that was previously inaccessible to those who lived in the cramped cities. Cohen writes:

> Residential suburbanization contributed to the emergence of a social landscape in the postwar period where the mass of Americans shared less and less common physical space and public culture. In the haste to survey, divide and develop land in order to meet the demand for suburban housing, developers (whether intentionally or not) made no effort to plan for the new residents' commercial needs.[19]

This left the sprawling suburbs devoid of community spaces and, more pressingly, of commercial spaces. It is within this void that shopping centers entered the suburban picture. Shopping centers complemented the new suburban developments because their spaces aligned with the consumer economy that was being ramped up and promoted in the postwar years and because they provided a "fantastical diversion from the stark realities of suburban living."[20] In 1956 the first enclosed shopping center was opened and the suburbs (and, by extension, all of America) was forever entrenched in a privatized consumer economy.

Shopping centers were not constructed in suburbia to lure migrants from the city; instead, they were built to meet the needs of the new suburban inhabitants. William Severini Kowinski writes that "it seemed clear to me that television, suburbia, the Highway, the Baby Boom, and the Bomb had all prepared the way for the mall—had even conspired somehow to create it."[21] This is not an unfair assessment. The shopping center was the architectural culmination of all of the postwar changes, such as "cars, […] commercial media, […] and national brands and advertising."[22] The term "shopping center," in fact, originated in 1947.[23]

Some historians attribute shopping centers' rise in suburbia not simply to the then-new suburban car culture, but rather to tax policy. Historian Thomas Hanchett argues that the 1954 Internal Revenue

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[17] Christopher Klemek, "Mall Meets Maker: Suburban Development as Failed Reformer," *Journal of Planning History* 4, no. 3 (2005), 270.

[18] Margaret Crawford, "The World in a Shopping Mall," in *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*, ed. Michael Sorkin (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 21.

[19] Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 257.

[20] Lisa Scharoun, *America at the Mall: The Cultural Role of a Retail Utopia* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2012), 26.

[21] William Severini Kowinski, *The Malling of America: An Inside Look at the Great Consumer Paradise* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1985), 25.

[22] James J. Farrell, *One Nation Under Goods: Malls and the Seductions of American Shopping* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2003), 5.

[23] Scharoun, *America at the Mall*, 25.

Code led to the proliferation of shopping centers across the American suburbs. The Code enabled what is known as "accelerated depreciation," which allowed owners of income-generating structures to shelter a non-taxable amount for the normal wear-and-tear of a building.[24] According to Hanchett, the maximum amount that could be sheltered was for the depreciation of new structures.[25] The best place to build new structures was, of course, in the vast vacant lands that were being increasingly developed: the suburbs. This led to a frenzy of investors who constructed new shopping centers, squirreled away large amounts of funds from Uncle Sam, and then later sold the buildings to recoup their investment and repeated the whole thing over again with new shopping centers. Malcolm Gladwell writes of accelerated depreciation that "suddenly it was possible to make much more money investing in things like shopping centers than buying stocks."[26] Accelerated depreciation is a persuasively argued factor for the proliferation of shopping centers, and it also explains the rate at which shopping centers reached a point of oversaturation, which would lead to its eventual demise. This is because none of the sheltered funds were actually used to maintain buildings; rather they were used to reinvest into newer malls, leaving old malls in their dust to wither and, well, ironically, depreciate.[27]

The suburbs—whether through the highways they begat, the suddenly isolated inhabitants they housed, or the underdeveloped land they stood atop—were the fecund grounds that birthed the shopping center. On one hand, the enclosed shopping center was a continuation of the souks, the bazaars, the arcades, the markets and the department stores that had characterized the commercial (and social) lives of previous eras' patrons.[28] On the other hand, the shopping mall was novel and "the United States' most original architectural contribution."[29] The shopping center, while first built in America, was designed by an Austrian, Victor Gruen. Gruen attended the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts and fled Europe in 1938. He became active in the arts community in New York and during this time he conceived of a "utopian experiment."[30] Gruen viewed the booming American suburbs as a blank slate onto which he could enact his utopia. Within the new suburbs, Gruen saw both a longing—for community and commercial amenities—and potential—to rewrite the script on how society consumes. Gruen was inspired by the arcades of his native Vienna, in which "public amenities were part of the price and purpose of private shopping."[31] Gruen envisioned a communal space in which alienated suburbanites could meet face-to-face, in which citizens could be brought together outside of their cars, private homes and office spaces. In

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[24] Thomas Hanchett, "U.S. Tax Policy and the Shopping-Center Boom of the 1950s and 1960s," *American Historical Review* 101, no. 4 (1996), 1092.
[25] Ibid., 1097.
[26] Malcolm Gladwell, "The Terrazzo Jungle," *The New Yorker* (7 March 2004). https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/03/15/the-terrazzo-jungle?currentPage=all [17 April 2019].
[27] Hanchett, "U.S. Tax Policy and the Shopping-Center Boom of the 1950s and 1960s," 1103.
[28] Paco Underhill, *The Call of the Mall* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 4.
[29] Klemek, "Mall Meets Maker: Suburban Development as Failed Reformer," 269.
[30] Scharoun, *America at the Mall,* 9.
[31] Farrell, *One Nation Under Goods*, 9.

1956, Southdale Center was opened in Edina, Minnesota, and Victor Gruen's experiment was realized. The first enclosed shopping center was hailed by *Time* magazine as "a pleasure-dome-with-parking" and Gruen went on to design a series of similar shopping centers across the American suburbs throughout the 1950s and 1960s.[32] "Victor Gruen didn't design a building," writes Gladwell, "he designed an archetype."[33]

These "Southdale facsimiles" proliferated to serve sprawling suburban communities, but also because Gruen's blend of commercial art, natural landscapes, and pedestrian-friendly walkways proved incredibly effective at moving products and generating huge profits for the centers' tenant stores.[34] This became known as the "Gruen Transfer," in which a destination buyer is transformed (by the ease at which they are put by their surroundings) into an impulse shopper.[35] "Store environments that induced pleasure or good feelings did lead to potentially greater impulse shopping behavior," one study notes.[36] This might not have been Gruen's explicit intention but it was certainly the effect. The shopping center design, therefore, mutated away from Gruen's artistic style toward one that was commercially lucrative and replicable. Kowinski writes that, "the Southdale model was stripped down to its basic elements and replicated in thousands of suburbs all over America."[37] Because of Victor Gruen, every mall from 1956 on included the same features: parking and security, public art (Gruen spent $200,000 on art when designing the Northland Center)[38], climate control, comfort, variety (of stores), and muzak to lull shoppers into a sedated state.[39] Other features included an emphasis on nature, such as greenery, sunroofs and water fountains, as well as pedestrian-friendly walkways and central courts "all scaled down to a quaint and comprehensible size."[40] Although shopping centers were inaccessible without cars, Gruen's design was meant to tame the automobile by providing shoppers with car-free spaces.[41] Shopping centers were notoriously aesthetically unpleasing from the outside, another of Gruen's artistic intentions. This was an "architecture of inversion," in which the beauty of the enclosed space was hidden beneath "a pile of blocks."[42] Crawford observes that "seen from above, the mall resembles an ungainly pile of oversized boxes plunked down in the middle of an enormous asphalt sea, surrounded by an endless landscape of single-family houses. Inside, the mall presents a dizzying spectacle of attractions and diversions."[43] Gruen detested the automobile and therefore created a stark separation between the drab, vast parking lot to the "pedestrian streets" upon entering the shopping center.[44] These parking lots were also important facets of the design because they were intended to be seen from the highways that surrounded them, luring drivers to exit toward them.[45]

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[32] Gladwell, "The Terrazzo Jungle," 2004.
[33] Ibid., 2004.
[34] Ibid., 2004.
[35] Elena Gooray, "There's a Name for That: Gruen Transfer," *Pacific Standard Magazine* 9, no. 2 (January 2018), 11.
[36] Frederick W. Langrehr, "Retail Shopping Mall Semiotics and Hedonic Consumption," *Advances in Consumer Research* 17, no. 1 (1991), 428.
[37] Kowinski, *The Malling of America*, 121.
[38] David Ames, "Shopping Malls," in Deborah Andrews, *Shopping: Material Culture Perspectives* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2014), 39.
[39] Farrell, *One Nation Under Goods*, 10.
[40] Kowinski, *The Malling of America*, 70.
[41] Scharoun, *America at the Mall*, 35.
[42] Farrell, *One Nation Under Goods*, 24 and Neil Harris, *Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 282.

Gruen wrote the encyclopedia on mall design, and that design was further honed by future mall developers to elicit spending from the patrons of the enclosed center. Marketing professor Frederick Langrehr claimed that "the purchase of goods may be incidental to the experience of shopping," and it was the task of shopping center developers and designers to entice people to buy through built-in features.[46] The escalator, for example, was not simply a practical means of transporting people from one level to another. It was designed to move people in a way that displayed all the stores the mall had to offer.[47] Additionally, these escalators were placed on opposite ends of the center, forcing people to walk from one end of the mall to the other (and therefore past all the mall's stores) in order to get from one level to the next.[48] The same effect was achieved through the placement of department stores, which anchored shopping centers and served as the centers' main attractions.[49] Goods were dispersed around the shopping center with an effect that "bounce[d] shoppers like balls throughout the store."[50] Artificial nature was another calculated design feature of the enclosed shopping center. "Every effort was made to trick the visitor into believing they were really outdoors," writes visual communications theorist Lisa Scharoun, including precisely controlled climates, which simulated a perfect day's weather, every single day.[51] Kowinski refers to the enclosed aspect of mall design as "the keys to the kingdom," offering its patrons a certain perceived safety and control.[52] Retail design, therefore, emphasized the comfort and pleasure of its patrons in order to cajole spending. Historian James Farrell writes: "Basically, then, a mall design is a highly calculated plan to stimulate unplanned purchases, a rational system for the promotion of impulse buying."[53] This directive, which increasingly focused on the commercial feasibility of malls rather than its community-fostering imperative, severed the enclosed shopping center from Gruen's original vision. By the late 1960s, shopping center development placed increasing importance on the role of investors, developers and mortgage bankers and a decreasing importance on the role of the architect.[54] The shopping center became formulaic, profitable and was replicated *ad nauseum*. In 1978, Gruen denounced his shopping centers, announcing: "I refuse to pay alimony for those bastard developments."[55]

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[43] Crawford, "The World in a Shopping Mall," 3.
[44] Scharoun, *America at the Mall*, 10.
[45] Farrell, *One Nation Under Goods*, 24.
[46] Langrehr, "Retail Shopping Mall Semiotics and Hedonic Consumption," 428.
[47] Farrell, *One Nation Under Goods*, 29.
[48] Gladwell, "The Terrazzo Jungle," 2004.
[49] Farrell, *One Nation Under Goods*, 27.
[50] Ames, "Shopping Malls," 37.
[51] Scharoun, *America at the Mall*, 12.
[52] Kowinski, *The Malling of America*, 61.
[53] Farrell, *One Nation Under Goods*, 53.

In 1957, 940 shopping centers had been built and by 1976, there were over 17,500.[56] By the time shopping centers had fully integrated into the suburban landscape, they quickly shed Victor Gruen's utopianism in favor of the privatization that more accurately characterized the postwar suburbs. As Crawford writes:

> Shopping mall design reinforced the domestic values and physical order of suburbia. Like the suburban houses, which rejected the sociability of front porches and sidewalks for private backyards, the malls looked inward, turning their backs on public street.[57]

As malls and neighborhoods turned inwards, public space became scarce, and rights of private property owners took precedence over traditional rights of free speech in community forums.[58] Despite shopping centers' façade as public spaces, they were strictly private affairs; they were often joint ventures between developers, department stores and big investors, particularly insurance companies, who were exempt from federal taxes on long-term investments.[59] In her manual, *Shopping Center Development and Investment*, Mary Alice Hines describes the "unmeasurable" psychological enjoyment that investing in shopping centers produces, in which the "investor may drive by the walk through, view the customer crowds and admire the architecture of the center."[60] This delight, no doubt, came from the dollars that were being spent within their centers, symbolizing huge returns on their investments. The focus on private gains led to the standardization of mall design, an emphasis on maximizing profits and therefore a deemphasis on community service. Privatization favored corporate and sanitized versions of community and did little to highlight the local flavor of the neighborhoods in which the shopping centers supposedly served. "The preponderance of chains and franchises over local, independent stores, required by big investors such as insurance companies, brought shoppers the latest national trends in products and merchandizing techniques," writes Cohen.[61] Under this regime, a national culture usurped a local one; highways replaced streets, national stores replaced local stores, and shopping malls replaced the mom-and-pop shops of the downtown centers.[62] This paved the way for the sameness of mall culture that would define America in the late twentieth century.

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[54] Scharoun, *America at the Mall*, 13.
[55] quoted in Gladwell, "The Terrazzo Jungle," 2004.
[56] Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 258.
[57] Crawford, "The World in a Shopping Mall," 21.
[58] Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 259.
[59] Ibid., 261 and Hanchett, "U.S. Tax Policy and the Shopping-Center Boom of the 1950s and 1960s," 1101.
[60] Mary Alice Hines, *Shopping Center Development and Investment* (New York: Wiley, 1983), 22.
[61] Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 263.
[62] Kowinski, *The Malling of America*, 52.

As malls doubled down on their profit motives, they increasingly treated their patrons less as members of a community and more as segments of a marketing demographic. Shopping centers paid particular attention to suburban women. Shopping centers targeted the spending power of the suburban housewife, but they also sought after their labor. In the shopping centers of the postwar period, housewives generally filled part-time jobs.[63] Kowinski offers the caustic observation that "housewives getting jobs at the mall, suddenly in the public eye again, cared about the way they looked."[64] Shopping center design, from its inception, had women in mind. "From the color schemes, stroller ramps, baby-sitting services, and special lockers for 'ladies' wraps' to the reassuring security guards and special events such as fashion shows, shopping centers were created as female worlds."[65] And in doing so, Cohen argues, malls further entrenched women into prescribed roles, into the private spheres of the home and the mall "while circumscribing the power they wielded there."[66] When we consider the ways in which malls targeted women, we can see that shopping centers were not neutral spaces. They were quite literally constructions—both in a physical and cultural sense—instead of representing the public they wish to serve, malls disseminated a particular vision of society: one in which a woman's role in society was defined by her purchasing power and, by extension, one in which democratic participation was the equivalent of the act of consumption.

Malls have been historically subsidized, whether through the tax incentives discussed previously or through the public investment that enabled their growth. Shopping centers, since they began peppering the American landscape, have existed uncomfortably between being a private and public space. These "boundary problems" are part of its design because malls promoted themselves as community centers while primarily concerning themselves with their commercial bottom line.[67] Shopping centers opened their climate-controlled doors to the public but proved "an inadequate substitution for the more public and inclusive town squares of the city."[68] The public, in using the space of the shopping center, perhaps unknowingly, traded their political rights for commercial opportunity.[69] But that does not mean that shopping centers are devoid of political meaning. Farrell argues that "[m]alls perform cultural work that helps to shape American popular culture. Shopping and consumption shape our assumptions about the place of politics in our lives, so that consumption itself becomes a political statement."[70] Therefore, the mall's character was not always defined by its purpose. And while this tension between private and public plagued the shopping mall throughout its short-lived history, it is within this liminal space—of being *both* private and public and *neither*—that provided the public with the opportunity to shape the mall along with its own needs and desires.

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[63] Cohen , *A Consumers' Republic*, 283.
[64] Kowinski, *The Malling of America*, 49.
[65] Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 278.
[66] Ibid., 259.
[67] Harris, *Cultural Excursions,* 283.
[68] Cohen, *Consumers' Republic*, 407.
[69] Farrell, *One Nation Under Goods*, 218.
[70] Ibid., 223.

In the mid-twentieth century, shopping centers landed on the former orange groves in the peripheries of the city like aliens landing in U.F.O.s (Ian Frazier likened the Bergen Mall in New Jersey to a "space station").[71] Their strangeness was quickly assimilated into a type of innate Americanness, and the ideology they propagated—one of conspicuous consumption, privatization and incessant entertainment—jibed well with the rhetoric and policies of the neoliberal era. The remainder of this thesis will analyze the shopping center under the neoliberal context and will seek to understand how this tension was at odds with the youth culture that claimed malls for themselves. Marshall McLuhan said that one basic fact about North Americans is that "we, alone, in the world, go outside for privacy and inside for community."[72] With malls, we go inside the enclosure to feel outside (next to the water fountains and indoor shrubbery), we are exploited by the private motivations to promote an artificial sense of community, and in the end, we find community within decidedly private spaces.

Literature Review and Methodology

This thesis is rooted in a bounty of scholarship that is principally concerned with the effects of consumerism on American society. Lizabeth Cohen is arguably the authority on consumerism in twentieth-century America. Her coined term "Consumers' Republic" denotes the conflation between consumer and citizen that has evolved since the postwar period. Cohen describes her Consumers' Republic as "an economy, culture, and politics built around the promises of mass consumption, both in terms of material life and more idealistic goals of greater freedom, democracy, and equality."[73] Citizenship, she argues, is practiced through mass consumption and therefore democracy is reduced to freedom of choice of consumer goods. Cohen's concept undergirds much of what this thesis seeks to argue, as the development of the Consumers' Republic dovetailed (arguably, causally) with other twentieth-century trends, such as the collapse of liberalism into neoliberalism, the rise of new media technologies, and the invention of youth culture. Cohen articulates the shopping center as both a product and a condition of the Consumer Republic, in which spaces for community and sociality are relegated to the backdrops of consumption and commercialism. Cohen's work contextualizes the rise and subsequent oversaturation of shopping centers in the United States. The history of the shopping center, while recent and still underdeveloped, has been the subject a handful of scholarly works. Lisa Scharoun's *America at the Mall: The Cultural Role of a Retail Utopia*, for example, evaluates the shopping mall as a "microcosm of the American Dream."[74] Scharoun imbues the mall with emotional, spiritual and physiological meanings and unpacks what those meanings signify, particularly in the current context of the decline of shopping malls' relevance. James J. Farrell shares Scharoun's approach and considers the shopping mall to be a cultural and social construct. To Farrell, the mall is a charged space, in which consumers are socialized to consume, but also a space of contestation, in which malls can be made malleable to suit the needs of its patrons beyond a purely commercial purpose.

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[71] Ian Frazier, "The Mall," *The New Yorker*, 18 December 1977, 19.
[72] Marshall McLuhan, Convocation Address, University of Alberta (20 November 1971) http://projects.chass.utoronto.ca/mcluhan-studies/v1_iss5/1_5art3.htm [22 May 2021].
[73] Cohen, *Consumers' Republic*, 7.

Much of the scholarship that I cite critiques consumerism without any particular focus on shopping centers. I am therefore applying these scholars' criticisms to the way I approach the "cathedral of consumption," the mall. Rachel Heiman and her predecessor Katherine Newman, for example, tackle the effects of downward mobility and deindustrialization in their respective anthropological studies that characterize the era in which my research is situated. These works provide important context that defines the late-capitalist period and demonstrates how neoliberal policies affected the lives of everyday people. Cultural critic Henry Giroux furthers this critique of neoliberalism, which he argues—in the vein of Cohen—that the deregulation characteristic of late-capitalism reduced political citizens to consumers. Giroux writes that "[w]ithin increasing corporatization of everyday life, market values replace social values, and people appear more and more willing to retreat into the safe, privatized enclaves of the family, religion and consumption."[75] Naomi Klein makes a similar observation in *No Logo*, in which she argues that the privatization and corporatization of space—with a particular emphasis on branding of goods over the production of goods—has left citizens without any meaningful choices other than consumer choices. In *An All Consuming Century*, Gary Cross characterizes the 1980s as an era of both penance and excess, in which entitlements produced by the expanded welfare state were slashed at the same time that unadulterated hyper-consumption was being promoted by deregulation. It is within this context that mega-malls begin to emerge, and regional shopping centers began reaching an oversaturation point. Cross chronicles the shift in public policy under the Reagan administration, a shift which embraced markets over government, which, he argues, moved the national economy further away from social cohesion toward an "enveloping personal fantasy."[76] I will argue that the shopping mall, through its shift toward embracing entertainment over community service, fed into those perennial fantasies.

Throughout this thesis, I seek to answer the questions: how is the shopping center a socially and culturally constructed space? How did teenagers, through their use of shopping centers, challenge the intentions of shopping center developers? How did they contribute to that social construction? And how does the spatial identity of a building and the social identity of its patrons intersect, enter into conversation with one another, and, ultimately, help to define each other? My questions are informed by the theoretical works that observe space as an active force in political, social and cultural production, rather than as a neutral vessel. I frame teenagers' use of the physical space of the shopping center through the lens of Michel de Certeau's everyday practices. De Certeau asserts that there exists a tension between city planners and the everyday movements of city walkers, where the design of a space is constantly renegotiated by the "spatial acting out" of the walker.[77] De Certeau likens the city streets to a "text" in which the way the walker moves around the city is the walker's own style and rhetoric.[78] Applying this concept, the mall can play the role of the textual street and its adolescent patrons appropriate this text to serve their own discursive style. The "spatial practices" that teenagers acted out in malls provided "shape to spaces" and demonstrated the possibilities of shopping centers beyond the prescription of mall developers and owners.[79] Building on de Certeau, Fran Tonkiss views the city (and for my purposes, the mall) as "a site of social encounter and social division, as a field of politics and power, as a symbolic and material landscape, as an embodied space, as a realm of everyday experiences."[80] Importantly, Tonkiss emphasizes that the intent of a space and the use of that space shapes both the users of the space and the space itself, in which "spaces can be seen as structuring social relationships and processes, and in turn, as shaped by social action and meaning."[81] We ascribe meaning onto a space in tandem with the so-called prescribed meaning of that space. Through this lens, we can analyze what kinds of power shopping malls held over teenagers as well as the kinds of power teenagers wielded to shape shopping centers to conform to their needs and desires.

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[74] Scharoun, *America at the Mall*, 2.

[75] Henry A. Giroux, *Public Spaces, Private Lives: Beyond the Culture of Cynicism* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001), ci.

[76] Gary Cross, *An All Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Win in Modern America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 193.

Another theoretical concept that informs my spatial reading of shopping centers and teenagers' use of shopping centers is that of *third space*. In chapter four, I place Homi K. Bhabha and Edward Soja in conversation with one another in order to appropriate their concepts of *third space* to apply them to teenagers' presence in shopping centers. Bhabha, whose writings focus on the subversion and ambiguity of space, particularly with respect to subaltern groups, can be usefully applied to teenagers in malls, who congregated in a space in which they were decidedly unwelcome and transformed it into something that was neither fully against them nor wholly theirs.[82] Soja similarly emphasizes that compromises inherently make up the "spatiality of human life." Soja's third space is "a purposefully tentative and flexible term that attempts to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meanings."[83] By applying Soja's third space to teenagers' use of malls, we can see that teenagers' presence in shopping centers placed the very identity of the mall in flux. In other words, teenagers' presence collided the real and concrete version of the mall with the imaginary and illusory ideal of what the mall could be into a third space that was neither and both.[84] Shachar Pinsker, in his work *A Rich Brew: How Cafés Created Modern Jewish Culture*, applies these ideas of third space to the coffeehouses that were used by Jewish émigrés throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century.[85] Pinsker uses the coffeehouse as a lens to view Jewish identity, asking "why the coffeehouse?"[86] Similarly, I ask: "why the mall?" and use the shopping center as a lens through which to better understand youth culture in the late twentieth century. In a reversal, however, I also use teenagers' identity as a means to view the shopping mall.

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[77] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1984), 98.
[78] Ibid., 96
[79] Ibid., 97-98
[80] Fran Tonkiss, *Space, the City and Social Theory: Social Relations and Urban Forms* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2005), 1.
[81] Ibid., 2.
[82] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 1.

While the theorists that I have mentioned above very much inform my approach to the mall, my analyses and conclusions are more concerned with the practical use and design of space. In this regard, cultural geographer Sophia Cele's conclusions drawn from her study of adolescent girls' use of public parks can be directly applied to teenagers' use of the pseudo-public shopping center. Cele argues that "[p]olitics is entangled in how public space is used and perceived by young people, and that the practice of everyday life shapes how political subjectivities are formed."[87] Through this understanding, we can see the mall as a socio-political arena in which young people's identities were formed, performed, challenged and reified.

In considering space, I need to parse the shopping centers' design and intent to better understand how teenagers disrupted its commercial purpose. In his chapter "The Changing Landscape: Spaced Out at the Shopping Center," art historian Neil Harris historicizes the cultural role of design planning. Harris highlights the ways in which mall design enhances the act of shopping, particularly through its use of environmental ambivalence. The mall is interesting, Harris believes, because it occupies multiple, conflicting meanings at once: it simulates nature yet is completely artificially designed; it alludes to the city yet proliferates in suburbia; and, importantly, it presents itself as a public space yet is bound by private interests. Urban-design theorist Margaret Crawford furthers this critique in her writing on the West Edmonton Mall, which she used as a case study to demonstrate the blurring boundaries between shopping and entertainment. Crawford views inherent contradictions within the design of the shopping mall: malls are designed to promote shopping; however, many parts of its design seem to dissuade shopping, such as sitting areas and water fountains. She describes the interior of the mall as "dizzying," noting how its appropriation of historical forms of architecture, such as Parisian-style boulevards, collapse the past and the future "meaninglessly into the present."[88] She traces the conflation between shopping and entertainment to the 1980s, when shopping malls were reaching a point of oversaturation. The additions of video arcades and movie cinemas marked a shift of the mall toward a recreational space. This entertainment shift, I will argue, both directly and indirectly transformed the shopping mall into a more appealing destination for teenagers. Additionally, this shift circumscribed shopping centers' roles to serving purely commercial functions within their communities. This is echoed in Michael Sorkin's analysis of what he calls the "new city." The new city is sterile, privatized, and "ageographic" – any place but also no place.[89] He argues that the rise in communication technology has created a false sense of closeness and citizenship that is wholly dependent on consumption. Sorkin is most scathing toward the concept of "theme park," which he describes as "a regulated vision of pleasure" and a poor substitution for public democracy.[90] My thesis will focus on how, by the late twentieth century, the shopping center shifted its purpose to one of commercial entertainment and how malls became more and more like a theme park, spaces full of dizzying distractions but devoid of any meaningful public participation.

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[83] Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1996), 1.

[84] ibi., 6.

[85] Sachar M. Pinsker, *A Rich Brew: How Cafés Created Modern Jewish Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 10.

[86] Ibid., 2.

[87] Sophia Cele, "Performing the Political through Public Space: Teenage Girls' Everyday Use of a City Park," *Space and Polity* 17, no. 1 (2013), 74

This thesis seeks to analyze how the intersection of consumerism and space produced identities, specifically teenaged identities, and how those identities shaped commercial spaces, specifically the mall. My research on teenagers is primarily anchored in sources from the period in which I am writing, including marketing studies, newspaper and journal articles, and documentary interviews. I rely on many scholars to provide me with a deeper understanding of the youth market and of youth culture (which, as I will later discuss in greater detail, are mutually reinforced) as well as what it means to be a teenager. Cultural critic Thomas Hine argues that teenagers are a slippery group to write about because "all of us have been teenagers, and we ought to be experts on how teenagers think," yet few of us can really recall the experience of being young.[91] An important part of Hine's writings on teenagers is that he posits that teenagers are a "social invention," and that their experiences should be mapped against the context in which they are coming of age.[92] Sociologist Kelley Massoni echoes this sentiment, specifying that the invention of the concept of "teenager" dovetailed with the invention of a youth market. Massoni analyzes the rise of the teenager through the history of *Seventeen* magazine, demonstrating how cultural products shaped the conceptual creation of a demographic. Historian Grace Palladino also cites the culture of consumption and individualism as paramount to the evolution of the modern teenager. Through Palladino's reading, we can recognize that while the term "teenager" appears static, each era, and the cultural productions from that era, alter what it means to be a teenager from one generation to the next. My research is concerned with the relationship between the late-capitalist era and the adolescents it produced. Palladino asks an important question that influences the way I make sense of this relationship: "Who gets to decide how teenagers look, act, and experience life? And who decides what that experience means?"[93] When we approach teenagers with this question in mind, the relationship between time, space and identity is complicated, and untangling the youth market from youth culture becomes untenable.

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[88] Crawford, "The World in a Shopping Mall," 4.
[89] Michael Sorkin, *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), xv.
[90] Ibid., xv.
[91] Thomas Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager: A New History of the American Adolescent Experience* (New York: Bard, 1999), 2.
[92] Ibid., 4.

The above-mentioned scholars, writers and cultural critics helped shape the lens through which I explore the shopping mall and its teenaged patrons, lending my research a platform from which it can bloom. Some of the types of primary texts that I utilize are news articles, academic journals on sociology and marketing, photographs, films, documentaries, Supreme Court decisions and advertisements. I rely heavily on William Severini Kowinski's *Malling of America: An Inside Look at the Great Consumer Paradise*. Kowinski's account is honest, funny and replete with mall-related fodder that I have mined for this thesis. Kowinski's book is about more than shopping malls, "it's a book also about America."[94] In the early 1980s, Kowinski returned to his home in Ohio after being sheltered for years within the ivy walls of a northeastern university to find that his hometown had been taken hostage by mall culture. Curiosity overtook Kowinski and he began a years-long journey across America to explore its malls and the raging culture it produced. Kowinski likens the mall to a funhouse mirror that reflected the American Dream, a federation (the "United States of the Mall") and as a simple fact of life in America.[95] He is essentially a mall ethnologist, and his work has left a profound mark on my research. These texts are the voices that illuminate my writing—they are weaved into my analysis in order to corroborate what is being theorized and to enliven and enrich the points that I discuss.

The Scope of this Study and the Question of Race

One thing I hope readers will take away from this thesis is that the mall meant many things to those teenagers who chose to spend their time there. The mall, in its most basic form, was a place to buy practical goods and services, but it could also be a source of income, a fashion runway, a concert venue, a movie theatre, a panopticon, secret meeting spot and a refuge from home and school. This thesis complicates our relationship to malls by analyzing the teenagers who hung out there. In addition, historians should complicate the privilege associated with these mallrats and demonstrate that "teenager" is not a monolithic demographic. Throughout this thesis, I touch on the class dynamics that cast a shadow over America's favorite past time. In the first chapter, I explain how mall developers sought after wealthy clientele, building bigger and better malls in decidedly upscale neighborhoods. In chapter four, I demonstrate how teenagers used shopping centers as a theatre stage on which they could experiment with identities, even class identities. And in this introduction, I describe how the suburbs were designed along racial lines, bringing the so-called American Dream into reach for some while intentionally excluding others.

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[93] Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), xxii.
[94] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 7.
[95] Ibid., 57.

While I do believe that race and class are intangibly linked, historians need to untangle the two, specifically consider the shopping mall through the lens of critical race theory. This thesis argues that, while malls were by design commercialized spaces, they were also spaces of opportunity for suburban teenagers with few alternatives for public spaces. But malls were also exclusionary spaces, ones in which certain patrons were perceived as more desirable over others. We see this with teenaged patrons versus adult patrons. Teenagers were disproportionately targeted by security guards, for example, often told to "move along," or removed from the premises altogether. The obstacles these mostly white teenagers faced, however, does little to shed light on the agency people of color in general—and young people of color more specifically—were denied within a space that favored sanitized entertainment over meaningful community engagement. The teenagers of my thesis, while criminalized by the adult mall-frequenting population, benefited from their whiteness and their perceived middle-class belonging. Race also becomes an area of contention when we consider malls' self-promotions are bastions of democracy. Shopping centers are colonizing forces, they occupy vast sums of stolen land and further entrench colonizers' falsified claim to such land. For example, I will discuss how some of the mega malls appropriated images from the Wild West. This appropriation, however, erroneously perpetuates a myth of a so-called wild land tamed by what we now know were oppressive regimes. Shopping malls are also part of the realization of the replacement of indigenous economic systems with a globalized capitalist economy. This mythologized history has real-world implications. Consider a 2016 protest in which over thirty Standing Rock Sioux Tribe members protested the construction of an oil pipeline inside of Kirkwood Mall in Bismarck, North Dakota. The mall's managers and officials, with police enforcement, violently forced the protesters from the shopping center to allow Black Friday shopping—one of the busiest shopping days of the year—to continue uninterrupted.[96] The pipeline, the police and the shopping center are all agents of colonialism.

The limited scope of a pandemic-era M.A. thesis did not allow me to explore fully these racial implications of mall use by teenagers. I have chosen to focus on a particular demographic—teenagers—at the exclusions of other demographics. The concept of "teenager," although nebulous and generic at times, has nevertheless proven to be an interesting lens through which to view the shopping mall. I am mostly dependent on texts and media prepared by white creators and for white audiences. My scope is also limited geographically, since my thesis is primarily anchored in California and therefore analyzes Californian malls and teenagers. To effectively analyze race, I would either need to restrict my geographic scope to a particularly racialized neighborhood within California or expand the scope to be more diasporic to seek an observable pattern between race and shopping centers. Finally, because my approach to my subject has not included an oral history, I cannot presume to tell an accurate story about race in shopping centers without falling into a trap of overgeneralizing. The sources that I have used for the purposes of researching and writing this thesis, while at times critical of the mall, are glaringly uncritical about race. There is an assumption in these sources that the mall represented a microcosm of America, and that version of America is decidedly white. As a result, this thesis cannot present a fully diverse view of mall culture.

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[96] Terray Sylvest, "Anti-pipeline protesters arrested at North Dakota shopping mall," *Reuters* (25 November 2016) https://www.reuters.com/article/north-dakota-pipeline-idUSL1N1DR00H [3 August 2021].

I hope future historians of American commercialism will pick up and further explore the question of race and mall culture raised but not resolved by this thesis. If white teenagers were criminalized within shopping malls, were black teenagers further criminalized? How did punishments differ? How was race sanitized and ignored in shopping centers? How was it reinforced and perpetuated? Was retail labor divided along racial lines? How was race performed in the theatrical space of the mall? How was it appropriated by captains of industry looking to sell an image of "cool"? What can an oral history with former black mallrats teach us about the potentials and limitations of the shopping mall? Answers to these important questions will help historians to better grapple with the shopping center and teenagerdom in late twentieth century America.

Why the Mall?

Why the mall? This is a question that I have asked myself over and over again. It is now a question that I try to suppress whenever it pokes its prying little head into the forefront of my mind. This question has developed a personality of its own. Embedded within it is a genuine curiosity but also a certain haughtiness. The question attempts to undermine the value of my research and the academic integrity of my topic. The mall evokes images of idle spendthrift Valley girls, of cookie-cutter architecture, of superficial commercial sameness—all images that are decidedly nonacademic. Kowinski too reflects on the "weird notion of writing about shopping malls."[97] Of course, I cannot (and do not) believe that there is no scholarly merit to studying shopping malls. Malls are part of the iconography of the American landscape, and their significance is owed in part to their ubiquity. More importantly, they are becoming relics, ruins of the late-capitalist era. The increasing disappearance of shopping centers gives studying the mall a certain cachet, no doubt, but it also means that the mall has (re)entered the contemporary national conversation. With its disappearance comes its mourning, its autopsy reports and its memorialization.

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[97] Kowinski, *The Malling of America*, 8.

We need to study the mall because we need to historicize this artifact before it becomes a fetishized commodity of nostalgia. That being said, I must be transparent about my own relationship to malls. In his introduction to *The Conquest of Cool*—a history of Madison Avenue in the 1960s—Thomas Frank meditated, "I found it impossible to escape the feeling that I was writing about my temporal homeland" of the 1960s.[98] I wondered if I was writing about my spatial homeland. I did grow up shopping in malls, specifically Ottawa's Bayshore Shopping Centre, but I was not one of the self-defined mallrats on whom this thesis pays particular attention. I associate shopping in malls with a part of my youth, and therefore sometimes feel a nostalgic loss for it, but this is not my swan song to malls. Malls deserve our critical attention as much as they deserve our mourning (perhaps they deserve our critical attention *because* they receive our mourning). I need to separate what is a cultural history and a personal one.

I further need to distinguish the present yearning for malls from the past. Claire Bond Potter and Renee C. Romano outline the best approach for a historian of the oxymoronic "recent history."[99] The recent past is often too close for comfort, we do not have the temporal distance of hindsight or a well-developed historiography to build off, something Potter and Romano call the "zone of imperfect visibility."[100] They further complicate the writing of recent history by noting that there is often an "info glut," meaning too many sources to sift through.[101] This has certainly been my experience. I have access to a trove of material from the 1980s and 1990s that is available to me with the click of a mouse. Potter and Romano warn against the pitfalls of crafting a narrative when there is no clear moment of closure.[102] This certainly feels like the case for mall history, not only because dying malls have consumed contemporary subcultures on the internet but also because they are not all dead yet; there are still malls out there that many people still shop in. The caveats that Potter and Romano identify, while specific hinderances to writing recent history, point to the trappings of writing any history. Those who write history are not telling the story of the past, they are constructing a version of the past. I not only accept these limitations but attempt to embrace them as I construct my history of shopping malls and the teenagers who patronized them.

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[98] Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), ix.

[99] Claire Bond Potter and Renee Christine Romano, *Doing Recent History: On Privacy, Copyright, Video Games, Institutional Review Boards, Activist Scholarship, and History That Talks Back* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 1.

[100] Ibid., 2.

[101] Ibid., 8.

[102] Ibid., 5.

In the “Mall Rats” *Los Angeles* magazine article, Karen Lansky concludes that “in the mall, the training is for a brave new world.”[103] Lansky argues that, as bleak as mallrat culture seemed, she accepts it as a facet of a world these teenagers would inherit. We know now that mall culture did not sustain itself, and one can only imagine what Lansky would have thought about social media and its influencers. It might seem quaint for us now to imagine a time when the existence of a shopping center seemed bizarre enough to be likened to a dystopian novel, especially when our current popular culture mourns the loss of mall culture. I hope that this thesis will illuminate not only the fallacies of Lansky’s pity but also that it will provide us with a better comprehension of our own mythologizing of the recent past as we enter our own “brave new world.”

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[103] Lansky, “Mall Rats,” 496.

Chapter 1: There's No Business like Mall Business

Arcades are houses or passages having no outside—like the dream.

—Walter Benjamin

To grasp the dominating influence the shopping mall had on American culture and society, consider the film *Scenes from a Mall*, directed by Paul Mazursky and released in 1991. The film, loosely based off Ingmar Bergman's *Scenes from a Marriage*, chronicles a day in the life of Nick and Deborah Fifer on their sixteenth wedding anniversary. The Fifers, who seem to have a happy and functional marriage, make their way in their Saab Turbo to the Beverly Center in Los Angeles to pick up a few things in preparation for a party they are hosting later that evening to celebrate their anniversary. Some of the stops in the Beverly Center include a surf shop to pick up Nick's anniversary gift, a surfboard, a sushi restaurant to pick up hundreds of dollars' worth of sushi for their party, a bookstore where Deborah's newly published book on marriage psychology is being promoted, and to a specialty frame store to pick up Deborah's anniversary gift, a framed family photo. All this shopping leaves them famished and they make their way to the large food court to nosh before resuming their shopping. Nick decides that this break is an opportune moment to confide in his wife that he just ended an affair that he had sustained for many months. The revelation is poorly received by Deborah, who launches the sushi across the food court and then storms off in fumes. It is later revealed that Deborah is also having an extramarital affair with another psychologist and the film—which is not very compelling or even entertaining (Roger Ebert called it "very bad indeed")—cascades the audience through a series of the Fifer's fights, reconciliations, breakups, and makeups all against the backdrop of the Beverly Center.[104] The couple first break up in the food court, plan their divorce over margaritas in a Mexican-themed restaurant, argue in the parking garage, have make-up sex in the mall's movie theater, break up again under the sunroof of the atrium, fight up and down the escalators, reconcile after buying fancy clothes in a department store, have breakdowns by the payphones, have their argument broken up by a mall security guard, and, eventually, leave the mall with a stronger marriage. What is significant about *Scenes from a Mall* is not the film itself but the fact that a shopping center could serve as the backdrop for a film, suggesting that it could serve as the backdrop of American life. The film played on both the ubiquity of the mall—a familiar space that added some verisimilitude to the film—and on its novelty as an entertainment hub. The Beverly Center resembles a circus more than a marketplace, exhibited by a pesky mime who follows the Fifers around, by a Shanghai traveling troupe who perform in the central court, and simply by the cackling of overstimulating sounds, the sight of bedazzled spectators and the appearance of a seemingly never-ending list of things to do.

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[104] Roger Ebert, review of *Scenes from a Mall*, dir. by Paul Mazursky, *RogerEbert.com* (22 February 1991). https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/scenes-from-a-mall-1991 [22 May 2021].

A 1980 *Marketing News* article entitled "Towns of Tomorrow" argued that malls' capacity to entertain was a product of their ability to adapt to meet shifting consumer demands: "Today's malls […] provide us with food, shelter, pinball, church, nightlife, and a place to hang out. […] They are more than a lifestyle—they are America's new towns, capable of adapting to changing consumer and environmental needs."[105] As malls were reaching a point of oversaturation in the 1980s, each mall needed to rework its offerings to vie for the consumer's dollar. This translated into shopping malls offering an array of shopping *and* entertainment options to its patrons all under one sunroof. Americans heeded the call of the mall, turning shopping centers into gathering places in which most Americans spent their leisure time. When defending his choice of venue for his film, *Scenes from a Mall* director Paul Mazursky said: "Real life used to take place in the streets and town squares, but today people spend a lot of their time in shopping malls. Whatever can happen in your life can happen in a mall."[106] The mall served a cathartic purpose for the Fifers; it provided them a space to work through their grievances and eventually save their marriage. Shopping centers consistently proved, however, that their primary goal was to induce spending. Indeed, as shopping malls double downed on their entertainment roles, they reduced their visitors to dollar signs rather than members of the communities in which their behemoth structures were situated. In this chapter I will explore how the shopping center in the 1980s and 1990s actively shifted its focus from serving the basic commercial needs of any given community to becoming entertainment destinations and how this shift rendered its spaces sterilized, superficial and singularly focused on profit.

By the 1980s, business seemed to be booming with a rediscovered sense of unfettered optimism.[107] It was an era of excess. Echoing a popular Madonna song of the time, one businesswoman banally obverses that "People want things. They want material things."[108] This sentiment extended to mall business, an industry that seemed to take America by storm. At the beginning of the decade, there were approximately 55,000 malls and by 1989 there were 76,000.[109] William Severini Kowinski comments on this ubiquity in his *The Malling of America*: "There are more enclosed malls than cities, four-year colleges, or television stations, and nearly as many as county courthouses."[110] Malls were "economic monoliths," not only because they housed a variety of shops, but because their development used precise marketing metrics to locate and satisfy customers, offering "packaged sensations, divided by age and lifestyle."[111] As more malls sprang up across America, they became much more finely tuned to the needs of their clientele. Malls hyperbolized the one-stop shop to become the "one-stop culture," as Kowinski puts it, "providing a cornucopia of products nestled in an ecology of community, entertainment, and social identity."[112] While those in the mall business were strictly concerned with the economy of malls, more and more Americans, like Kowinski himself, became fascinated with the cultural allure of shopping malls. In 1982, *CBS Reports* aired a documentary entitled "After the Dream Comes True," in which the host of the program tells the viewer of shopping centers: "If you want to find America today, this is where you have to look."[113] The cultural significance of shopping centers in the late twentieth century cannot be disentangled from the late-capitalist policies that produced it and allowed it to proliferate. Where did shopping centers fit into America's turbulent economy of the 1980s and why, in this period, were malls becoming a microcosm of what the *CBS Reports* documentary claims "what this country is becoming"?[114]

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[105] "Shopping centers will be America's towns of tomorrow," *Marketing News*, XIV, no. 11 (28 November 1980), 1.

[106] Marcida Dodson, "Move Over, Apple Pie—America is Sweet on Malls," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles), 23 February 1991, OCA1.

[107] Karen Frankel, "1980s: The Age of Consumerism," in *American Life and Fashion from Jeans to Jeggings* (New York: Cavendish Square Publishing, 2013), 52.

[108] "After The Dream Comes True," *CBS Reports*, narr. Charles Kuralt, 4 August 1982.

[109] Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *American Consumer Society, 1865-2005: From Hearth to HDTV* (Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2009), 209.

[110] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 20.

The 1980s marked a radical departure from the economic policy of mid-twentieth century. Public officials and businesspeople alike scorned the emphasis on collective action of the 1960s and 1970s but also borrowed from the era's lexicon to map a very different ideological landscape. For example, the term "empowerment," which was used in the 1960s and 1970s in a freedom struggle for underrepresented factions of American society, became appropriated by conservatives during the Reagan and Bush eras and was weaponized to support the shrinking of government programs and regulatory-agency powers in order to "empower" individuals against the state.[115] A common understanding during this period was that government spending and taxes must be reined in in order to enable businesses to prosper, which would in turn contribute to the overall economic wellbeing of American society at large. Under this neoliberal regime, democracy became synonymous with freedom of choice of commercial goods, and the only power individuals wielded under this equation was through their aggregate purchasing power supported by a growing consumer culture.[116] As historian Stuart Ewen articulates, by the 1980s, consumer culture "mushroomed into a vehement global religion."[117] Consumer culture became not only ersatz religion and democracy, but it also undergirded a whole economic system that justified the deregulation of business at the expense of consumer protection. And while advocates of so-called unfettered capitalism believed that the market should be left untouched by government regulations, they perhaps failed to realize how much the "invisible hand" that guided Americans to a mass-consumption economy was in fact reinforced by public policy. For example, in 1981, a change to the accelerated depreciation code, included as part of President Reagan's tax cuts, known as the Accelerated Cost Recovery System, enabled developers of commercial real estate to deduct as much as thirty-one percent of a building's cost as a depreciation during the building's first three years.[118] Therefore developers and investors were encouraged through this tax incentive to build commercial properties as opposed to, for instance, building a public park. Another example is Reagan's reversal of the environment protection laws of the 1970s through his appointment of "aggressive champions of industry" to Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) rank-and-file positions.[119] This reversal allayed any pressure shopping centers and other commercial venues faced from the 1970s-era EPA for their flagrant and excessive energy consumption. The most obvious example of the ways in which Reagan-era policies and actions supported a consumer society is through his tax cuts and expanded credit, which triggered and promoted an unhampered spending spree.[120]

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[111] Crawford, "The World in a Shopping Mall," 214 and George H. Lewis, "Community Through Exclusion and Illusion: The Creation of Social Worlds in an American Shopping Mall," *Journal of Popular Culture* 24, no. 2 (Fall 1990), 121.

[112] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 22.

[113] *CBS Reports*, 1982.

[114] "After The Dream Comes True," *CBS Reports*, 1982.

[115] Douglas Kellner, "Media Culture, Politics and Ideology: From Reagan to Rambo," in *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics between the Modern and the Postmodern* (London: Routledge, 1995), 59.

[116] Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic,* 54.

[117] Stuart Ewen, "Memoirs of a Commodity Fetishist," *Mass Communication & Society* 3, no. 4. (2000), 447.

Government policies, beyond legislating consumerism into the economics of the nation, also nurtured the idea that the American standard of living—measured by access to commercial goods—was the birthright of every American, which therefore suggested that consumption was the ultimate civic responsibility of each citizen.[121] The fundamental problem with this idea is that with a deregulated marketplace, a decentralized government and a privatized economy, access to consumer goods insufficiently replaced access to more important services such as jobs, health care and education. Lizabeth Cohen calls this tradeoff "embourgoisement," in which:

> [R]ewards of material prosperity and social integration in return for ceding shopfloor control and company governance to management and for accepting private corporate welfare such as pensions and health insurance in place of an expanded and more social democratic welfare state.[122]

This was especially pronounced in the 1980s, as individualism was emphasized over community and as laissez-faire was emphasized over social compassion.[123]

The prosperity of the 1980s was not evenly distributed. While hyper-consumption was bloating the wallets of corporate executives and shareholders, the shift from a production to a consumer economy disenfranchised a whole class of newly downwardly mobile Americans.[124] The stability of the middle-class that had been built and sustained by public investment during the postwar years, as discussed in the introduction, was starkly undermined by neoliberal policies that favored industry growth over the distribution of wealth. Under this regime, limited public services were offered to those in need of meaningful public support and the ability to make commercial purchases attempted to bridge the gap between the wealthy and the disenfranchised, as a façade to appease class insecurities and tension.[125] Anthropologist Rachel Heiman explains this when she writes of the "class-encoded habits, desires, and practices that entrench neoliberal logics: hyper-consumption and overspending that benefit corporate capital, spatial strategies that further segregation along race, class, and age lines; and privatized solutions that divert a politics of demand on the state."[126] By the 1980s, this neoliberal logic dictated that the American Dream was attainable to any consumer-citizen while ignoring that the equation worked in favor of corporations and against individuals. The privatization of the economy extended to the privatization of space, and shopping centers held the monopolies on these spaces. And while individuals were becoming more disenfranchised under neoliberalism, shopping centers were proving to be lucrative business opportunities for those who could exploit America's desire to consume.

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[118] Hanchett, "U.S. Tax Policy and the Shopping-Center Boom of the 1950s and 1960s," 1105.

[119] Philip Shabecoff, "Reagan and Environment: To Many, a Stalemate," *The New York Times* (New York), 2 January 1989, 1.

[120] Cross, *An All-Consuming Century,* 206.

[121] Blaszczyk, *American Consumer Society, 1865-2005,* 273.

[122] Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 155.

[123] Katherine Newman, *Falling from Grace: The Experience of Downward Mobility in the American Middle Class* (Jefferson, New York: Free Press, 1988), x.

[124] Rachel Heiman, *Driving After Class: Anxious Times in an American Suburb* (Oakland, University of California Press, 2015) 8.

A glaring insufficiency in the role of the citizen-as-consumer is that one's purchasing power replaced accesses to meaningful democratic protections, such as consumer protection or an unbiased media, while real political power tended to be concentrated with those who have the purchasing power to buy not simply consumer goods, but influence. In 1988, the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC) established a political action committee in order to lobby the government for policies that favored the mall business. Beyond political influence, the ICSC, which was founded in 1957, became a major force in formalizing, centralizing and standardizing mall development. Since its inception, the ICSC has molded the retail industry into the shape of the enclosed shopping mall by publishing handbooks and journals, commissioning surveys and polls, holding conventions, and lobbying Washington on the industry's behalf. As Kowinski observes, the ICSC "has been instrumental in making the industry a comprehensive and efficient success, and probably also in creating a national sameness."[127] This sameness is a large part of the enclosed shopping center's success, especially for regional shopping centers. It reduced the shopping center to a formula that could be replicated across the country with similar rates of success. The ICSC depended on this sameness not simply to ensure the replicated success of its members but to safeguard its relevancy in the retail sphere, to entice its membership (and their dues) to stand together as a united force under one industry.

Shopping mall manuals and handbooks, like Mary Alice Hines's *Shopping Center Development and Investment*, acted as how-to guides for anybody looking to grab a slice of the lucrative mall pie. Hines was herself schooled in mall management and development through courses offered by the ICSC's

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[125] Ibid., 4.
[126] Ibid., 4.
[127] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 225.

University of Shopping Centers, and her handbook reads as zealously optimistic. "Good investment yields have been realized from shopping centers for years, even centuries," she writes.[128] One *Marketing News* article concurs with this statement: "Due to several built-in incentives [shopping center investments] represent an exceptionally safe way to reap long-term profits. As in most commercial real estate ventures, taxes on money invested in shopping centers are relatively low, thanks to property depreciation allowances."[129] Mall developers, reaping the yields of their investments, were quick to latch onto this sanguine belief and justified their rewards by conflating business ownership with American exceptionalism. One mall developer's statement exemplified this:

> There's nothing elected "by the people" in a mall. The mall actually is more like a business enterprise run by private individuals who are I guess capitalist who live in a capitalistic economy and hope that it stays that way. I think that's what makes America great is the fact that we've had thousands, hundreds or thousands of individual entrepreneurs who started out small and who have grown large. That's the nice thing about this country.[130]

Even the parts of Hines's handbook that warn potential investors of pitfalls like recession, overdevelopment and downward mobility are undermined by reassurances that "consumers have continued to spend their decreasing real incomes in consumer nondurable and durable goods."[131] ICSC conventions take on a similarly rosy tone. The *CBS Reports* documentary, "After the Dream Comes True," takes the viewers inside an ICSC convention in Miami Beach where the narrator observes: "All we learned here is that shopping mall people talk a lot about cost per square foot and that they have a lot of money."[132] Kowinski is even more critical when he visits an ICSC convention in Las Vegas:

> By and large, it indeed was a homogeneous group of white middle-aged males with a polyester point of view that made up the bulk of the conventioneers, just as I'd been warned. Although there were a few black mall managers and other minorities, and a scattering of women mall managers—along with a great many women public relations and marketing directors—there weren't very many women participating at the executive level in the convention.[133]

That the Oz behind the mall curtain was white, rich and male was concealed by the illusion of a plethora of commercial goods and services that could meet the manufactured needs of every type of American. Mall development may have looked no different from any other corporate board room in America, but the mall itself could have played the role of a democratic agora.

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[128] Hines, *Shopping Center Development and Investment,* 1.
[129] "Shopping centers will be America's towns of tomorrow," 11.
[130] "After The Dream Comes True," *CBS Reports*, 1982.
[131] Hines, *Shopping Center Development and Investment,* 28.
[132] "After The Dream Comes True," *CBS Reports*, 1982.
[133] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 228.

It seemed that there was no business like mall business—but this optimism came with one giant caveat: there were too many malls. As early as the mid-1970s, the *Los Angeles Times* observed: "how many regional shopping centers does a region require?"[134] While shopping centers appeared to be the feeding the "American disease known as conspicuous consumption," the untethered growth of mall development appeared to be reaching epidemic proportions in the last quarter of the century.[135] According to one *Marketing News* article, in 1983, 80% of adults had access to two or more malls, 55% had access to three or more, and 25% had access to four more.[136] In order to differentiate one's mall from the vast sea of enclosed shopping centers, mall developers had to ramp up their offerings and transform their spaces into entertainment destinations. One way a mall developer could compete was to build a "super-regional" mall to outshine more established regional malls, which would later lead to the development of mega-malls, which will be further discussed below.[137] The logic of these super- and mega-mall developments was sustained by a popular theory in commercial real estate economics, Reilly's law of retail gravitation. The law dictates that shoppers will visit the largest mall that they can easily get to.[138] Under the adage of "if you build it, they will come," this law led developers to abandon old community and regional types of shopping centers in favor of developing new, larger-than-life complexes. And Americans *wanted* to shop; it became a major national pastime by the mid-1980s. In 1985, 78% of Americans went to an enclosed shopping center at least once a month.[139] In a 2017 *New York Times* article, one former mall dweller recalls 1986 as "a peak mall year in America."[140] Droves of Americans were looking to spend their hard-earned cash and well-deserved leisure time at the mall—it was up to mall developers, cultural curators, institutional backers and governmental regulators to attract these consumers' dollars. The narrator hosting the *CBS Reports* documentary implored the viewer to consider: "When you look around you and the leaves are always green and business is always good, it's easy to feel that the system is working, that it can work for any American who wants to give it a try."[141] And try they did.

Shopping malls and their industry representatives sought to maintain the appearance that shopping centers were the new town squares of America, the focal points of open and free democratic debate. In reality, however, shopping centers were premised around serving purely profit-oriented goals. The deregulation of corporate America, the neoliberal policies that promoted individualism over collective action, and the powerful industries that aggressively lobbied politicians created a particular type of consumerism in the late twentieth century that, according to historian Gary Cross, "moved farther away from social cohesion and reality and toward an enveloping personal fantasy."[142] Shopping centers carved out a place for themselves within that fantasy, offering its patrons an artificial forum for community while barring actual democratic participation. Shopping centers were first conceptualized as enclosed spaces to serve sprawling suburban communities; however, actual mall development took place far outside of residential areas, where land was cheapest.[143] Kowinski notes this when he visits Fox Valley mall, which was built in the late 1970s. Fox Valley "is linked not to a specific community as to the disposable income of anybody who can get to it on the fast ribbons of highway."[144]

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[134] Art Seidenbaum, "A New Kind of Amusement Park," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles), 9 May 1976, G1.
[135] "Shopping centers will be America's towns of tomorrow," 1
[136] "Five factors seen to determine profitability of shopping centers," *Marketing News*, 9 December 1983, 14.
[137] Scharoun, *America at the Mall,* 15.
[138] Crawford, "The World in a Shopping Mall,"20.
[139] Cross, *An All-Consuming Century,* 215.
[140] Steven Kurutz, "An Ode to Shopping Malls," *New York Times* 27 July 2017, D1.
[141] "After The Dream Comes True," *CBS Reports*, 1982.

Residential development in the suburbs also did little to nurture any sense of community among its inhabitants. Ever-changing zoning laws and emphasis on resale value segregated residential communities along racial and class lines. Furthermore, the desire to move up to a new housing rung rendered the community unnecessary, or even an inconvenience to individualistic aspirations.[145] Community, therefore, was gained through the consumption of products that aligned one with a particular lifestyle.[146] Much like the way youth culture was defined strictly through the invention of the youth market, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, all Americans were buying their identities. This was the type of community shopping centers aimed to promote, a community of brand identification. This type of community was not open to all but rather to those who could afford the products that signify membership into that lifestyle. Additionally, the so-called lifestyle that was considered most lucrative to mall developers and retailers was that of the upper-middle class. For example, in 1985, when South Bay Mall in Redondo Beach, California was given a facelift and turned into the $70 million South Bay Galleria, located just two miles away from another upscale shopping plaza, Del Amo Fashion Center, "concerns remained […] about the economic repercussions from another major shopping mall."[147] These concerns were ignored by the retailers who conducted extensive market research before deciding to open a store in Redondo Beach to gain access to wealthy clientele.[148] The concerns were also flouted by the city of Redondo Beach, which stood to gain $1 million annually from tax revenue from the three anchor stores alone.[149]

Municipalities often invested in shopping centers. For example, in 1988, Los Angeles county contributed a $31.3 million grant to the development of a Pomona regional shopping center "in exchange for more than $61 million in increased revenue from bond sales and various redevelopment projects over the next 30 years."[150] Demonstrating both the necessity of public investment into mall development as well as the lack of discrimination developers had in terms of where that investment comes from, one *Los Angeles Times* article concedes that without the support from the county the mall could not be built, but adds that "if that happened, a major mall would probably be built a few miles down the Pomona Freeway in San Bernardino County, depriving Los Angeles County and the Pomona Redevelopment Agency of the $440 million in tax increment revenue officials hope the project would generate over the next 30 years."[151]

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[142] Cross, *An All-Consuming Century,* 193.
[143] Gladwell, "The Terrazzo Jungle," 2004
[144] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 107.
[145] Scharoun, *America at the Mall,* 29.
[146] Ibid., *America at the Mall,* 30.
[147] Dean Murphy, "Galleria Puts Pressure on Competition," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles), 29 August 1985, 10.
[148] Murphy, 10.
[149] Ibid., 10.

A shopping center relied on its appeal to offer hundreds of jobs and hundreds of thousands of dollars in sales tax revenue to entice public contributions. Public investment, however, did not necessarily mean public support. In White Plains, New Jersey, a mall—called the Galleria—that had been built in 1980 became a site of "conflicting views" regarding the mall's success. [152] The city of White Plains incentivized the mall's development by building a $29 million parking garage and was rewarded with an increase of 2500 jobs and a surge in sales tax collection.[153] Residents of White Plains, however, complained that the mall actually hurt local businesses and contributed to a rise in rent prices.[154] Many critics also argued that the mall engulfed the character of the city. "There was a time—pre-Galleria—when the 19-story, white-marble courthouse building on Grove Street served as the distinguishable landmark in White Plains. Now, when visitors ask for directions to the courthouse, they are usually told it is one block over from the Galleria."[155] The shopping center, therefore, enveloped the economy of White Plains and obfuscated its civic landmarks.

Citizens across America took note of the effects of mall development in their local communities and began pushing back. Kowinski bears witness to this trend and writes, "In the eighties, the whole question of suburban development and the mall's role in it had become a national issue, and a number of towns, cities, and even suburban areas had begun to oppose the building of malls."[156] This was reflected in community organizations that lobbied against the construction of new malls. In 1980, *Marketing News* warned potential developers and retailers that "[l]ocal citizenry, one-time champions of shopping centers as a rich source of tax revenue, now consider the complexes a strain on community services and have attempted to stop construction of new malls."[157] This growing resentment even manifested itself on the big screen, such as the B-movie *Phantom of the Mall: Eric's Revenge*. The film tells the story of Eric, who died when prospective mall developers set fire to his house, which was sitting on valuable potential shopping center property. Eric's ghost inhabits the mall that was later built over the ruins of his home, haunting and murdering those who have wronged him. It serves as an allegory for the insatiable desire produced by the mall industrial complex as well as the palpable tension between mall development and the communities that these malls supposedly serve.

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[150] Jeffrey Miller and Daryl Kelley, "$31.3-Million Grant Paves Way for Big Shopping Mall," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles), 8 December 1988, AS1.
[151] Ibid., AS1.
[152] Lena Williams, "For a Mall, Both Praise and Gripes," *The New York Times* (New York), 22 August 1985, B2.
[153] Ibid., B2.
[154] Williams, "For a Mall, Both Praise and Gripes," B2.
[155] Ibid., B2.
[156] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 147.
[157] "Shopping centers will be America's towns of tomorrow," 11.

That the mall could serve as a backdrop to a horror film reflects the uneasiness many felt about its increasing relevance in American culture. Critical theorist Douglas Kellner writes that "the most interesting contemporary horror films have presented, often in symbolic-allegorical form, both universal fears and the deepest anxieties and hostilities in U.S. society."[158] Despite the attempt to squelch unrestrained mall development, most residents of America's cities, towns and suburbs had few options for both commercial and community spaces outside of the shopping mall.

While the shopping center may have been reaching a saturation point in terms of development, by the 1980s, it was reaching its zenith in terms of its marketability. Regional shopping centers needed to compete with one another in order to attract more and more patrons into its enclosures. In order to achieve this, shopping centers needed to expand their offered services beyond retail. By the 1980s, the food court was becoming a regular component of a shopping center, offering shoppers who get "ravenously hungry, shopping at the mall" an opportunity to rest their feet, throw down their many shopping bags, and chow down on some chain-restaurant delicacies.[159] Technological advancements of the 1980s made spending one's dollar easier than ever before. For example, barcode technology was invented in the 1980s, enabling even more seamless transactions.[160] The deregulation of the loan industry allowed a greater segment of the population access to credit.[161] During this decade American Express partnered with some of the largest mall developers to set up card application kiosks in shopping centers. Applicants received a $20 gift card to use in the mall in a cross-promotional hope to "build credit card use at shopping malls."[162] One Maryland shopping mall even introduced its own credit card.[163]

Beyond technological advances, shopping centers were expanding their business to offer a wide range of services such as medical facilities, fitness centers and movie theatres. Movie theatres were particularly notable because they followed a similar trajectory to retail in this period. The cinemas that largely occupied the downtown districts of a town consolidated into multiplexes and moved into suburban shopping malls. These theatres, because they attracted people into the malls where they were housed, were given preferential treatment in their leases by shopping center owners. They were also often tucked away into mysterious corners of the shopping mall to force movie-goers to walk through large sections of the mall in order to reach the theatre.[164]

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[158] Kellner, "Media Culture, Politics and Ideology," 126.
[159] Joyce Carol Oates, "Shopping," *Heat, and other stories* (New York: Dutton, 1991), 59.
[160] Rachel Bowlby, *Carried Away: The Invention of Modern Shopping* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 3.
[161] Scharoun, *America at the Mall,* 28.
[162] "AmEx card in joint promotion with mall chain," *Marketing News*, 13 February 1989, 9.
[163] "Shopping centers will be America's towns of tomorrow," 11.

Shopping centers were popular spaces in the late twentieth century, but part of their popularity was an ongoing and intentional effort to attract foot traffic into their enclosures. As Kowinski writes, "It seemed that the mall had virtually called these customers into existence—and in a way it had."[165] Malls lured customers into their enclosures with promotions, marketing events and community attractions. A classic example of this is Santa Claus, who is commonly found stationed in malls across the country at Christmastime. One New Jersey mall further attracted families by hosting Hanna-Barbera cartoon characters alongside Santa.[166] Other examples include Sherman Oaks Galleria, which drew crowds when it hosted the National Aerobics Championships, which was sponsored by a sugar-free soft drink and several fitness magazines.[167] The Woodfield Mall in Illinois provided its space for performances by the Chicago Symphony as well as a campaign speech by President Ford.[168] The Hilltop Mall in the Bay Area partnered with a community college to offer a mall-walking class to provide the students with some valuable exercise while they window shop.[169]

Malls also attempted to bring customers into their stores through more traditional means, particularly through advertisements. One newspaper ad for Century City Shopping Center touted "Three Hours Free Parking" to get shoppers in the door.[170] Kowinski writes of being on the receiving end of an aural assault from the car radio that hammered out "a rapid-fire onslaught of mall advertising."[171] One such radio ad for The Mall of Orange, whose slogan, "Great stores, great prices, great place" is followed by the repetitive jingle: "The Mall of Orange! The Mall of Orange! Our Mall is your mall! Our Mall is your mall! The Mall of Orange!"[172] Some of these ads used local figures to not only promote the mall, such as one print advertisement for the Vallco Fashion Park in California, in which a local county sheriff is portrayed handcuffing a model for "Crimes of Fashion."[173]

Shopping centers appealed to customers by the very nature of their design. As climate-controlled environments, they offered patrons an escape from all sorts of inclement weather. "A heat wave is an undeniable form of persuasion," writes one *Los Angeles Times* columnist.[174] Joan Didion once wrote about the science behind shopping centers' appeal in an essay in *The White Album*. She remarks on a trick to paint parking spaces wider when the mall first opens. "By this single stroke," she writes, "the developer achieves a couple of important objectives, the appearance of a popular center and the illusion of easy parking, and no one will really notice when business picks up and the spaces shrink."[175] Didion credits her knowledge to an extension course on Shopping-Center Theory in which she was enrolled at the University of California. Post-secondary institutions were recognizing the value of shopping centers and began to legitimize shopping-center knowledge as a valid arm of business science. This was captured in a *Los Angeles Times* article, which exclaimed, "Spending time at the mall has been raised to an art form by some high school students, but at Youngstown State University it's a management science."[176] The degree was a crash course in "the study of malls and how to run them."[177]

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[164] William Paul, "The K-mart audience at the mall movies," *Film History* 6, no. 4 (1994), 493.

[165] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 49.

[166] Frazier, "The Mall," 19.

[167] Doug Smith, "Aerobic 'Athletes' Flex, Leap Among Shoppers," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 June 1985, 6.

[168] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 113.

[169] "Walking the Mall Brings College Credit," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles), 15 November 1987, 14.

[170] "Century City Shopping Center (Ad)," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 January 1982, 5.

[171] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 215.

[172] Ibid., *The Malling of America,* 215.

[173] "Mall ad draws more attention than expected," *Marketing News*, 11 April 1986, 10.

[174] Donna K. H. Walters. "Malls, Theatres Profits from Heat Wave Some Merchants Turn Hot Days to Cold Cash," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles), 4 July 1985, 1.

At the heart of mall theory is, of course, the intent to sell. The marketing director at Glendale Galleria succinctly captured this objective by stating, "[O]ur primary purpose is to promote shopping."[178] The controlled climate, for example, is to facilitate a comfortable environment that will put customers at ease and hopefully induce shopping. One mall's customer-relations director noted during a heat wave that "everyone seems to have bags in their hands. Even if they are coming in for the air conditioning, they are buying something."[179] The imperative of shopping centers is to encourage individuals to shop in the malls' stores, but also to promote the ideology of consumerism more broadly. Even the events hosted by shopping malls t generally promoted the act of buying, whether asking Santa for toys, watching a tournament sponsored by a beverage company, or dining at the food court. One mall manager considered the shopping mall as "a good vehicle for any product as long as it's noncontroversial and sold in the retail environment."[180] An instructional *Marketing News* article echoed this sentiment when it coined the term "Traffic Development" as one of the important facets of mall management. "Sales, exhibits, shows, and community events help to draw crowds, but it must be traffic that has the interest and ability to buy."[181] The shopping mall is both a commercial space and a sanitized space, one that filters out the messiness of real life outside of its enclosure. In the *CBS Reports* documentary, one mall developer and owner claims:

> We want everyone to be comfortable when they come here. We want them to be completely at ease and that they are not going to be in a hurry because the longer we can keep them here the better job each shop in the mall will do. We want them coming back. The important thing is to get

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[175] Joan Didion, "On the mall," in *The White Album* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 183.
[176] "Hours Spent Shopping Aren't Wasted," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 December 1988, 2.
[177] Ibid., 2.
[178] Michael Szymanski, "All the Mall's a Stage," *Los Angeles Times*, 30 August 1991, F21A.
[179] Walters, "Malls, Theatres Profits from Heat Wave Some Merchants Turn Hot Days to Cold Cash," 1.
[180] "Malls offer prime venue for targeted promotions," *Marketing News*, 11 31 July 1987, 17.
[181] "Five factors seen to determine profitability of shopping centers,"14.

> 'em here, instead of once a week, twice or three times a week. We hope they consider this to be part of their entertainment.[182]

This meant that the mall can be a vessel for advertisements but not for politics, that it could be a space for consumption but not for democracy, that it could be a space that serves the commercial interests of a region but not its needs as a community.

Although the primary concern of mall developers and managers was to generate revenue, part of malls' appeal to customers was the services offered that were not wholly retail by nature. By shifting their attention toward entertainment and by zeroing in on malls as social gathering spaces (no matter how circumscribed), shopping-center developers and managers drew a variety of demographics into their spaces. Day-care centers for mothers and their toddlers, amusement parks for older children, arcades for teenagers, and nightclubs for adults are all examples of the deliberate attempts that mall developers and managers made in order to draw niche yet all-encompassing crowds.[183] Movie theatres, ice rinks, art galleries, restaurants and food courts "with eateries stuck together like so many gum drops" all encouraged lingering and therefore increased the probability of additional spending.[184] This "shoppertainment" became the business model for any shopping center hoping to draw in customers and avoid obsolescence.[185] Malcolm Gladwell once called the mall "an exercise in cooperative capitalism" because each component of the mall helped sustain all other components; anything that drew in foot traffic could lead to profits for the interconnected web of stores and services.[186]

Suburban shopping centers sought to provide its patrons with the culture, vibrancy and commodities of the city. One ICSC spokesman epitomized this when he told the *Los Angeles Times* that "a mall is like a shrunken-down community, and anything can happen there, like in a city or a neighborhood. It's like a city under glass."[187] Those who were interested in seeing shopping centers profit often considered the mall as a microcosm of America. Much like the film *Scenes from a Mall*, it was believed that the mall could serve as a backdrop to your entire life. Children could grow up under the skylight of the mall's atrium, teenagers could make new friends inside the video arcade, retirees could find a safe space to gather with old friends. Love could be found inside the mall as well. In 1989, one California-area couple tied the knot inside Arco Plaza. The couple were both Arco Plaza employees and won a mall-sponsored contest in which they were rewarded with a venue for their nuptials. One stipulation was that they were to be married in the central court and during peak mall hours, to ensure heavy foot traffic.[188]

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[182] "After The Dream Comes True," *CBS Reports*, 1982.

[183] "Shopping centers will be America's towns of tomorrow," 11.

[184] Bruce Horovitz, "The New Entertainment Malls," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 October 1985, v1.

[185] Farrell, *One Nation Under Goods*, 13.

[186] Gladwell, "The Terrazzo Jungle," 2004.

[187] Dodson, "Move Over, Apple Pie—America Is Sweet on Malls," OCA1.

[188] Dodson, "Move Over, Apple Pie—America Is Sweet on Malls,"OCA1

Mall tours, which will be discussed in greater detail in a later chapter, were another essential way shopping centers could sell merchandise under the guise of entertainment. For example, the Glendale Galleria hosted a "Mid-Week Music Series" in an attempt to draw customers into the mall during its typically slower times, and the Promenade Mall, which, in 1991, was under construction, hosted a "Hard Hat Tour" to give customers a sneak-peek at its renovations in progress.[189]

Superficially, shopping centers looked as though they were bringing the vitality of the city to the suburbs. Realistically, however, shopping centers merely promoted conspicuous consumption and fostered community through prescribed activities and events whose purposes were primarily to entertain and elicit consumption. This promotion of city life within the suburban enclosures of the mall actually took a toll on the cities themselves. In *CBS Reports'* "After the Dream Comes True," a Kansas City barber observes that the mall "has hurt my business quite a little bit," but he concedes that "you can't stop progress."[190] Eventually, however, the success of the shopping center was reproduced in the downtown districts. Kowinski highlights that malls were designed to suggest the city, and, in turn, cities were beginning to appropriate the suburban shopping mall:

> The malls responded with what the city no longer had: clean, safe, human-scaled environments where people could walk and see each other along tree-lined internal streets. They didn't lock out kitsch and kin of human tastes and interactions; they enclosed them in a protective embrace. They didn't embody visions of the ideal; they fulfilled the pedestrian fantasy.[191]

An example of this is that the New York City Port Authority remodeled its bus terminal after shopping malls to appear more welcoming to its passengers and to serve as a destination in and of itself.[192] By the 1980s, a movement of revival was sweeping downtown areas across America because federal investment shifted from housing in the suburbs to investment in urban renewal.[193] This trend incentivized developers to turn derelict historic buildings into "festival marketplaces" that focused on housing specialty shops that sold kitschy items. Kowinski writes that these central shopping centers demonstrated that "a collection of shops, selected and managed by a single developer, could survive in the city without being inside a mammoth structure but in rehabilitating older buildings once used for something else."[194] Communications specialist Lisa Scharoun contends, however, that these revival attempts failed to bring suburbanites into the city, that they catered primarily to tourists, and therefore did not serve the community in which the buildings resided, putting too much emphasis on buildings over people.[195]

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[189] Szymanski, "All the Mall's a Stage," F21A.
[190] "After The Dream Comes True," *CBS Reports*, 1982.
[191] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 272-73.
[192] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 272.
[193] Hines, *Shopping Center Development and Investment,* 10.
[194] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 283.
[195] Scharoun, *America at the Mall,* 43.

Another prime example of the city imitating the shopping mall is Los Angeles's CityWalk, which opened in 1993. Sitting adjacent to Universal Studios and attached to an artificial beach, CityWalk attempted to offer a sanitized version of Los Angeles to its residents. The promenade consisted of storefronts, restaurants and a giant video screen. The *Los Angeles Times* wrote: "On weekend nights, their promenade boasts a carnival atmosphere, bristling with couples and clusters of teenagers who hurry to dinner or merely stroll from shop to shop."[196] CityWalk was designed as a type of simulacrum of Los Angeles, a version of itself without any crime, ugliness or shabbiness. It was the very pedestrian fantasy about which Kowinski wrote, providing residents and tourists alike a chance to sample city life within the parameters of the metropolitan but without encountering the malaise that defined many downtown districts. Insidiously, these types of urban revivals, while drawing people into the city, detracted from real central landmarks that desperately needed consumers' dollars by providing visitors a recognizable formula they have become accustomed to. "In other words," the *Los Angeles Times* article continued, "CityWalk is a shopping mall."[197]

The entertainment model that shopping centers embraced was influenced by the success of amusement parks. As early as 1976, one *Los Angeles Times* journalist wrote: "We told people we were going to a shopping center for the weekend, they snickered and asked, where? […] Why? They wanted to know, why go there? Because shopping centers have become the amusement center of our time."[198] Another *Los Angeles Times* article called the mall "a hipper playground than Disneyland."[199] A 1992 *Money* piece entitled "Watch Out, Disneyland" made the bold prediction that mega-malls were becoming "America's newest vacation destination."[200] Disneyland had opened around the same time that malls were beginning to pepper the suburban landscape, in 1955, but it was not until the late 1980s that mall developers began borrowing from the Disneyland playbook by opening mega-malls such as the West Edmonton Mall and Mall of America. "Theme parks are increasingly attractive to marketers," according to a 1989 *Marketing News* article, "consumers are generally in a receptive mood, and they are exposed to advertising for a prolonged period of time."[201] Mall developers and managers sought to recreate this spellbinding state by turning shopping centers into theme parks in what I call the Disneyfication of shopping malls. As malls served to make the mall-going experience more amusing and novel, they adopted Disneyland tactics, such as investing in attractions, populating the centers with branded characters, and by emphasizing thematic experiences. Although many shopping centers devoted their spaces to short-lived tours and cross-promotional events, more and more malls began installing permanent entertainment fixtures. Mall of America, for example, built an entire mini-amusement park—called Knott's Camp Snoopy—and West Edmonton Mall boasted the largest indoor rollercoaster.[202] Restaurants also became standard features of superregional mega-malls— celebrity chef Wolfgang Puck opened his first restaurant outside of California inside the Mall of America,[203] and West Edmonton Mall boasted over ten restaurants in their "nightlife" section alone.[204] In *Scenes from a Mall*, Nick and Deborah Fifer dined at a sushi restaurant, a Mexican restaurant, and even an upscale restaurant called Caviar, all located within the Beverly Hills mall. Mickey Mouse-like characters were also added to shopping centers in order to ape theme parks' entertainment appeal. At Sherman Oaks Galleria, for example, clowns, mimes and jugglers made regular appearances.[205] In *Scenes from a Mall*, the Fifers are constantly followed and taunted by an in-house mime. Another California mall, Antelope Valley Mall, unveiled a mascot in 1991, a giant antelope named Augustus, "who will wander around the mall, much like Mickey Mouse at Disneyland."[206] The most jarring feature of theme parks that was embraced by shopping-center developers, particularly mega-mall developers, was the emphasis on *theme*, which entailed the blurring of the temporal and the spatial into one sedating yet euphoric consumer-entertainment experience. One *Marketing News* article describes the attractions, live shows, flashing lights and electric games as resembling "the world of Stanley Kubrick & Disney Architecture Inc."[207] These themes were often pronounced and part of the malls' marketing campaigns. For example, the nightlife district of the West Edmonton Mall was named "Bourbon Street," to evoke New Orleans, and its Fantasyland Hotel had themed rooms, such as the Wild West. The Vegas Forum Shops in Las Vegas were created as "a dreamy vision of ancient Rome." And the fourth floor of Mall of America was named "Upper East Side," an homage to New York City, with movie theatres and various restaurants.[208]

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[196] Peter Bennet, "Malls Offer a Walk on the Mild Side," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 December 1999, E19.
[197] Ibid., E21.
[198] Seidenbaum, "A New Kind of Amusement Park," G1.
[199] John M. Glionna, "Call of the Mall," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 August 1993, Part B-B4.
[200] Gary Belsky, "Watch out, Disneyland," *Money* 21, no. 10 (1992), 213.
[201] Helene Diamond, "A marketer's dream is a park with a theme," *Marketing News,* 23 October 1989, 6.

The mall as theme park is an especially attractive analogy when we consider that the theme parks served not only to entertain but to reify the consumer economy by creating an artifice that resembled the real but that was entirely imagined, designed to put its patrons at ease by emphasizing pleasure over the ugliness of real life:

> The theme park presents its happy regulated vision of pleasure—as a substitute for the democratic public realm; and it does so appealingly by stripping troubled urbanity of its sting, of the presence of the poor, of crime, or dirt, of work.[209]

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[202] Belsky, "Watch out, Disneyland," 214.
[203] Neal Karlen, "The Mall That Ate Minnesota," *The New York Times*, 30 August 1992, V5.
[204] Belskey, "Watch out, Disneyland,"213.
[205] Szymanski, "All the Mall's a Stage," F21A
[206] Ibid., 21A.
[207] "Shopping centers will be America's towns of tomorrow,"11.
[208] Belsky, "Watch out, Disneyland," 214.
[209] Sorkin, "Introduction: Variations on a Theme Park," xv

Architectural critic Michael Sorkin's critique of the theme park can extend to the mega-malls of the late twentieth century: these megamalls offered "reasonable comfort and predictability […] that were not dependent on natural or historic beauty."[210] Just as the festival marketplaces acted as vacuous tourist traps that robbed the city of its character, mega-malls condensed and replicated a digestible form of nature, history and culture. Water fountains and ice-skating rinks paid homage to natural wonders while Wild West-themed pavilions suggested a mythical version of history. In the Mall of America, there is a Main Street USA corridor that evoked a small-town nostalgia that sought to recall a simpler time. "This was Main Street," Kowinski writes of the corridor, "but it was a made-up Mickey Mouse kind of Main Street, under private ownership and control."[211] It is no coincidence that Disneyland too boasts a Main Street USA quarter. Lisa Scharoun calls the mythological Main Street the "first manifestation of free-market capitalism," in which community and commerce appeared seamlessly linked, and she likens Main Street to a commodity in and of itself.[212] In this sense, Main Street is nothing more than an imagined time and space. The evocation of "Main Street" is a failure to recognize that such a place never existed except in America's imagination; however, the very perpetuation of this fantasy makes it more potent.

Mega-malls, by borrowing a page from Disneyland's playbook, collapsed time and space within their windowless walls to rewrite history in a way that positions them as the gatekeepers of this version of history, but also as the natural realization of that history. In conjuring up these "free-floating images" of Main Street and the Wild West, for example, these themed mega-malls placed themselves along a continuum of a mythologized American spirit.[213] The mega-mall therefore served as the next frontier, and its shops, although uniform and corporate, harkened back to the mom-and-pop shops of Main Street. In other words, if history is aestheticized and reduced to images that merely signal the past, then history can be shaped to serve the motives of the present. In his treaty *Simulacra and Simulation*, philosopher Jean Baudrillard writes, "[T]herein objects shine in a sort of hyper-resemblance […] that makes it so that fundamentally they no longer resemble anything, except the empty figure of resemblance, the empty form of representation."[214] The reduction of history within the walls of theme parks and mega-malls did more than suggest a past that might not have existed—it blurred the line between what is real and what is reproduced, which rendered both artificial.[215] During his sojourn, Kowinski interviews one shopper who ceased visiting malls because, as she claims, "I was in a plastic place with plastic people buying plastic products with plastic credit cards."[216] To visit Mall of America, was like entering a "house of fantasy," in which the real and the artificial are indistinguishable.[217]

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[210] Cross, *An All Consuming Century,* 216.
[211] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 357.
[212] Scharoun, *America at the Mall,* 59.
[213] Crawford, "The World in a Shopping Mall," 16.
[214] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 31.
[215] Ibid., 8.

The Mall of America was built less than ten miles from Victor Gruen's first mall, the Southdale Center, but it might as well have been built on an entirely different planet. Both Gruen and Triple Five, the Mall of America's developers, conceptualized a space that served more than shopping; they envisioned a destination, "an idealized community."[218] For Gruen, this looked like a public space that resembled the gallerias of Europe—spaces that combined commerce and community with an emphasis on walkability and public services. The Mall of America, on the other hand, was built to serve America's insatiable hunger for entertainment. In the *CBS Reports* documentary, one downtown Kansas City salesman offers his diagnosis on mall culture, a culture that was detrimental to his business: "I think we're not communicating with each other anymore. I think we've just got to be entertained with something special."[219] The documentary then cuts to a clip of mall-goers gawking at a parrot on display, followed by a man captivated by a football game on TV, and finally to a group of teenagers playing an arcade game.[220] In the late twentieth century, commerce and entertainment fully eclipsed the community objectives of the shopping center. The Mall of America's slogan was: "There's a place for fun in your life, the Mall of America. You've got to see it to believe it. Who told you you couldn't have it all?"[221] Having it all was the mantra of the excessive period of the late twentieth century, a time when materialistic pursuits supplanted democratic aspirations, when bigger meant better, and when culture, history and nature were all at the mall.

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[216] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 339.
[217] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 61.
[218] Karlen, V5.
[219] "After The Dream Comes True," *CBS Reports*, 1982.
[220] "Ibid., 1982.
[221] Karlen, "The Mall That Ate Minnesota," V5.

Chapter 2: The Invention of the American Teenager

Whenever I look back on the best days of my life, I think I saw them all on T.V.
—The Bravery

In 1987, the *Los Angeles Times* published an article about teen pop star and songwriter Tiffany. The article, entitled "Tiffany will hang out all summer in shopping malls and try to meet new friends," discussed Tiffany's upcoming music tour. But this was no ordinary tour. Tiffany's *The Beautiful You: Celebrating the Good Life Shopping Mall Tour '87* did not stop at America's traditional music venues but at its shopping malls. The mall tour at this time would have seemed both novel yet obvious—malls had become a ubiquitous facet in America's suburbs, yet it was not until the late 1980s that they were being treated as entertainment venues in and of themselves. The article opened with, "Chances were that Tiffany Darwish was going to do what most 15-year-olds do during the summer—go to the mall. So, when offered an expenses-paid trip to malls from coast to coast, she could not say 'yes' fast enough."[222] It chronicled the young singer's journey to stardom as well as the support she received from her parents, who, the article conspicuously noted, are divorced. Tiffany's mother expressed both pride and worry about her daughter: "Tiffany has grown up much faster because of all this […] She's much more mature than most 15-year-olds. But I would hate to see her 15 and not mature, what with all the pressures facing teens today."[223] The article presents Tiffany as "looking like a typical teen from the suburbs," and her tour is understood as the natural culmination point of teenagers' affinity for shopping and music.[224] The article assumed that with or without the tour Tiffany would be at the mall, but it also demonstrates how this banal assumption could be exploited for a profit. Tiffany's manager, who was interviewed, explained that he "wanted to take her where her peer group hangs out all summer long—shopping malls. […] If Tif is going to make it, she's going to do it first among 12- to 18-year-olds, and what better place to expose her than in America's playgrounds, the malls."[225]

By the late 1980s, the mall had taken over America and it was teeming with teenagers. Tiffany's tour and the *Los Angeles Times's* coverage of it reinforced and propagated the mall as the natural habitat for teenagers. The article expressed a visceral uneasiness about the state of adolescents during this period. There is an implicit correlation between Tiffany's typical teen-ness to her mall hanging out in malls but also, importantly, to her parents' divorce. From the article, we can glean that not only were teenagers facing a series of stresses, as intimated by Tiffany's mother, but that the mall represented something of an antidote to those stresses. The symbiotic relationship that teenagers had with malls—an unwritten agreement that teenagers could use the malls' spaces and malls could make money off teenagers' use of those spaces—begs the proverbial chicken-and-egg question about which came first: did teens choose the mall or did the mall market to teens? t

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[222] Steven R. Churm, "Tiffany," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles), 2 July 1987, 2.
[223] Ibid., 2.
[224] Ibid., 2.
[225] Ibid., 2.

Of course, the demographic of young people between ages twelve and eighteen preexisted the enclosed shopping center, but the group of people we commonly characterize as "teenagers," and all the traits that we associate with youth culture in general, were crafted by advertisers, corporations, public policy, and commercial popular culture. In other words, Tiffany's manager was able to exploit the mall as a playground for teens because he—and others of his ilk—were the ones who put them there. In this chapter, I will explore the parallel rise of youth culture and youth marketing in order to evaluate how these dovetailing phenomena culminated in teenage mall culture in the late twentieth century. I will do this by discussing the brief history of the so-called "youth market," exploring its origins, its proliferation in the 1960s, and its acme during the increasingly deregulated late-capitalist era, which paved the way for mall culture of the late twentieth century. I will discuss the perceived changing family dynamics during this period, such as the Tiffany's parents' divorce to which the *Los Angeles Times* article alluded, and finally I will address the ways in which shopping center developers and corporations worked symbiotically to attract teenagers into malls as a means of grooming them into lifelong consumers.

When considering teenagers, just like shopping malls, it is easy to conflate their ubiquity with a certain innateness. In other words, it is easy to assume that, because there have always been teen-aged people, there have always been what we call "teenagers." The term "teenager," however, did not enter our lexicon until 1941, when it was first used in a *Popular Science* magazine.[226] Giving teenagers a name allowed marketers to attribute unique characteristics to that age group in order to sell to them. Historian Grace Palladino articulates that "[n]o matter what we profess to believe about teenagers and their vital importance to the future, we tend to value them most as consumers."[227] The branding of the teenager began around the beginning of the twentieth century with the rise of the advertising industry. It can also be traced back to the time when Americans first started sending their older children, who would have typically abandoned schooling for work, to continue their education in high schools, which became a petri dish for a unified culture.[228] Historian Thomas Hine argues that this segregation stunted young adults, infantilized them and further increased the importance on establishing interpersonal relationships between them. He writes:

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[226] Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager,* 6.
[227] Palladino, *Teenagers,* xi.
[228] Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager,* 9.

> Like the Hoover Dam, the American teenager was a New Deal project, a massive redirection of energy. The national policy was to get the young out of the workforce so that more jobs would be available to family men. For the first time, high schools were enrolling a majority of young people of high school age.[229]

By design, young people did not fit in with the rest of society, which fostered within them a preoccupation to carve out a place where they did belong.

This need to belong was exploited by the puppeteering hands of marketers and creators of culture, who named this group and catered directly to them. By the 1930s and 1940s manufacturers were beginning to recognize the unique needs of adolescents. Department stores took out ads in newspapers that referenced their "teen shops" sections, and clothing manufacturers began designing "junior"-sized clothes.[230] The advent of these products both responded to real needs (such as the developing teenaged body and a decline in at-home sewing) and *manufactured* needs, such as wearing a style that separated you from your sibling's hand-me-downs. The advent of these new products created a new demographic, a distinct group with their own needs, interests and desires. In 1944, the socialite Helen Valentine, who recognized the growing interest in this unique demographic, published the first edition of *Seventeen*, a magazine that was directed explicitly to young women, specifically to teenage girls. *Seventeen* used its mascot, Teena, to educate young girls in decency, homemaking, beauty, and, above all, citizenry. Valentine was set on positively shaping the minds of the future generation of women with editorials and articles like "Getting Along in the World" and "Jobs Have No Gender."[231] Soon *Seventeen* was flying off the shelves into the bedrooms and lockers of young girls across America. The editors and the marketers of the magazine began to recognize that they were sitting on a golden egg; they had the attention of young girls across the country and could fill their minds (and bedrooms and lockers) not with character-building tools but with products. After pleading with various companies to sponsor them—some of which were skeptical of the viability of the youth market—the magazine found its wheelhouse in advertising. *Seventeen* worked with the clothing industry to tailor products to their readers' affinities, the magazine furnished their pages with advertisements for department stores' products, and it helped design department stores' window displays to make them more attractive to teenage girls. Eventually Valentine would leave the magazine, sealing its fate as a propagator of products. By the 1950s, the magazine had shifted its message entirely from one that prioritized the importance of citizenship to one that emphasized the gratification of consumption.

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[229] Ibid., 4.

[230] Kelly Massoni, *Fashioning Teenagers: a Cultural History of* Seventeen *Magazine* (California: Left Coast Press, 2010), 27-28.

[231] Massoni, *Fashioning Teenagers,* 65.

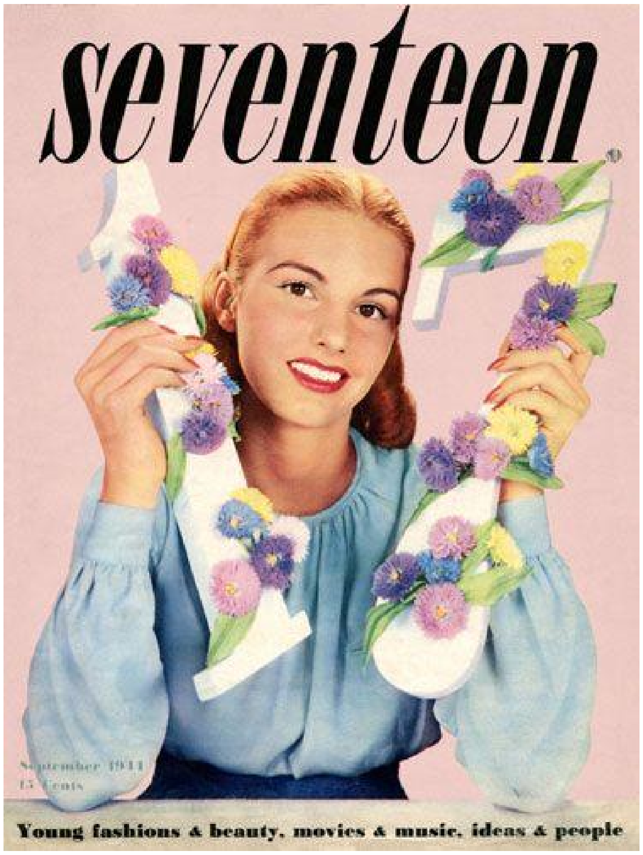

Figure 1: Seventeen, September 1944.

The editors at *Seventeen* were pioneers in what would come to be known as the "youth market," a term first coined in 1948 by market researcher Eugene Gilbert. Gilbert stressed the fruit to be reaped from this untapped goldmine when he wrote, "[T]he influence which young people exert on parents, combined with the actual buying power of these youth makes today's Youth Market an interesting potential for all wide-awake manufacturers."[232] The ubiquity of youth marketing today is a testament to Gilbert, who opened the floodgates to the explosion in marketing to youth. Youth marketing became a subset of a whole series of segmented marketing strategies. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, under the assumption that if your product is imbued with mass appeal then it will be purchased widely by a large variety of people, companies marketed their products to the general population. By the end of the Second World War, particularly by the 1950s, economists and marketers began to realize that it was more lucrative to cultivate a product for one particular demographic and market exclusively to them. In 1956, Wendell R. Smith published a paper in the *Journal of Marketing* entitled "Product Differentiation and Market Segmentation as Alternative Marketing Strategies." In this article, Smith emphasized the money to be made by determining the particular needs of a niche market and selling directly to them. He wrote,

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[232] Eugene Gilbert, "The Youth Market," *Journal of Marketing* 13, no. 1 (1948), 80.

"[A]ttention to smaller or *fringe* market segments, which may have small potential individually but are of crucial importance in the aggregate, may be indicated."[233] This was followed by some skepticism by the companies themselves who worried they would be placing all their eggs in one small basket rather than casting a wide net into the vast ocean. The youth market proved the true earning potential of market segmentation; for just as *Seventeen* worked directly with department stores to curate styles and products to be consumed specifically by its female adolescent readership, the youth market proved that companies could manufacture particular needs that youth culture depended on and conveniently sell them products through the channels created by the youth market.

According to marketing historians Stanley Hollanders and Richard Germain, there are two branches to youth marketing: marketing *to* youth and *youthful* marketing.[234] The latter, which has existed since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, is when a company credits its product with tapping the "fountain of youth."[235] Youth marketing, by contrast, took off in the 1960s, when teenagers and young people in general suddenly found themselves at the center of a movement that could be aestheticized and sold to others and, importantly, sold back to the youth themselves. The youth culture of the 1960s—remembered hyperbolically as flower children, draft-dodgers, don't-trust-anyone-under-thirty-ers—not only invaded the living rooms, discussions and imaginations of Americans, but also invaded the copywriters' rooms of Madison Avenue. The advertisement industry had an obsession with these rabble-rousing young people. Not only did the makeup of their copywriters begin to reflect this obsession but so did the copy they produced. For the first time, the culture of young people was co-opted by big business and ad agencies. With this appropriation, a whole new vernacular was developed in order to gain legitimacy among those who were so outwardly distrustful of Corporate America. But as the 1960s-era ad man "shed his gray flannel suit and leaped headlong into youth culture," the line that distinguished youth culture from a youth market began to blur.[236]

The obstacle of gaining the trust of young people, of somehow convincing them with an ironic wink that they should buy a certain product without coming off as too "establishment," was indeed a challenge. Advertising seemed antithetical to the values of the flower children. Advertisers, however, saw youths' freewheeling spirit as an opportunity. Rather than decipher the code of youth, advertisers mimicked them in order to gain the credibility that comes with "being cool" to sell to other demographics: "Madison Avenue was more interested in speaking *like* the rebel young than *to* them" (emphasis in original).[237] Ad men were not only tapping into the youth market, but they were unleashing the counterculture's ethos into consumer society. This ethos, which stressed freeing oneself from the shackles of modern life, while it appeared anti-establishment, actually gelled well with the industry of selling products because of its emphasis on self-fulfilment, a fulfilment that could be achieved through consumption. "The revolt against mass conformity," Frank observes, "was most definitely not a revolt against consumerism or the institution of advertising."[238] The quest for self-actualization could be reached through any particular product—the articulation of one's individuality could be achieved through a pair of jeans, for example—and the obsolescence that the youth saw inherent to American culture could be built into the products they consumed, manufacturing lifelong customers.

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[233] Wendell R. Smith, "Product Differentiation and Market Segmentation as Alternative Marketing Strategies," *Journal of Marketing* 21, 1 (July 1956): 7. Emphasis in original.
[234] Stanley C. Hollander and Richard Germain, *Was There a Pepsi Generation Before Pepsi Discovered it?* (Illinois: American Marketing Association, 1992), xxii.
[235] Ibid. xxii.
[236] Frank, *The Conquest of Cool,* 106.

The discovery and subsequent honing of the youth market coupled with the frivolous materialism that the counterculture inadvertently produced cultivated the Pepsi Generation,[239] which created not only a new psychographic—a portmanteau of psychology and demographic—to be studied and marketed to but a demographic whose culture, identity and sense of belonging were dependent on the products that they consumed. It is not surprising, therefore, that the invention of the teenager dovetailed with the rise of Cohen's Consumer Republic of the postwar years—that as democracy was being conflated with consumerism, those coming of age in America in the late-capitalist period would be raised not as citizens but as consumers.

By the 1980s, the developments from the mid-century had reached new heights, and youth market advertising blended so inconspicuously with youth culture that it deserves some parsing. Nothing best exemplifies the youth-consumer culture of the 1980s better than MTV, which would become "the model for fully branded media integration."[240] Formed in 1981 through a partnership between Warner Communications and American Express, MTV (standing for Music Television) so insidiously blurred the lines between advertisement and entertainment that no youthful copywriter from late-1960s Madison Avenue could have dreamed it up on even their wildest acid trips. The station garnered instant success by playing music videos, which led one *New York Times* journalist to exclaim, "A song is no longer strictly a song; now it's a 'video', with three-or-four-minute screen presentations accompanying a hit single."[241] These videos and the VJs (video jockeys) who introduced them appealed particularly to the coveted twelve-to-thirty-four-year-old demographic and therefore attracted a lot of advertisers' attention. "I want my MTV" was its slogan, emblematic of the demands of a generation of youth who felt entitled to the programing that best complemented their perceived uniqueness, a perception that had been fabricated by advertisers since the youth movement of the 1960s.

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[237] Ibid., 121.
[238] Ibid., 118.
[239] In 1963, Pepsi-Cola launched the ad campaign that was the result of a slogan contest. The slogan, "Come alive! You're the Pepsi Generation!" was one of the first instances in which a product's campaign attributed its consumers with particular qualities, in this case, with being young. In consuming a Pepsi beverage, therefore, was to signify a particular lifestyle that was promoted by the slogan and the ad campaign.
[240] Naomi Klein, *No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs*, 10th anniversary ed. (New York: Pacador, 2010), 44.
[241] Janet Maslin, "A Song Is No Longer Strictly A Song. Now It's a 'Video'," *New York Times*, 23 January 1983, H25.

MTV was ingenious not only because it mobilized teenagers with such targeted haste or because it was saturated with a "cool" credibility that its sponsors were more than happy to piggyback on. What was clever about MTV was MTV's content—music videos—was itself a product to be consumed. Naomi Klein best summarizes this in *No Logo*:

> From the beginning, MTV has not been just a marketing machine for the products it advertises around the clock (whether those products are skin cleansers or the albums it moves with its music videos); it has also been a twenty-four-hour advertisement for MTV itself: the first truly branded network.[242]

Teenagers were watching advertisements for record companies and their artists that were then broken up by advertisements for MTV's sponsors. MTV became the golden standard for youth marketing and proved that the youth market was ripe for the taking. The network recognized this and in 1983 dispatched a campaign to potential advertisers with the slogan: "Now's the time to face the Music."[243] MTV wanted to expand its sponsors beyond its usual suspects—such as Pepsi Co, Pizza Hut, General Motors, CBS Records, the U.S. Army, and MCA/Universal Pictures—beyond companies that produced teen-friendly products.[244]

It was increasingly common knowledge that kids had spending power and not only for records and video games. The very nature of teenagerdom was changing in the 1980s because the nature of the family unit was changing alongside it. The changing family structure, which will be further discussed below, situated young people as the consumers of their families. The postwar period recognized the mother as the "Chief Purchasing Agent," but as those mothers entered the workforce, their adolescent children were appointed VPs of spending.[245] As one *Marketing News* article excitedly exclaimed: "While both parents may be the breadwinners, teenagers are now the breadbuyers."[246] According to another *Marketing News* article, "Teen spending hit $65 million in 1985 […] and $35 billion of that is family income spent on household items."[247] Through reports such as these, companies began to realize that they could foster a sense of brand loyalty from these young shoppers . For example, Campbell's Soup released an ad in 1986 with the tag: "eats like a meal." In the ad, a teenage boy is dancing to rock music around his kitchen while lip synching into a can of soup as though he is in a music video. He continues to dance and lip sync as he prepares the soup in the microwave (using the short cooking time for a broom-guitar riff).

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[242] Klein, *No Logo,* 44.
[243] Sandra Salmans, "MTV Cites its Young Audience", *New York Times*, 19 August 1983, D4.
[244] Andrew L. Yarrow, "Cable TV Moves to the Music", *New York Times*, 4 July 1982, F17.
[245] "Teens, moms target of new co-op", *Marketing News,* 24 October 1986, 34.
[246] "If both parents are breadwinners, teenagers often are the bread buyers," *Marketing News*, 13 February 1987, 5.
[247] "Teens influence $65 million in 1985 spending," *Marketing News*, 14 February 1986, 27.

The ad ends with the boy, feet up on the table, ready to indulge in his meal as a voiceover instructs the viewer to "go ask your mom," presumably for permission to buy your own ready-to-eat-music-video-in-a-can.[248] By appealing to teenagers, this ad illustrates that marketers believed that if your product could reach teenagers just as they are budding into full-fledged adult spenders, you could be guaranteed a lifetime customer. Eugene Gilbert foreshadowed this in his 1948 article, emphasizing that by 25, most individuals become set in their ways: "Thus, the conflict of thoughts between young and adult people. Youth is more willing to accept new ideas, to go in new directions."[249] By the 1980s, this idea was largely put into practice, and companies sought to gain the loyalty of the youth before they became rigid adults.

This belief that brand loyalty needed to be nurtured at the earliest possible stages of life became the dogma of the 1980s, and no child was spared the barrage of targeted marketing. Insidiously, this did more than simply predispose young people toward one particular product over a competitor; rather, it trained young people to perform their citizenship through the act of consuming. This effort was not exerted solely on the part of advertisers and corporations but was enacted through government deregulations characteristic of the late-capitalist era. During his administration, Ronald Reagan both defunded public services and appointed regulatory agents who were tasked with deregulating their agencies. Under his administration, the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) abolished the Fairness Doctrine, which mandated that media forums present opposing views on their channels of communication. Whether a newspaper or a cable channel, the Fairness Doctrine was set to establish balanced reporting in order to present the audience with both sides of a story or opinion. Its rescindment enabled one-sided broadcasts and absolved editors of any responsibility to the public.

The defunding of public television and the deregulation of the FCC led to a slew of cross-promotional and scarcely educational children's programming. Just like MTV, the contents of these programs were ads themselves. Historian Gary Cross explains that, "[W]hile promoters tried to find new ways of sneaking ads into entertainment and daily life, they also made the commercial into the entertainment itself."[250] We can see this in the program *Double Dare*, which first aired in 1987 on Nickelodeon, which at the time was owned by the same parent company as MTV. The show pitted teams of Reebok-sporting kids against one another to win prizes such as Milton Bradley toys, Ricoh cameras, and Walt Disney World vacations. As the show gained popularity, so did its merchandizing potential. Throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, the show partnered with publishers, board game creators, and video game consoles to further its brand's reach. Television programs such as *Double Dare* demonstrate that when broadcasters are empowered to air whatever they choose (and not what is deemed fair and balanced), the result might be one giant advertisement.

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[248] Betamax King, "Campbell's Chunky Soup 1986," *YouTube,* 13 July 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=la2woIFSTBc [22 May 2021].
[249] Gilbert, "The Youth Market," 80.
[250] Cross, *An All-Consuming Century,* 207.

Additionally, Reagan deregulated the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), which enabled an onslaught of mega-conglomerations to emerge. For example, Philip Morris was sanctioned to acquire General Foods and then, a few years later, it acquired Kraft, without any substantial regulatory oversight. Philip Morris was then able to utilize its well-crafted marketing skills—which had successfully seduced millions of Americans to become addicted to cigarettes—on processed food products that could be sold to children. An example of this is Philip Morris's marketing of the Kool-Aid brand. Previously, Kool-Aid had been marketed to "penny-pinching housewives" as a cheaper alternative to soda.[251] When Philip Morris acquired the brand from General Foods in 1985, it began concentrating its marketing directly toward children. In a 1987 company document, a representative of Philip Morris claimed that "we continue to believe Kool-Aid can prosper. […] We've decided to focus our marketing on kids, where we know our strengths are greatest. This year, Kool-Aid will be the most heavily promoted kids trademark in America."[252] Kool-Aid would go on to be heavily marketed to kids, particularly on their favorite (and by then deregulated) medium, television. Reagan's deregulation turned television—to which children had better access to than high-level education and public programs—into the Wild West of children's advertisement.

By the 1980s, the marriage of "youth marketing" and "youth culture" was fully realized, and the very nature of childhood and adolescence was subsequently defined by brands and consumption. It is within this complicated context, where the very existence of a youth culture depended on the invention of a youth market, that I would like to discuss the relationship between teenagers and malls. William Kowinski, who chronicled a mall road trip across the United States in the early 1980s, often notes the conspicuous presence of "legions of teenaged girls" in malls who were "worrying aloud about their popularity."[253] He writes:

> The mall is a common experience for a majority of American youths. Some ran within their first large open space, saw their first fountain, bought their first toy, and read their first book in a mall. They may have smoked their first cigarette or first joint or turned them down, had their first kiss or lost their virginity in the mall parking lot. Teenagers in America now spend more time in the mall than anywhere else but home and school. Mostly it is their choice, but some of that mall time

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[251] Andrew Jacobs, "How Big Tobacco Hooked Children on Sugary Drinks" *New York Times* (New York), 15 March 2019, B1.

[252] PM, Philip Morris; Millington, H; Storr, HG. "First Boston Beverage Tobacco Conference. 870401. Document date: 1987 April 1. Collection: Philip Morris Records; Master Settlement Agreement. https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/zzgb0112 [22 June 2020].

[253] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 28 and 207.

> is put in as a result of two-paycheck and single-parent households, and the lack of other viable alternatives. But are these kids really being harmed by the mall?[254]

Teenagers in malls became as commonplace ketchup on the side of fries. Business historian Regina Lee Blaszczyk writes, “By the 1980s, the regional mall was the major hangout spot for teenagers, replacing the dance hall, bowling alley, and hamburger joint as the leisure destination of choice.”[255] Scores of films from the period include mall scenes bustling with teenagers. Newspaper and magazine articles often remarked on the high saturation of young people in shopping malls. In the documentary *Mall City*, which was filmed at a Staten Island mall by New York University film students, every shot of the center includes at least a handful of teens. According to a 1985 study in *Adolescence*, sixty-three percent of teenagers consider themselves “regulars” at their local mall.[256] This pervasiveness begs the questions: why were teenagers hanging out in malls? The most convincing reason is that the mall wanted them there.

The early malls of the late 1950s and 1960s were designed to accommodate housewives in order to draw them into the shopping centers. Parking spaces were made slightly wider than regulation for the suburban women who were new to driving, entrances were designed with ramps for strollers, and the anchor-tenant department stores depended on housewives as part-time workers.[257] By the late 1970s shopping centers expanded their role from one-stop suburban shops to entertainment destinations. This was reflected in their design. According to architectural historian Margaret Crawford, the introduction of cinemas, arcades, and bowling alleys, for example, “signaled the mall’s expanded recreational role.”[258] The expanded recreational role coalesced with retail’s expanded reach toward the youth market. Mall developers and managers recognized that teenagers spent most of their expendable income on clothing, food, records and video games, therefore, malls’ shift toward becoming entertainment venues complemented the spending habits of the lucrative youth market.[259]

These spending habits were quickly exploited by shopping centers. In 1990, for example, a Massachusetts mall underwent reconstruction to add a new wing to its center. This new wing included record stores, a video arcade and a vast food court, “occupying the most space.”[260] Many of the tenant retail stores attempted to entice teenagers with rock and roll music blasting through their speakers and with television sets that played music videos while the young patrons shopped.[261] Video arcades were primary venues used to bait teenagers. Kowinski observes this firsthand, writing, “Inside the electric cave, adolescents manned the rows of panels as fluorescent flashes roiled in the darkness. […] their fingers twitching as they peered into the relentless regulated abyss."[262] This regulated abyss proved profitable. The arcades induced consumption among teenagers. As one teenager admits in 1983, "[E]very day I just come over here and play, I spend sometimes fifteen dollars a week in quarters to play games. It's just a habit. That's all."[263] The habit to which this youth refers had been gradually manufactured for generations, the habit to consume.

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[254] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 349.
[255] Blaszczyk, *American Consumer Society,* 209.
[256] Kathryn H. Anthony, “The Shopping Mall: A Teenage Hangout,” *Adolescence* 20, no. 78 (1985), 310.
[257] Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic*, Chapter 5.
[258] Crawford, “The World in a Shopping Mall,” 15.
[259] Anthony, “The Shopping Mall: A Teenage Hangout,” 310.
[260] Lewis, “Community Through Exclusion and Illusion,” 125.
[261] Farrell, *One Nation Under Goods*, 25.

While mall developers and managers exploited teenagers' inclination toward certain cultural ephemera, like music videos and video games, they also exploited the demographic as a cheap source of labor. Many mall-dwelling teenagers of the late twentieth century took part-time jobs to support a certain type of consumption that was part of teenage social life.[264] For example, in *Mall City*, a group of teenage girls, who are all dressed relatively alike, are asked, "[D]o all your friends buy the same clothes as you?" The girls respond, "yeah," and shrug when the interviewer suggests that they were just like everybody else. The interviewer then asks whether they are bothered by that, to which they enthusiastically respond: "No!"[265]

For these teenagers and many others like them, buying and wearing the same articles of clothing was not an assault on their individuality but membership to a club; it engendered within them a sense of belonging. In order to afford this membership, many teenagers needed to work. Much like the housewives that preceded them, teenagers filled the ranks of part-time workers in malls, which represented a broader trend under neoliberalism, an economic system that was sustained by "the creation of a worldwide economy of part-time workers."[266] Part-time work guaranteed fewer hours, typically paid lower wages, and offered no health benefits. All these qualities made part-time workers appealing to employers. By the 1980s, the service sector was expanding, and those occupying the positions within that industry were largely teenagers.[267] According to a 1982 study in *Developmental Psychology*, "More American teenagers are employed in part-time jobs today than any other time in the past 40 years."[268] Part-time work complemented teenagers' school schedules and, especially for middle-class teenagers, their earnings could be used toward the purchase of goods and services that could be found in the very mall where they worked. Therefore, mall managers and the tenant retail stores located in the malls could rely on teenagers as a cheap source of labor, and in return, the money that teenagers earned through these jobs could be funneled right back into the malls. Mall developers catered to this feedback loop by designing malls that facilitated the necessity of part-time employees.

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[262] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 184.
[263] *Mall City*, dir. Hugh Kinniburgh, New York University, New York, 1983.
[264] Farrell, *One Nation Under Goods*, 100.
[265] *Mall City*, 1983.
[266] Giroux, *Public Spaces, Private Lives,* xi.
[267] Heiman, *Driving After Class,* 14.
[268] Laurence D. Steinberg et al., "Effects of Working on Adolescent Development," *Developmental Psychology* 18, no. 3 (1982): 385.

Part-time work for young people garnered a lot of attention. Some psychologists wondered whether it could produce negative effects on the psychological development of youth. The *Developmental Psychology* article concluded that part-time work may decrease teenagers' propensity toward spending time with their families, that part-time jobs may diminish teenagers' school performance, and that part-time jobs may increase teenagers' likeliness to use drugs and alcohol.[269] Most importantly, the study noted that "observations of adolescents in the workplace indicate that their jobs are repetitive, provide few opportunities for learning, and often expose workers to environmental, personal, and interpersonal stressors."[270] Part-time work was not necessarily an edifying experience for young people but a necessity in order to gain access to the mall. In *Mall City*, one former mall employee—who worked at a clothing store called "Just Shirts"—is asked to describe the customers she served. She tersely responds, "obnoxious."[271] Part-time work represents one way that the shopping centers exploited teenagers' desires to belong through consumption, by purchasing teenagers' labor in exchange for enabling them to consume—ideally in the malls themselves. Kowinski writes that teenagers "learn how to hold a job and take responsibility but still within the same value context."[272] That context has its roots in the establishment of the youth market as well as the rise of Cohen's Consumer Republic.

Part-time work was not the only concern that society had about young people. The more visceral anxiety was surrounding the changing family structure and adolescents' role within these changing structures. At the inception of the shopping center in the late 1950s, society had been organized in a way that encouraged men to be the primary earner while women as relegated to mere beneficiaries to a male-dominated economy. Lizabeth Cohen summarizes this:

> As the US prepared itself for peace and prosperity, the government buttressed a male-directed family economy by disproportionately giving men access to career training, property ownership, capital, and credit, as well as control over family finances, making them the embodiment of the postwar ideal purchaser as citizen and limiting their wives' claim to full economic and social citizenship.[273]

By the 1970s and into the 1980s, this consensus was quickly unraveling as more women began carving out spaces for themselves as economic and social citizens. This threatened the suburban family unit and landscape, which had been intentionally designed around a patriarchal family structure. This conflict was most sharply brought into focus by American adolescents. Teenagers became a blank canvas onto which society could paint its deepest fears, particularly about women and the family. In a 1986 *The Public Interest* article, two sociologists wrote:

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[269] Ibid., 385.
[270] Ibid., 387.
[271] *Mall City*, 1983.
[272] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 352.
[273] Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 137.

> [T]he 1960s and 1970s should have been a golden age for the development of American youth. Over these two decades we should have expected to see significant improvements in the well-being of adolescents. […] However, a comparison of youth in 1980 with youth in 1960 reveals that what 'should' have happened did not happen.[274]

This loaded assertion demonstrates the sociologists' nostalgia for the past as well as their fear of the present. The article continues to surmise all the so-called privileges that generation had been granted with a subtle eyeroll and further observes that, despite all of these so-called privileges, their well-being was in a general decline.

The study quantified this decline through an array of charts that illustrated an increase in "deviant behavior," "delinquency" and "illegitimate births."[275] The latter suggests a particular fear, one of teenage sexuality, particularly of young female sexuality. This fear was bolstered by a neoliberal and socially conservative federal government that was simultaneously (and often contradictorily) anti-abortion and pro-abstinence. In 1982, the Reagan administration issued a regulation—known as the "squeal rule"—that mandated family physicians to notify the parents of anyone under eighteen years of age who requests or receives a birth control prescription. This rule infantilized adolescents while attempting to regulate their sexuality. One *New York Times* journalist explains another consequence, that it can actually lead to an increased abortion rate:

> A recent study shows, however, that 25 percent of the clinic's young patients would stop applying for prescription contraceptives if their parents were notified. Only 2 percent would stop sexual activity. That means the rest would use over-the-counter contraceptives or none at all. […] The possible result? A jump in teen-age pregnancies—and yet another rise in the abortion rate. It would be ironic if so committed a foe of abortion as President Regan were a cause of that 1.55 million abortion record being broken in 1982.[276]

The fear over so-called illegitimate births was a guise over a real threat to women's reproductive rights—a tenuous right that was under constant attack, particularly under the Reagan administration—as well as a thinly veiled excuse to cut the social services that could support young single mothers. As *The Public Interest* piece noted, teenage pregnancies "affect not only the young people involved, but also society at large, which bears much of the cost of these consequences of adolescent sexual activity."[277] In the individualist era of the 1980s, adolescents were no longer perceived to be a nation's most precious resource but rather a drain on an unfettered capitalist society.

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[274] Peter Uhlenberg and David Eggebeen, "The Declining Well-Being of American Adolescents," *The Public Interest* 82 (Winter 1986): 25.

[275] Ibid., 31.

[276] "Abortion and the Squeal Rule," *New York Times* (New York), 26 February 1982, Section A, 22.

[277] Uhlenberg and Eggebeen, "The Declining Well-Being of American Adolescents," 32.

The Public Interest article placed the blame of adolescents' declining well-being squarely on the parents, specifically on "a declining commitment of parents to their children over the past several decades."[278] The article emphasized that parents' pursuit of self-fulfilment led to a reduced commitment to their children, specifically defaming mothers who pursued a career over child-rearing, or in addition to child-rearing. According to the study:

> The proportion of mothers with children under the age of eighteen who were in the labor force has doubled (from 28 percent in 1960 to 57 percent in 1980). During the same period, the annual proportion of children under eighteen who experienced the divorce of their parents increased 140 percent.[279]

The authors make an explicit link between women entering the workforce and the rise in divorce in an attempt to victimize children as the consequences of their mothers' selfishness.

The sentiment that divorce was rampant was indeed palpable in much of the literature from the late twentieth century. On Kowinski's sojourn, he finds himself in Lincoln, Nebraska, which he calls a "ghetto for single moms" because over one half of the children are from broken homes.[280] "The stress of divorce," he writes, "and the change that resulted from it—like coming home to an empty house of a working single parent, and the increased emotional and practical responsibilities—was keenly felt by Lincoln teenagers."[281] Children of divorce were further pathologized in a 1987 *Child Development* study which concluded that "[a]dolescents living in single-parent households are more likely to engage in deviant activity (including truancy, running away from home, smoking, school discipline problems, and behaviors that lead to contact with the law) than youngsters living with both natural parents."[282] Child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim remarked on one of his patients who was experiencing chronic headaches, "[T]he seeds of the 14-year-old's troubled adolescence […] were planted a decade ago when his parents divorced."[283] In one article in *The Atlantic*, Bettelheim writes that "teenagers who behaved well tended to have parents who were themselves responsible, upright and self-disciplined—who lived in accord with the values they expressed and encouraged their children to follow suit."[284] This subtle jab and the less-than-subtle judgements of mothers' supposed failure say more about a fear of women's independence than of adolescent delinquency.

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[278] Ibid., 35.

[279] Uhlenberg and Eggebeen, "The Declining Well-Being of American Adolescents," 37.

[280] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 184.

[281] Ibid., 184.

[282] Laurence D. Steinberg, "Single Parents, Stepparents, and the Susceptibility of Adolescents to Antisocial Peer Pressure," *Child Development* 58, 1 (1987): 269.

[283] Doug Brown, "Childhood to Adult: Bridging the Gap," *Los Angeles Times* (Orange County) 14 November 1985, D1.

[284] Bruno Bettelheim, "Punishment versus discipline; a child can be expected to behave well only if his parents live by the values they teach," *Atlantic* 256 (November 1985), 55.

The perceived declining well-being of youth was explicitly attached to a lack of maternal attention in which white mothers failed to adequately rear the next generation of Americans. *The Public Interest* article writes, "This gap in maternal care is filled with a variety of substitutions, such as day care, sitters, neighbors, before- and after-school programs, and television."[285] Society places much blame on mothers for divorcing their husbands and entering the workforce (without considering the economic and social conditions that may have necessitated those actions), which culminated in a fear of what was replacing traditional maternal care: television or, of course, malls. Kowinski, for example, refers to the mall as a "surrogate mother," echoing the maternal scapegoating that is present in many psychology and sociology journal articles of the time period as well.[286] Anxieties around teenagers in malls, which will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter, were misplaced, as were the anxieties around the so-called unraveling family unit. The anxieties that much of society felt so deeply toward adolescents and their families were actually anchored in concerns about a shifting economy. The deregulation of federal agencies that were meant to protect the public, such as the FTC, the downward mobility brought on by deindustrialization and global outsourcing that dissolved the middle class, and the privatization of public space that turned forums of citizenry into cathedrals of consumption are the real culprits of society's ills in the late-capitalist era.

Regardless of the perceived fears that malls were becoming ersatz mothers, shopping centers depended on their young patrons and actively sought to entice them to their enclosures. Kowinski observes this while visiting a Pennsylvania mall that was hosting a Michael Jackson night, which drew a large teenaged crowd: "the small court just inside this [mall's] entrance is where the teenagers first congregate; it's where the swarm gathers, buzzing and swirling with the smell of sweat and hot cologne, the hive in heat."[287] By the 1980s, shopping centers were becoming destinations in and of themselves; however, they still needed to attract people to their spaces in order to accelerate sales for their tenant stores. To accomplish this, malls would often hold events in order to draw in shoppers. In other cases, companies would use the high foot traffic in malls to market their products. Often, it was a combination of the two; a symbiotic, cross-promotional affair. An example of this cross-promotion is that posters for the film *Footloose* were installed in one mall alongside salable styles of clothing worn by the characters.[288] Kowinski notes that “some of these promotions are simple crowd-gathers; some try to attract a special crowd; others have a direct merchandising goal.”[289]

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[285] Uhlenberg and Eggebeen, "The Declining Well-Being of American Adolescents," 37.
[286] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 351.
[287] Ibid., 27.

By the 1980s, Victor Gruen’s “utopian experiment,” in which shopping centers would serve as community centers rather than commercial enterprises, had failed, as malls morphed not into community centers but entertainment venues. Mall promotions did little to nurture community needs and instead attempted to encourage commercial desires. This is best exemplified through mall tours. For example, “*Nick at Nite’s* TV Land Mall Tour” traveled from mall to mall to promote its channel—which was owned by MTV—and its sponsor, Chevrolet’s Geo, through “interactive displays, TV artifacts, and celebrity appearances.”[290] The “Mitsubishi Motors Mall Tour ’85,” where shoppers could design their dream car using computer technology, was a joint venture between Mitsubishi, an ad agency, and a graphic design company.[291] Both of these examples demonstrate how companies exploited the popularity of the mall to promote their products. These tours were dependent on “people who just happen to be cruising the mall.”[292]

Other tours benefited malls by drawing crowds into their spaces. A perfect example of this is “MTV’s Museum of UnNatural History.” The museum, which toured malls across twenty-six cities, was promoted on MTV as “coming to a mall near you.”[293] One *Los Angeles Times* article reported that “each week, more than 100 000 MTV-addicts and curiosity seekers converge on local malls to stroll through the uncanny exhibit and gaze at the unnatural.”[294] These curiosity seekers meant more potential customers for malls. One mall manager excitedly estimates, “[W]e had at least 30% more people at the mall than we usually do on Thursdays, and I think the museum is going to draw even more traffic over the weekend.”[295]

The museum targeted young people and advertised in youthful magazines and on teens’ favorite channel, MTV. The museum took out a full-page ad in the magazine *Spin*, instructing its readers to “watch MTV for more information” and suggesting that “once you’ve visited MTV’s Museum of UnNatural History, you’ll be able to say … ‘I was there!’”[296] This copy played on young people’s desire to belong in order to facilitate a brand loyalty between youth and MTV. There was of course another caveat that was articulated by a *Los Angeles Times* article: “But the museum isn’t meant simply to bring

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[288] Ibid., 377.
[289] Ibid., 77.
[290] Cyndee Miller, “Attention Shoppers: Proceed to the giant TV and walk in,” *Marketing News* 23, no. 23 (1989): 10.
[291] “Shoppers Learn how to Build Cars during Mitsubishi Tour”, *Marketing News* 19, no. 11 (1985): 37.
[292] Miller, 10.
[293] Jeff D. Opdyke, “Unnatural history MTV visits OC mall,” *Orange County Register* (Santa Ana) 24 August 1989, 1.
[294] Opdyke, 1.
[295] Thomas K. Arnold, “UnNatural History Museum Is a Natural for MTV Crowd,” *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles) 16 April 1988, 6.
[296] “Roadside Attraction,” *Spin* (New York), 1 April 1988, 75.

MTV directly into the lives of its target viewers, the teens and early-20s set. Its purpose is also to lure that set into the world of shopping."[297] The museum accomplished this not simply by luring teenagers into shopping malls—which it did by hosting the event inside of malls—but also by partnering with its sponsors to sell particular products. For example, the museum included a Polaroid Cool Cam Booth, and one employee at an Orange County mall store called Ritz Camera attested to a rise in Polaroid camera purchases. The employee told the *Los Angeles Times*, "If we sell two Polaroids a month, that might be a record. But we've sold five in three days."[298] This is the fundamental purpose that these tours served, not to entertain but to increase foot traffic in malls and to sell products. These tours also reveal the essential goals of shopping centers, not to provide a space in which teenagers could hang out but to reduce them to consumers, to instruct them that citizenship in America is purchased through consumption. Kowinski notes this relationship, "Mall kids are already preprogrammed to be consumers and […] the mall can put the finishing touches to them as hard-core lifelong shoppers just like everybody else. That is, after all, what the mall is about."[299]

That brings us back to Tiffany and her *The Beautiful You: Celebrating the Good Life Shopping Mall Tour '87*. Tiffany lip-synced and danced to her music across multiple malls, playing three 20-minute sets—akin to the time intervals of a Walt Disney World parade—vying for the attention of mallgoers while drawing fans into the malls themselves. MCA Records' vice president at the time, Larry Solters, who conceived of the mall tour idea, called it a "grassroots promotion."[300] The reality was that Solters and others could promote Tiffany's mall tour as a fulfilment of teenaged mall culture, as the "grassroots" location for a teen to promote herself to other teens, but the mall had already aligned itself with youth culture in order to tap into the lucrative youth market well before "teenager" became synonymous with "malls."

Tiffany's mall tour did more than promote an album; it instilled within adolescents a particular set of values—specifically, it trained them to be consumers. The malls Tiffany toured were not benign venues, they were spaces loaded with ideologically-driven messages about capitalism and consumption. The mall was a space where teenagers both earned money and spent it. It was the place to buy the clothes and records that were funneled to them through MTV. It was a space that felt like home in an era when the idea of family seemed upended.

Shopping centers in the 1980s and 1990s were the culmination of the youth market that had been honed throughout the twentieth century, and they coincided with the beginning of a new phase of so-called unfettered capitalism under neoliberalism. The shopping mall, just like *Seventeen* magazine in the immediate postwar years, was a vessel through which advertisers could sell their products and through which captains of capitalism could educate a new generation in the value of low-wage labor and consumption. The insidious aspect of this education is that it limited the scope through which young people could perceive their world. As cultural critic Henry Giroux explains:

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[297] Opdyke, "Unnatural history MTV visits OC mall," 1.

[298] Ibid., 1.

[299] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 350.

[300] Lisa Russel, "Tiffany, the Teenage Mall Flower Who Serenades the Shoppers of America," *People*, 29, no. 11 (14 September 1987).

> No questions are raised about the relationship between the popular forums that teenagers inhabit and the ongoing commercialization and commodification of youth culture, or what the relationship might be between the subject positions young people invest in and those mainstream, commercially saturated dreamscapes of affect and representation that increasingly eat up social space and displace noncommodified public spaces. […] Market-driven politics and established forms of power increasingly eliminate noncommodified social domains through which young people might learn an oppositional language for challenging those adult ideologies and institutional forces that both demonize them and limit their sense of dignity and capacity for political agency.[301]

This criticism of commodified spaces brings into focus the fact that teenagers never actually chose the mall as their social space; it was chosen for them because they had nowhere else to go to develop and practice their social and political identities, which, within the narrow function of the shopping center, were reduced to brand and consumer identities. And while the corporate structures of power may work against each generation of adolescents, and while it may be hard to distinguish where youth market ends and where youth culture begins, it is imperative that we explore why teenagers in this period were not merely passive receivers of a corporate conspiracy but were themselves active agitators of their prescribed roles as budding citizen-consumers.

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[301] Giroux, *Public Spaces, Private Lives,* 35.

Chapter 3: "We Are the Mallrats"

Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship.
—David Foster Wallace

A 1985 study published in *Adolescence* asserted that sixty-three percent of Californian teenagers considered themselves "regulars" at the mall.[302] This statistic, however, does not capture the viscerally-felt presence of teenagers in shopping malls, a presence that was represented on film and television, that was contested by the so-called adult population and that was self-perpetuated by teenagers themselves. The previous chapter discussed the marketing forces that placed teenagers in shopping centers; however, teenagers' relationships to malls is far more complicated. While it is true that teenagers were present in shopping malls, it must be emphasized that shopping malls had been, for the most part, a major presence in the lives of these teenagers *before* they became teenagers. Those who would come of age as self-described mallrats actually grew up within the windowless walls of the shopping mall. The shopping mall served as an important space for mothers and their children, as one mother explains:

> Once or twice I even nursed him in the dressing room. […] And when he got big enough to walk, the Mall was a space big enough for him to run in during the winter and empty enough on a weekday for him not to cause a disturbance. […] Mothers would gather around the fountain and watch their children play as though by a pond in the park. And yes, David saw his first movie at that Mall, in Cinema I. […] There is no need like the need of a mother alone in the house with a small child, her first small child, for public space.[303]

I have already briefly discussed the important role shopping centers played for suburban women, but we must consider that the shopping mall played an equally important role for David, a child—one of many—who was reared in the mall.

Given that an entire generation were raised as children in shopping centers, it is not surprising that they choice the shopping center as their preferred space away from home and school once they became adolescents. William Kowinski, in his *The Malling of America*, considers the mall as "part of the lives of another generation, literally from the beginning," and views these mallrats with a mixture of incredulity, condescension and pity.[304] His academic fascination with shopping centers precludes him from fully empathizing with these mall-dwelling teenagers, whom he views as victims of mall culture. The *CBS Reports* episode on the mall, "After the Dream Comes True," similarly pathologizes young mall patrons: “[P]arents have memories of communities as they were before the shopping malls, children do not. It’s hard to get to know the children of Oak Park Mall without feeling a sense of loss.”[305] Often, the mallrat was perceived as a symptom of a failed society, but those who condemned these teenagers failed to consider that many found empowerment at shopping centers.

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[302] Anthony, "The Shopping Mall: A Teenage Hangout," 310.
[303] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 181.
[304] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 182.

Teenagers may have utilized shopping malls as commercial spaces that trained them in the ways of a consumer economy, but they also used these spaces as theatres, as spaces where they could act out their budding sociopolitical identities. Historian Grace Palladino posits: “Who gets to decide how teenagers look, act, and experience life? And who decides what that experience means?”[306] To teenagers in the 1980s and 1990s, the mall was not a benign space nor was it a purely commercial space, but it was their space. The sense of ownership teenagers felt that they had over the mall empowered them, offered them a refuge from home and school, and helped them define themselves. In this chapter, I will explore the proliferation of teenagers in shopping centers by interpreting the media’s representation of the shopping center as a space for teenagers. I will focus particularly on television and Hollywood films, whose synergetic relationships to shopping centers solidified and exaggerated malls’ cultural relevance. I will then discuss the “mallrat,” a sobriquet that was often ascribed onto teenagers who roamed the malls’ corridors but also a term that came to represent adult society’s collective anxieties about youth in the late twentieth century. In parsing this moniker, my goal is to better understand the entanglement of youth culture and mall culture and what this entanglement meant to the teenagers who placed an exceptional importance on the role of shopping centers in their social lives.

The proliferation of malls in the United States and the proliferation of teenagers in those malls can be best visualized through Hollywood films and television. These films and shows, like most visual representational media, held up a funhouse mirror to American youths; it portrayed the shopping centers as teeming with teenagers and in return legitimized mall culture as a uniquely teenaged experience. The relationship between shopping centers, film and television is one of mutual reinforcement. Television in particular complemented the commercial mandate of the shopping center. Both shopping centers and television existed to entertain but also to sell products.[307] Television and its advertisements primed consumers, essentially informing the consumer of what products were out there to be purchased; the shopping center was the “out there,” where the products could be purchased.[308] The shopping center and television developed along parallel historical timelines. Both flourished in the postwar years and both, during their infancies, offered a diversion for suburbanites, particularly housewives.[309] Television and shopping centers can also both be considered public spaces that are privately experienced. Television, particularly in the middle of the twentieth century, had mass appeal but was consumed by individuals within the privacy of their homes.[310] Shopping in malls, while a public affair, tended to be a very personal experience for its participants. Television and shopping centers contributed to the hyper-consumerist culture that would define the latter half of the twentieth century. "Television helped to create instant national demand, everywhere, all at once," Kowinski writes, and shopping centers helped to meet those demands.[311] Ironically, television became the catalyst for the beginning of the end of shopping malls, specifically through its at-home shopping programing, in which "transaction eclipses interaction," as media technologies innovated and transformed commerce.[312] Regardless, both television and shopping malls offered a type of escapism from the realities of daily life.

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[305] “After The Dream Comes True,” *CBS Reports*, 1982.

[306] Palladino, *Teenagers,* xxii.

[307] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 73.

[308] Crawford, “The World in a Shopping Mall,” 21.

[309] Scharoun, *America at the Mall,* 25.

Both television and shopping centers lull and stimulate simultaneously, nurturing the ideal state for consumption.[313] Television transplanted its viewers from their living rooms into a fantasy world while the shopping centers, through their design and architectural rhetoric, offered an extension of that fantasy world, mimicking the spatial and temporal illusions of television.[314] For example, we discussed in chapter one that shopping malls often referred to themselves as the new Main Streets, with many malls appropriated the iconography of a so-called Main Street (street lights, quaint mom-and-pop storefronts, etc.) to draw a direct comparison between the mall itself and the mythologized Main Street that existed in our collective memory.

This collective memory, Kowinski would argue, was actually implanted by television. Themed corridors in malls—which can resemble Main Street U.S.A., the Wild West, or New York City—were able to represent themselves as those places because television had already reduced them to signs of small-town nostalgia, cowboys, and Broadway. Kowinski writes that "all these places have been seen in movies and television—and perhaps *only* there, media images dominate ideas about these places."[315] Television created the shorthand, and shopping centers borrowed that language and turned it into a lived experience. Neither television nor shopping centers offered their patrons or viewers anything tangible or real. Environmental psychologist Paco Underhill likens the mall to television by calling it "another totally fake environment that attempts to pass itself off as a true reflection of who we are and who we want to be."[316] While this certainly sounds like a criticism, there is room for opportunity within the theatrics of the mall. Although "who we want to be" is narrowly defined to, say, how we want to dress or consume, the shopping center enabled its patrons to act out their fantasy, the mall serving as the stage and each consumer playing its part in a play.[317] This metaphor becomes especially apt when we consider films and the mall.

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[310] Kellner, "Media Culture, Politics and Ideology, 129.
[311] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 51.
[312] Gary Gumpert and Susan J. Drucker, "From the Agora to the Electronic Shopping Mall," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 9, no. 2 (1992), 189.
[313] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 340.
[314] Scharoun, *America at the Mall,* 28.
[315] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 72.
[316] Underhill, *The Call of the Mall,* 5.

In *Malling of America*, Kowinski likens shopping malls to movie stars.[318] He even compared the opening of a new mall to the equivalent of a Hollywood premiere.[319] This comparison extends beyond the mere magnetism of shopping malls because, by the 1980s, more and more malls were featured in Hollywood films. Many public representatives of Los Angeles area malls were "closely reading the scripts" of films in order to transform their spaces to better suit the needs of the film industry.[320] Shopping centers were ready for their close-ups, and film production companies were happy to use shopping malls, not just as their *mise-en-scènes,* but also as a stop on their promotional circuits.

On the most fundamental level, malls were invaluable to film production companies because, as touched upon in chapter one, movie theatres were increasingly being housed in shopping centers. These theatres borrowed from malls' playbooks by promoting impulse spending through increased concession stand offerings and in-cinema arcade games.[321] By the 1980s, the line between theatres and malls was blurring. Cinemas and shopping centers synergized the same way that entertainment and commerce coalesced. In what Kowinski calls a "mutually lucrative feedback loop," films were produced with a certain marketability in mind, those films were then promoted in shopping malls, then opened in theatres in malls across America. These films spawned tie-in products—such as clothes, soundtrack records, video games and toys—which were all sold in malls.[322] The latter part of this chain, the "aftermarket," influenced which movies were even produced during this period. For example, production company-owned theme parks wanted films that could be turned into attractions.[323] Branding became an integral part to the success of any product, and this was no less true of movies. Films used both shopping malls and television to unleash massive advertisement campaigns to promote their films.[324] The cinemas housed in malls were typically chain theatres that relied on cost-effective uniformity, that used their multiplex spaces to host an array of mass-produced films, and whose authority was gained through the suggestion of film history—by playing up the *idea* of the movies rather than one particular movie—the same way shopping centers suggested mythological eras in American history.[325]

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[317] Langrehr, "Retail Shopping Mall Semiotics and Hedonic Consumption," 428.
[318] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 380.
[319] Ibid*.,* 122.
[320] Glionna, "Call of the Mall," Part B-B4
[321] Paul, "The K-mart audience at the mall movies," 497.
[322] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 376-378.
[323] Paul, "The K-mart audience at the mall movies," 497.
[324] Ibid., 489.
[325] Ibid., 492.

In the late twentieth century, the symbiotic relationship between film and shopping centers was even more pronounced. Kowinski refers to the relationship between film and malls as a partnership in "The Retail Drama."[326] On his sojourn, he meets a film developer, Melvin Simon, who is also coincidentally (or not) a mall developer. Kowinski notes that many of the investors in shopping center development included media conglomerates. [327] Kowinski furthers his metaphor of The Retail Drama to the city of Los Angeles itself when he writes: "Like L.A., the malls are artificial environments that seem to be natural, and they help their denizens forget about the fragile underpinnings of this seemingly natural way of life in Southern California."[328] Baudrillard also noted this parallel between the real and the artificial in another Southern Californian institution, Disneyland:

> Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology) but the concealing of the fact that the real is. No longer real, and this saving the reality principle.[329]

Edward Soja once said that "Orange County is Tomorrowland and Frontierland, merged and inseparable."[330] So too are malls; they are the amalgam of Disneyland, Hollywoodland, and TV land. Films and television play with this reality principle, and as malls became more pop culturally significant by the end of the twentieth century, they too took on a fantastical role.

The significance of these screens—be they big or small—is that they solidified the cultural importance of shopping malls, and they placed teenagers at the center of the shopping mall's universe. Films and television series placed teenagers in malls, attracting teenagers into malls but also legitimizing the mall as a space for teenagers. In the 1982 film *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, the shopping center, which was filmed at Sherman Oaks Galleria, served as the backdrop to the happenings of a cohort of adolescents. The film begins with the Go-Go's "We Got The Beat" playing against a series of shots from inside the mall. In these opening shots we see teenagers in groups wandering the corridors of the malls, adolescent boys playing *Pac-Man* in the video arcade, and young mall workers working in one of the mall's many restaurants and at the movie theatre. We even see one more rebellious youth scalping concert tickets within the mall's confines. The protagonist, Stacy, is looking for romance and impatiently complains to her friend, Linda, "[Y]ou were the one who told me I was going to get a boyfriend at the mall."[331] While Mark, who works as the "assistant to the assistant manager at the movie theatre" and who is infatuated with Stacy, announces to his friend Mike that “all the action is on the other side of the mall,” where Stacy works.[332] Stacy and Mark meet at the mall, work at the mall and hang out at the mall. The mall, other than their high school, for which the film is named, serves as the most prominent setting for the film. The movie ends as it began, with a series of shots from inside the mall, only all of the stores are shuttering for the night. Scenes from inside the mall bookend the film and sandwiched between them is a story about the teenagers who have adopted the mall as their second home.

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[326] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 376.
[327] Ibid., 122.
[328] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 207.
[329] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation,* 10.
[330] Soja, *Thirdspace,* 238.
[331] *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, dir. Amy Heckerling, Universal Pictures, Los Angeles, 1982.

Shopping malls were typically portrayed as a space for teenagers and young people to relax, to recenter and, of course, to shop. In 1995’s *Clueless*, the main character, Cher, was feeling out of sorts because she was unable to convince her teacher to raise her grade and was beginning to feel consumed by her anxiety. Her inner monologue reveals, “I felt impotent and out of control. Which I really, really hate. I had to find sanctuary in a place where I could gather my thoughts and regain my strength.”[333] the film then cuts to a wide shot of the Westside Pavilion in Los Angeles. The shopping mall is Cher’s sanctuary, and she is often seen holding a considerable number of shopping bags. Cher struggles to escape the superficiality that accompanies spending so much time in shopping centers. When her dad accuses her of lacking direction in her life, Cher retorts, “I have direction!” To which her stepbrother, Josh, quips, “Yeah, towards the mall.”[334] For Cher, the mall is her space to unwind, but it is also perceived as a place that lacks the seriousness to win the respect of her lawyer father and college student Josh.

One film that embraces that lack of seriousness is a film that was also released in 1995, *Mallrats*. The film chronicles a day in the life of directionless young adults, Brodie and TS, who waste their day in their favorite place, the mall (filmed at the Eden Prairie Center Mall in Minnesota). Both men are having relationship troubles, and Brodie has just the cure: “There’s something out there that can ease our double loss.”[335] He is referring, of course, to the mall. “I love the smell of commerce in the morning!” Brodie exclaims as they enter the enclosure, a “monument of consumerism.”[336] Unfortunately, Brodie’s refuge is short-lived, and he runs into his ex-girlfriend at the mall. The two argue over “visitation rights” to the mall but end up hooking up in the mall’s elevator.[337] *Mallrats* is a typical Generation X film about slackers wandering around with no specific goals or purpose. The mall is the perfect backdrop for their antics. The shopping mall produced a mall culture that became entangled with youth culture. It also spawned subcultures, like mallrats and mall workers, which have been highlighted in some of these films. Malls positioned themselves as cultural institutions and teenagers, through their own use of the malls and their engagement with tangential media, like film, positioned themselves as the denizens of the mall.

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[332] Ibid., 1985.

[333] *Clueless*, dir. Amy Heckerling, Paramount Pictures, Los Angeles, 1995.

[334] Ibid., 1995.

[335] *Mallrats*, dir. Kevin Smith, Alphaville, New Jersey, 1995.

[336] Ibid., 1995.

[337] Ibid., 1995.

Hollywood, television and other forms of popular cultural did not necessarily put teenagers in the malls; they merely codified the mall as a teenaged space. For Brodie and TS in *Mallrats* and many non-fictional teens, the nickname "mallrat" was a badge of honor, but for many adults, mallrats were beginning to look more like vermin. "A lot of our merchandise is geared towards brats now. […] They're like animals," complained one twenty-something mall worker about his teenaged clientele.[338] One *Los Angeles Times* columnist likened groups of mall-dwelling teens to a "hormonal tide of trouble."[339] When asked about teenagers in malls, a middle-aged woman exclaims, "The kids? Forget about it. They just take over the mall. They just come in and hang out. They don't do much shopping."[340] Even Kowinski, who devoted an entire book and cross-country escapade to understanding mall culture stops short at understanding mallrat culture. "But the mall was like…awesome. Totally," he jokes, donning an exaggerated Valley Girl accent while writing about Sherman Oaks Galleria.[341]

For better or for worse, shopping centers were swarming with teenagers, but their presence in malls was not always planned by mall developers. Kowinski notes that the Westgate Mall "doesn't encourage teenagers to hang out there, but they were there anyway."[342] Actually, malls sent very mixed messages to teenagers. On the one hand, they were heavily monitored, but on the other, as malls expanded their recreational role, many of their newly installed fixtures, such as video arcades and cinemas, appealed primarily to teenagers. Whether they were wanted or unwanted, however, teenagers embraced the mallrat identity that was both imposed on them and self-affirmed. "We are the mall rats," one teenager says, "we are the mall. What the fuck else can I say?"[343] The *CBS Reports* documentary interviews two sixteen-year-old girls, Pam and Melissa. "Oak Park is where they work, play, shop, hang out," explains the narrator. "Pam and Melissa call themselves 'mallrats.'"[344] Many teenagers were ecstatic about being at the mall. "We're going shopping!" announced a group of shrill, screaming teenagers outside of the Roosevelt Field Mall in Long Island.[345] The *Mall City* filmmakers ask a group of teenagers, "What do you like to do in the mall?" "Shop. Buy stuff," they respond. "What do you like to buy?" "Stickers." The girls hold up a sticker with the slogan "License to Flirt" written across it, which was purchased from a novelty shop, World Imports.[346]

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[338] *Mall City*, 1983.
[339] Glionna, "Call of the Mall," B-B4.
[340] *Mall City*, 1983.
[341] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 221.
[342] Ibid., 202.
[343] Lewis, "Community Through Exclusion and Illusion," 133.
[344] "After The Dream Comes True," *CBS Reports*, 1982.
[345] *Mall City*, 1983.
[346] Ibid*.*, 1983.

Many adults ridiculed the superficiality of teenagers' affection toward the mall. "I get the feeling they don't know anything else. This is the adventure it itself," says the father of a thirteen-year-old.[347] One downtown store owner believed that "young people want to shop where young people go. And they want to see the new stuff, they want to see more, more of everything. It isn't that they want to buy more, they want to see more."[348] Some had a more visceral reaction to teenagers in malls. "Mall culture? Very interesting. Probably the wave of the future. Maybe the end of the future," a thirty-something jokes while he observes young people hanging out around the mall's fountain.[349] "Actually, I think it's pretty pitiful that a lot of people have to come to a place like this to hang out," condemns a twenty-something who is being interviewed by the *Mall City* documentarians. "That they have no place to go, to do anything constructive with their minds. It's sort of just the meeting grounds […] Most of the kids who hang out here don't do anything with their lives except hang out and party, which I think is pretty pitiful."[350] The interviewers relay this man's message to a group of teenaged boys and ask them what they would say to him. "I'd tell him to go fuck himself," one of the boys responds.[351]

Teenagers doubled down on their mall-ness as adults pushed back against their presence there. Meanwhile, the media encouraged a subculture that was becoming more and more defined by their occupation of a commercial space. One *Seventeen* magazine article entitled "Mall Zone" writes, "So….you walked in circles for hours, scarfed down nachos and blew your allowance. Who says that fun has to be deep?"[352] The article essentially promotes the very superficiality that many of the adults criticized about teenage mall culture. In a type of mobius strip, adults condemned teenagers as mallrats, teenagers self-identified as such, and marketers co-opted the term to perpetuate teenagers' patronage in shopping centers.[353]

The adult condemnation of teenagers' shopping mall patronage arose out of a larger context in which teenagers were often pathologized for their use of public space. Urban geographer Sophia Cele draws attention to the complicated relationship young people have to public spaces; they are frequent users of these spaces, yet their presence is generally unwanted.[354] One mother of an infant, who attended a children's music series at the Glendale Galleria, told the *Los Angeles Times* that "[I]f it weren't for the music, I would never normally come here. I think of the Galleria as where all the teen-agers hang out."[355] Part of the reason adults disapproved of teenagers in shopping centers was due to the fact that they were perceived as troubled and unruly. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there was a lot of anxiety surrounding the way children of the 1980s were being raised and around the changing family structure. This anxiety was deflected onto the youths themselves, who were considered to be growing up without any discipline.[356]

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[347] Ibid., 1983.

[348] "After The Dream Comes True," *CBS Reports*, 1982.

[349] *Mall City*, 1983.

[350] Ibid., 1983.

[351] Ibid., 1983.

[352] "Mall Zone: Mall Trends," *Seventeen* 52, no. 10 (1995), 118.

[353] Bowlby, *Carried Away,* 6.

[354] Cele, "Performing the Political through Public Space," 74.

[355] Szymanski, 2"All the Mall's a Stage," F21A.

Teenagers appeared to be the poster children for the unravelling family unit, the blame of which was placed on mothers who were entering the workforce (and, by extension, giving up their primary caregiving role). In reality, however, the shifting family values had less to do with unconcerned mothers and more to do with the downward mobility that characterized the Reagan era, combined with the ever-increasing privatization of space and community. Downward mobility upended so-called traditional family roles by, for example, creating a generation of unemployed fathers or obliging mothers to work in the service industry.[357] Additionally, the privatization of space, particularly how that space was used to buttress and expand a consumer culture, overwhelmed the practical space and time of the traditional family.[358] Dinner tables became TV tables and Sunday outings became trips to the mall.

It can also be argued that the so-called traditional family never existed but was rather—just like the Main Street symbolism that was appropriated by shopping malls—the manifestation of a nostalgia for a mythologized bygone era. Regardless, the youth bore the burden of society's anxieties and were chastised for being a product of an environment that they were essentially born into. Kowinski referred to teenagers' affinity for the mall as a result of "broken homes, latchkey kids, drugs, drinking, boredom, selfishness, and mindless materialism."[359] These itemized causes do little to understand (or sympathize with) teenagers' motives to spend their time in shopping malls and instead pathologize their behavior.

The very presence of teenagers in malls was threatening because it was a space where they could act out their political and social agency, something the adult population has been generally uncomfortable seeing.[360] "The mere presence of teenagers threatens us," writes cultural critic Thomas Hine.[361] Public spaces, under which malls can arguably be classified, are often considered adult public spaces, and therefore teenagers' presence threatens adult's exclusive rights to those spaces.[362] But teenagers were also perceived as a threat to the very commercial nature of the shopping mall as a private space. Shoplifting was both a real problem that malls faced and an excuse to criminalize teenagers. One *Marketing News* article entitled "Habits, Patterns of Shoplifting Kids," claimed that $16 billion are lost annually to shoplifting and that fifty percent of shoplifters were juveniles.[363] One marketing professor called shoplifting "the largest monetary crime in the nation."[364] The article instructs mall operators to alert themselves to the telltale signs of shoplifting youths, such as older female teens shopping in groups.[365]

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[356] Cross, *An All-Consuming Century,* 196.
[357] Newman, *Falling from Grace*, 97.
[358] Cross, *An All-Consuming Century,* 229.
[359] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 221.
[360] Cele, "Performing the Political through Public Space," 76.
[361] Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager,* 275.
[362] Hugh Matthews et al. "The Unacceptable *Flaneur*: The Shopping Mall as a Teenage Hangout," *Childhood* 7, no. 3 (2000), 288.

The potentially real threat of shoplifting combined with the perceived threat that teenagers' presence in the mall enabled mall operators to turn their spaces into mini surveillance states. Closed Circuit Televisions turned the shopping center into a sort of panopticon, and the heavy presence of security guards reinforced the image of safety that shopping centers so eagerly tried to project.[366] One Long Island mall staffed their security force with retired New York City police officers.[367] A mall in Houston armed their security guards.[368] Kowinski calls this escalation of security an "admission of vulnerability for malls," because it forced malls to reckon with the fact that were not merely safe by nature.[369] One security guard summarized his duty as "look[ing] out for the interest of the mall."[370] It appeared to be in malls' interest to prevent teenagers from loitering. Mall security tended to target teenagers more than any other group of mall patrons. Teenagers were often asked by security guards to "move along" in areas where other age groups, such as elderly people, were free to loiter.[371] "Just about all of us have gotten kicked out at one time or another," said one self-described mallrat.[372] "The security guards have no respect for mallrats," stressed another.[373]

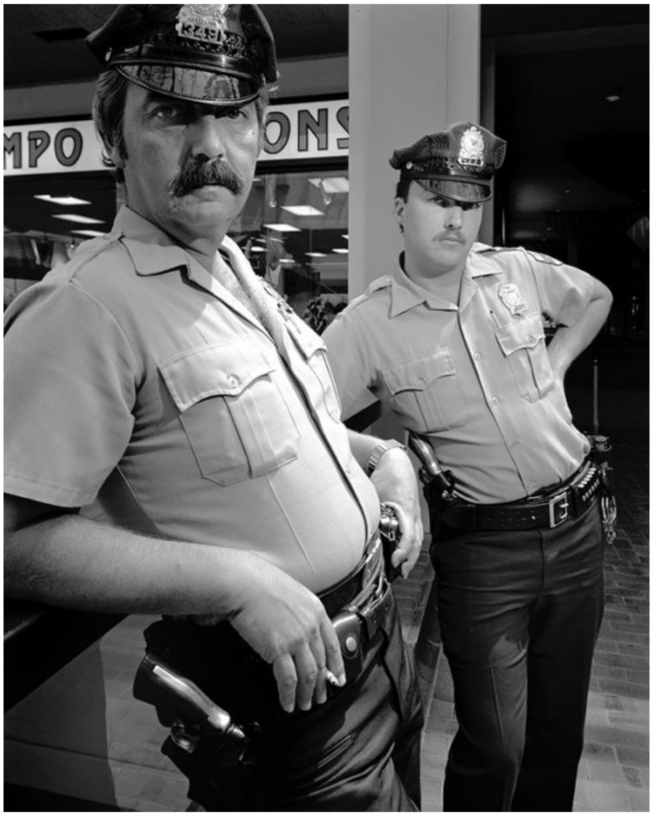

Figure 2: DiRado, Stephen. "Mall Series," 2019.

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[363] "Habits, patterns alert retailers to shoplifting kids," *Marketing News*, 28 March 1986, 27.
[364] Ibid., 27.
[365] Ibid., 27.
[366] Crawford, "The World in a Shopping Mall," 27 and Matthews et al., "The Unacceptable *Flaneur*," 282.
[367] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 136.
[368] Ibid., 251.
[369] Ibid., 251.
[370] "After The Dream Comes True," *CBS Reports*, 1982.
[371] Matthews et al., "The Unacceptable *Flaneur*," 289.
[372] Lewis, "Community Through Exclusion and Illusion," 131.
[373] Ibid., 130.

Security guards were not the only order enforcers who failed to allow teenagers to use the mall without harassment. In the panopticon of the shopping center, other shoppers felt empowered to criminalize teenagers as well. Thirteen-year-old Lisa told the *Los Angeles Times* about an encounter she had in a mall: "We were in this store and a lady came up to us and ordered us to empty our purses. […] We weren't doing anything. But sometimes people assume you're shoplifting just because you're young."[374] In the *CBS Reports* documentary, one mall manager tells the camera, "A lot of times young people will meet other young people—boys will meet girls—at the shopping center. […] And most of these—95-99%—of these youngsters behave themselves and are very cooperative. You only have maybe 1% that we have to watch out for." The video then cuts to a teenager walking in the mall with a boombox player presumably playing music, who is then stopped by a security guard.[375] In the Mall of America, unescorted teenagers were banned from the mall entirely.[376] One New England shopping center's expansion included the additions of flashy new shops, record stores, fast-food court, and an arcade; all storefronts that would have attracted teenagers. This new section also added more security than any other area of that mall.[377]

Kowinski makes the argument that arcades were installed in shopping centers not only as a way to empty teenagers' pockets but also to funnel them into one contained area.[378] More often than not, however, video arcades were perceived as the magnet that attracted undesirable teenagers into the mall in the first place. In a 1983 *Youth and Society* article, the author writes that "[v]ideo parlors provoke the opprobrium of many adults who feel that any locale where adolescents can gather unsupervised is a breeding ground for delinquency."[379] When one mall's F.W. Woolworth Co. opened a video arcade called Fun Center, sixty-eight mall merchants signed a petition to close the arcade due to its "obnoxious and intimidating" teenaged patrons.[380]

Teenagers' use of the mall was both pathologized and considered undesirable. The reactions against mallrats in this period failed to consider why teenagers spent their time (and money) at the mall and how that undesirability effected teenagers' sense of belonging. By alienating teenagers from adult spaces, adults were also alienating themselves from teenagers, further distancing themselves from any meaningful understanding of their society's youths.[381] What these reactionaries failed to recognize is that

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[374] Glionna, "Call of the Mall," B-B4.
[375] "After The Dream Comes True," *CBS Reports*, 1982.
[376] Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager,* 275.
[377] Lewis, "Community Through Exclusion and Illusion," 125.
[378] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 350.
[379] Tom Panelas, "Adolescents and Video Games: Consumption of Leisure and the Social Construction of a Peer Group," *Youth and Society* 15, no. 1 (September 1986), 63.
[380] Wayne S. Wooden, *Renegade Kids, Suburban Outlaws: From Youth Culture to Delinquency* (Pomona, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1995), 24.
[381] Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager,* 275.

American society was becoming increasingly corporatized and privatized, emptying itself of civil spaces in favor of commercial ones. Shopping centers became one of the few semi-public spaces in which the members of that society—old and young alike—could feel a sense of membership in their community.[382]

By criminalizing teenagers' use of mall's space and by forsaking any empathy toward teenagers, adult society denied teenagers membership into their community and further perpetuated the ideology of individualism of the late-capitalist period. Ultimately, teenagers were pathologized with little sympathy, indiscriminately criminalized, and presented with no other options for meaningful participation in their communities. Sociologist Fran Tonkiss writes that "public policing, private security, social aversion, hostility, or harassment, codes of consumptions and conduct interact in various ways to determine both the rules of access to public spaces and the exclusion zones of the private."[383] Teenagers inhabited a liminal space between inclusion and exclusion, and it is within this space that they forged their own identities and communities.

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[382] Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager,* 275.

[383] Tonkiss, *Space, the City and Social Theory,* 72.

Chapter 4: Appropriation of Space

Task of childhood: to bring the new world into symbolic space. The child, in fact, can do what the grownup absolutely cannot: recognize the new once again.

—Walter Benjamin

Teenagers were perceived as undesirable in shopping malls; however, shopping malls were desirable destinations for teenagers. Despite their unwantedness, young people asserted their right to be in malls, most tangibly by hanging out there. Hanging out in shopping centers could take on many forms: "To the untrained and stalk-naked eye," remarks a *Seventeen* magazine article on hanging out, teenagers "may even appear to be loitering. Loafing. Goofing off. But these words are far too puny to convey the majesty and import of what's going on.[384]" Hanging out represented a rite of passage for teenagers, and malls presented teenagers with a space and opportunity to hang out.

For teenagers who idled within shopping malls' windowless enclosures, architecture could take on an entirely different meaning. Water fountains could become meeting places, bathroom mirrors could become canvasses and staircases could become living room couches. William Kowinski encounters a group of teenagers "who would sit together on a large polished-wooden bench that was wrapped around three sides of a planter full of glossy-leaved greenery."[385] These teenagers and many like them transformed the mall into a space they could call their own. These acts of spatial renegotiations placed teens at odds with the commercial design of the space and the intentions of the mall developers and managers. Teenagers appropriated the features of malls in order to hang out there and in doing so staked a claim in the malls themselves. The teenagers Kowinski encountered, for example, were not simply loitering to stir up trouble, but they were carving out a place for themselves not only within the mall itself but within society. The bench Kowinski describes was not merely a sitting area for a quick respite from shopping—it was, as Kowinski describes, "their special place."[386]

In this chapter, I will look at the ways in which teenagers appropriated the intended use of the mall and how this appropriation challenge the purely commercial design of these cathedrals of consumption. I will first theorize the mall as a figurative "third space" for teenagers, politicizing the space of the mall as well as teenagers' presence there. Second, I will discuss how the mall served a social function for teenagers, providing them (whether willingly or not) with a space in which they could hang out and perform their identities among their peers. This hanging out actually challenged the commercial purpose of the shopping mall since teenagers who lingered in a private space did not necessarily intend to make any purchases. It is through the act of hanging out that teenagers most viscerally appropriated the space of the mall, a concept I will discuss in detail below. Finally, I will analyze two Supreme Court cases that placed shopping centers' role as a private or public space under legal scrutiny, an ambiguity that teenagers exploited and that underscored their appropriation of the shopping malls.

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[384] Judith Stone, "Hanging out," *Seventeen* 51, no. 8 (August 1992), 185.

[385] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 18.

[386] Ibid., 18.

Throughout my research I have encountered various factors that motivated teenagers to spend their time in shopping centers: they go to malls to meet friends, to shop, to eat, out of boredom and in search of entertainment. The most common reason teenagers visited malls, however, was simply because they had "nowhere else to go."[387] "It's something to do when you want to get out of the house," said one teenaged girl.[388] A seventeen-year-old boy said, "Whenever I don't have anything to do I come to this mall."[389] "There's nothing to do. What can you do? It's a holiday. School's out. You know, you usually work, work, work, so you come here and relax. That's it. There's really nothing more to it," explained one teenaged boy to the *Mall City* filmmakers.[390] To the *Los Angeles Times*, another teenage boy explained, "[T]he mall is a great place to suck up some air-conditioning and run into somebody you know. […] Summer gets old after a while. You have to make up stuff to do or else you get bored."[391]

As discussed in the previous section, teenagers were typically barred from many private spaces. A woman in her twenties was asked if she goes to the mall to meet men. "Get out of here," she laughs. "Why would we have to come to a shopping mall when we could go to our local bars or discotheque for that?"[392] These options did not exist for teenagers; they were relegated to home and school and occasionally their workplaces (which were often located in shopping malls). Shopping centers, though not public, served as a sanctuary for many teenagers who longed to be somewhere outside of home and school. Kathryn Anthony, a professor of architecture, wrote that for teenagers, "[T]he shopping mall may well serve as an antidote to the regimentation of high school and home life."[393] Kowinski referred to the mall as "high school without the impertinence of classes."[394] Sociologist George H. Lewis called the mall "one of the few places teenagers can go in this society where they are—albeit reluctantly—allowed to stay without being asked to leave."[395] The fact that young people tolerated all the suspicious looks, the "move along"s by security, and the general harassment by adult society is a testament to the importance of shopping malls as a space that teenagers were permitted to use.

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[387] Lewis, "Community Through Exclusion and Illusion," 130.
[388] "After The Dream Comes True," *CBS Reports*, 1982.
[389] Wooden, *Renegade Kids, Suburban Outlaws,* 34.
[390] *Mall City*, 1983.
[391] Glionna, "Call of the Mall," Part B-B4.
[392] *Mall City*, 1983.
[393] Anthony, "The Shopping Mall: A Teenage Hangout," 312.
[394] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 353.
[395] Lewis, "Community Through Exclusion and Illusion," 129.

Although teenagers were reluctantly allowed to use the mall, their embrace of the mall was anything but reluctant; often, it was enthusiastic. The *Mall City* filmmakers ask a group of teenage girls, "If you had a choice, would you rather be in school or hang out here?" The three girls emphatically responded in unison "here!"[396] Shopping centers were not only places where teenagers could buy the products that signified a membership into their groups, but it was also a place where they could act out the identities tied to those memberships. In the *CBS Reports* documentary, a school guidance counselor offers some insight into the reason teenagers enjoy spending their time in shopping centers. "The closest thing for them to participation in something is that shopping mall."[397] I argue, therefore, that shopping centers offered teenagers a third space, away from the boundaries of home and school, a space where they could negotiate their identities away from the watchful eyes of parents and teachers.

Various scholars have grappled with the term "third space" as a space of cultural and spatial production. On a basic level, shopping centers served as a literal third space for teenagers—a space that was neither home nor school. To extend this basic understanding of third space, teenagers themselves occupy a figurative third space within our society—they are neither adults nor children.[398] Cultural theorist Homi K. Bhabha defined "third space" as "moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide terrain for elaborating strategies of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself."[399] Under this definition, the shopping center serves as an ambiguous arena in which adults—who use the space for shopping—and teenagers—who use the space to hang out—clash, but within that conflict, the shopping center transforms to become a space that serves both functions.

Malls are also "in-between" spaces in that their character is neither entirely private nor public. There is no doubt that shopping centers are privately owned enterprises with real profit and commercial mandates; however, through the events they host, the communities they serve and their own self-promotion as the so-called new town squares, shopping centers took on a decidedly public tone. Urban theorist Edward Soja used the term "thirdspace" to articulate the "spatiality of human life." He writes, "[W]e are, and have always been, intrinsically spatial beings, active participants in the social construction of our embracing spacialities."[400] The emphasis on spatiality renders the mall a politically charged space but also a space that is constantly in flux. Soja envisions "thirdspace" as a "creative recombination and extension [of] firstspace," which represents the "'real' material world and a "secondspace […] that interprets this reality through imagined representations of spatiality."[401]

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[396] *Mall City*, 1983.
[397] "After The Dream Comes True," *CBS Reports*, 1982.
[398] Matthews et al., "The Unacceptable *Flaneur*," 282.
[399] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* 1.
[400] Soja, *Thirdspace,* 1.
[401] Ibid., 6.

According to this definition, the teenagers used the mall as a place to shop but also as an extension of the fantasy worlds from the pop culture that they consumed about shopping malls. Cultural historian Shachar Pinsker's analysis of the café as a third space for Jewish émigrés can also be applied here. Particularly, he writes that the café provided an "interplay between subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined."[402] Shopping centers perfectly exemplify this collapse of the real and imagined; they are a concrete and physical space, offering real and practical services, but at the same time they are a fantasy world, offering escape and perpetuating its own mythologies (as an extension of the ancient agoras, or as the continuation of Main Streets, etc.). It is within these constructed and collapsed identities that teenagers asserted their own identities, their own idiosyncratic use of the space.

Teenagers used shopping centers as a third space in which they could act out their identities and find solidarity with other groups teenagers. The liminal space that teenagers occupied, as neither children nor adults, afforded them a combination of disposable income and a vast amount of free time. "Many use this time attempting to build a social and cultural space that is free from the direct surveillance of the major institutions that dominate their lives."[403] While we have discussed that teenagers were indeed surveilled inside shopping centers, malls offered teenagers a certain freedom that many lacked within the confines of home or the classroom. Not only were malls a comparatively more liberated space than home and school, but they were also the only third spaces to which teenagers were granted access.[404] Of hanging out at the mall, one teenager said:

> It makes you feel like you have more freedom in the mall, I guess you could say. Because, you know, like, when you're at home there's always your mom in the other room or you know someone calling you or something like that, you know? It's a place to get away from everything and shop and do some things for yourself. I spend more time at the mall than I do at my house."[405]

Additionally, malls provided teenagers with the forum to buy goods and services that were recognized as cultural currency among their peers. A *Youth and Society* study particularly focused on how video games became a cultural currency for teenagers, in which the conspicuous consumption of video games in the very public arena of a video arcade store enabled teenagers to signify to other teenagers that they spoke the same language, consumed the same ephemeral products.[406]

To consume these products and to hang out within the spaces where these products are consumed became a rite of passage for teenagers, an initiation into a club of belonging. Kowinski likens teenagers' knowledge of mall culture as a "mall sense," instead of a street sense, as a type of knowledge that signified belonging and also imbued them with a sense ownership and control over the space.[407] To develop this "mall sense" is to codify one's identity, to entangle it with the act of being in the mall. In the *Mall City* documentary, the filmmakers interview a group of teenage boys about why they spend time at the mall:

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[402] Pinsker, *A Rich Brew,* 9.
[403] Panelas, "Adolescents and Video Games," 62.
[404] Lewis, "Community Through Exclusion and Illusion," 133.
[405] "After The Dream Comes True," *CBS Reports*, 1982.
[406] Panelas, "Adolescents and Video Games," 62 and Cross, *An All-Consuming Century,* 210.

> One of the boys replied, "Nothing better to do than just hang out."
> "It's something to do," added his friend.
> "As opposed to what," asked the interviewer
> The boy shrugs, "Getting stoned or whatever."
> "How old are you?"
> "Sixteen," replied the teenager.
> "Do you go to bars?"
> "Sneak in."
> "Do you go to clubs?"
> "No, they wouldn't let us in."
> The teenager's friend summarized, "There's the cool type and there's the faggy type. We're the faggy type."[408]

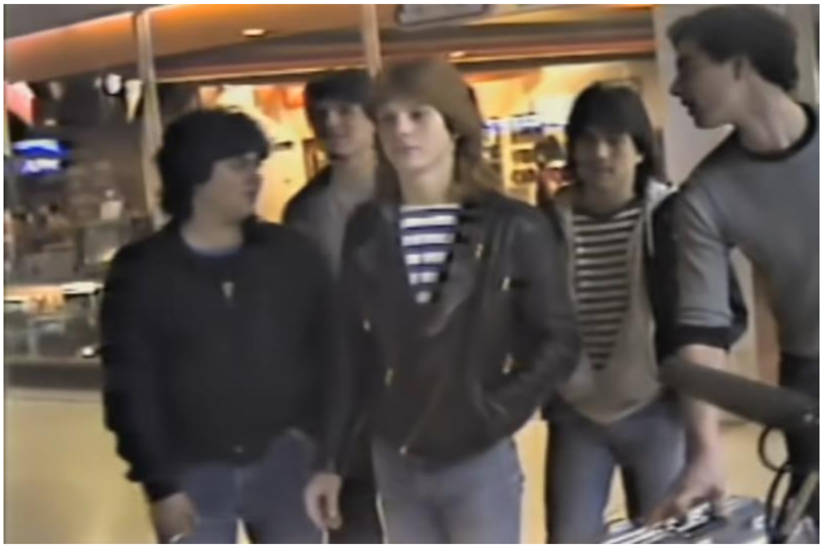

Figure 3: Mall City, dir. Hugh Kinniburgh, New York University, 1983.

Through this exchange, we understand not only that the shopping mall was one of few alternatives in which this group of teenagers could hang out but also that, as a group, they found a sense of belonging and identity defining themselves against other teenagers (the "faggy types" versus the "cool types"). On his mall-scapade, Kowinski meets a preteen, Todd, who tells him that he can go to the mall alone and still find a friend.[409] In a recent *New York Times* article, one former mallrat recalls that in the 1980s, "malls were not just points of sale but robust social spaces."[410] Like a secret handshake, shopping centers were spaces where teenagers could speak their own language, form intricate networks and create exclusive clubs. "It is where the cool people are at," one teenager explains, coolness itself being a form of cultural currency.[411]

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[407] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 305.
[408] *Mall City*, 1983.

Shopping malls gave it patrons a feeling of privacy that many other public spaces lacked. Kowinski calls this the "neutral intimacy of the mall," and it allowed its patrons, whether teenagers or not, to build private ties within its space. In Joyce Carol Oates's short story, "Shopping," a mother and daughter take a trip to the mall, where "in such crowds of shoppers, moments of intimacy are possible as they are rarely at home."[412] In *Scenes from a Mall*, the Fifers have a very public fight about their very private marital troubles and when a moment of embarrassment seeps in, Doug Fifer reassures his wife that "no one is listening to us, believe me."[413] For teenagers, this neutral intimacy can be referred to as simply "hanging out." An elderly man, who is sitting in the food court surrounded by a group of his elderly friends, raves about the shopping center. "It's a wonderful place for us oldies and even for the youngsters," he says. "It's a very sociable place, you meet good people here." When asked where he hung out when he was young, he replied, "We had nowhere to hang out. This is fantastic [for the youngsters]."[414]

However, teenagers have been "hanging out" since Teena was gracing the covers of *Seventeen* magazine. An article in the *Los Angeles Times* entitled "A Place to Hang" explores the history behind hanging out: "[F]rom soda shops to shopping malls, generations of teens have been searching for somewhere to be themselves."[415] The article chronicles the "simple and harmless" hangouts of the 1950s—such as bowling alleys, dance halls, and hamburger joints—to the 1970s and 1980s when "hangouts bounced from skateboard parks, discos and punk-rock clubs to shopping malls."[416] The article characterizes these hangouts as "an oasis," a place that offers its patrons a sense of belonging.[417] In 1995, *Seventeen* magazine published its own article entitled "Hanging Out" that explored the ethos of hanging out: "Hanging out has nothing to do with killing time. It's making time. It's doing whatever, but doing it at the center of the universe. When you're hanging out, you're there."[418] "Hanging out is fluid," the article asserts. Within these hangouts, "alliances are formed, shattered, reconstituted, relationships grow and shrivel and then thrive again."[419] When we consider that teenagers used the shopping mall as a space to hang out ("malls are major," according to the article), we can see that teenagers' patronage in the mall was not a criminal act or an act of boredom, but rather a deliberate attempt to "ultimately maintain continuity and community."[420]

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[409] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 183.
[410] Kelsey Lawrence, "The Collective Memory of American Shoppers," *New York Times*, 21 August 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/21/style/retail-facebook-groups-reddit.html. [19 November 2019].
[411] *Mall City*, 1983.
[412] Oates, "Shopping," 54.
[413] *Scenes from a Mall*, 1991.
[414] *Mall City*, 1983.
[415] Erik Hamilton, "A Place to 'Hang'," *Los Angeles Times* 6 January 1991, E1.
[416] Ibid., E8.
[417] Ibid., E8.

Public spaces and semi-public spaces like shopping centers are where identities are formed, friendships are constructed, and gender is performed.[421] For teenagers, the mall was the primary place for social interaction and community—a place where they could feel wanted within a society that pathologized and disregarded them.[422] As fifteen-year-old Michael explains, "I usually come to the mall with shopping as my motive but end up hanging out and meeting cool people."[423] To call oneself a "mallrat" or a "mall bunny," therefore, was to stake a claim in an identity and on a territory that allowed a type of freedom of expression that was denied in other more controlled environments. In the *CBS Reports* documentary, a teenage girl explains to the camera, "When I walk around here by myself, I feel independent and I feel in control because I know I'm not afraid of anything here."[424] The control and confidence that she is relating is part of her construction of self, part of her understanding of her place within her community and world. Shopping centers may have lured teenagers into their spaces while keeping them under threat of expulsion, but teenagers made those spaces their own and turned them into political and social theatres. I think one youngster summed it up perfectly when he said: "It's a good time to just waste your time here."[425]

In his 1948 article on youth marketing, Eugene Gilbert warned that those looking to tap into the youth market often face many obstacles in understanding how to sell to young people. One of those obstacles is that "youthful interviewees often take delight in misleading adult interviewers."[426] This caveat to selling to young people perfectly emblematizes why we cannot reduce young people's presence in malls as superficiality or even purely commerciality. Adolescents, who are both distrustful of adults and budding adults themselves, co-opt designated intent to suit their own needs. Teenagers used shopping centers for an assortment of reasons beyond shopping; for meeting friends, observing members of the opposite sex, playing video games, people watching, eating, loitering, etc.[427] In hanging out in shopping centers, teenagers were not just utilizing shopping malls as a space to act out their identities, they were also co-opting the space through everyday acts of spatial manipulation. In other words, teenagers both consciously and unconsciously appropriated the space of the shopping center that often countered the underlying intent of the shopping center's design.

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[418] Stone, "Hanging out," 185.
[419] Ibid., 184.
[420] Stone, "Hanging out," 185.
[421] Cele, "Performing the Political through Public Space," 76.
[422] Scharoun, *America at the Mall,* 72.
[423] "Mall Zone: Mall Trends," 117.
[424] "After The Dream Comes True," *CBS Reports*, 1982.
[425] *Mall City*, 1983.
[426] Gilbert, "The Youth Market," 80.
[427] Anthony, "The Shopping Mall: A Teenage Hangout," 310.

The appropriation is the way in which individuals, through their actions, ideas and attitudes, construct and reconstruct the spaces they inhabit.[428] This is best exemplified through Michel de Certeau's writing on everyday practices, which he emphasizes usually take place within "the space of the other."[429] It is through de Certeau's description of walking the city streets that I frame teenagers' everyday use of shopping centers as a space of negotiations and contestations. This use of space forms a discursive "text" that is juxtaposed against the "planned and readable" design of the mall itself.[430] Therefore, without necessarily being cognizant of it, these teenagers undermined and challenged the prescribed intention of shopping malls through acts of "surreptitious creativities" that de Certeau calls "spatial practices."[431] The ways teenagers appropriated the space of the mall constituted a form of "spatial acting-out" that transgressed the panopticon of the mall as well as the mall's wholly commercial intent.[432] These spatial practices not only gave these teenagers a sense of ownership over the space, but it changed the character of the space itself.

Fran Tonkiss suggested that a public space is not a neutral space, but rather a site of "everyday experiences" that "provides the basis for social relations, and offers a reflection of them."[433] She argues that within these spaces, individuals exercise their "spatial rights while negotiating the spatial claim of other."[434] This is demonstrated in shopping centers, as teenagers often had to mark their claim on the space at the expense of being perceived as undesirable. Despite their perceived unwantedness, teenagers continued to occupy malls in droves, suggesting that the heavy-handed surveillance was worth access to the space. Although shopping centers promoted consumption, they also offered teenagers access to a space that they did not necessarily have to pay to use.[435]

Shachar Pinsker observed this phenomenon in the coffee shops that were inhabited by Jewish émigrés in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Pinsker writes that "the urban café is not just a site of consumption but also an institution of sociability and exchange, where people can meet, converse, read newspapers, or discuss and debate the news of the day or other matters."[436] Tonkiss maps "the café" as a schema of public space used for social exchange, writing, "[T]hey may be privately owned and regulated but still involve a sense of being out in public."[437] We can apply this schema, as theorized by Tonkiss and described by Pinsker, to teenagers in shopping centers. Much like the Jewish expats of Pinsker's work, who were often barred from private clubs that prohibited Jewish membership, teenagers were similarly denied entrance into other forums like bars and clubs.[438] For the price of a cup of coffee, therefore, these Jewish expatriates delineated a space in which they could act out their identities and find belonging within a society in which they were generally perceived as unwanted.[439]

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[428] For an interesting application, see Patrick Ewick and Susan S. Silbey, "Conformity, Contestation and Resistance: An Account of Legal Consciousness," *New England Law Review* 26, no. 3 (Spring 1992), 738.
[429] de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* 37.
[430] Ibid., 93.
[431] Ibid., 96.
[432] Ibid., 98.
[433] Tonkiss, *Space, the City and Social Theory,* 1-2.
[434] Ibid., 59.
[435] Scharoun, *America at the Mall,* 74.
[436] Pinsker, *A Rich Brew,* 3.

Teenagers used the mall along similar lines. For the price of a record, a soda, or, in some cases, for the price of nothing but suspicion from security guards, teenagers found a space in which their identities were not defined by being "othered." These spaces, in return, took on the particular characteristics of its patrons by blending a "mixture of history and fiction, reality and imagination, longing and belonging, consumption and sociability, idleness and productivity."[440] Teenagers utilized shopping centers to act out their spatial practices and, in exchange, transformed the very essence of the space in which they occupied.

This conflict, between intent of space and use of space, corresponds with the internal conflict of shopping centers themselves; that they are privately owned enterprises that are open for the public's use. Malls are manufactured by developers, investors, managers, and architects; however, malls are also created by their patrons, by the way their spaces are occupied and by the ways in which their patrons respond to the spaces' design. "The mall is thus a theatre where consumers can create their own world and fantasize their parts in a place," wrote marketing scholar Frederick Langrehr.[441] While Langrehr was writing about the "hedonic consumption" that is promoted by the mall's design, the metaphor can be extended to teenagers who use the mall beyond its commercial purposes.

Everyday spaces like shopping centers shaped how these teenagers moved, expressed themselves, positioned themselves and were positioned by others.[442] The mall is therefore a theatre and a sociopolitical arena, where teenagers could perform "spatial acts of identity formation," in which they could express their class, gender, ethnicity and race, but they could also construct new forms of those embodiments.[443] For example, one seventeen-year-old mall dweller, who went by the name Skid Marx and defined himself as "a suburban punk bordering on the punk funk," discussed the shame he felt about being middle class. "I didn't want anyone to know that I was from a middle-class family," Skid explains. "My parents have a

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[437] Tonkiss, *Space, the City and Social Theory,* 67.
[438] Pinsker, *A Rich Brew,* 7.
[439] Ibid., 5.
[440] Ibid., 5.
[441] Langrehr, "Retail Shopping Mall Semiotics and Hedonic Consumption," 428.
[442] Cele, "Performing the Political through Public Space," 84.
[443] Ibid., 79.

Mercedes and I don't even want to drive around in it."[444] It is within the space of Skid's local Brea Mall that he felt most comfortable and where he had experimented with his own persona, shedding a middle-class identity in favor of a punk identity that signified a decidedly lower class.

In Skid's case, he adopted a punk style to distance himself from his middle-class family. For lower-class teenagers, the flexibility to appropriate a different class might not always be as accessible. One teenage girl, whose father had been recently laid off from Boeing, described her inability to gain membership with the middle-class teenagers in her cohort. "I always felt poor because I couldn't go out and buy new clothes. Instead of shopping at Nordstrom's, the high-class department store, we used to go to K-Mart or Penney's."[445] She expressed the "disdain the Benetton set have for the K-Mart kids," and in doing so defined herself against her more privileged counterparts.[446] In the sociopolitical space of the mall, she could self-define as a "K-Mart kid" just as Skid could self-define as "punk." Hugh Matthews, a professor of geography, likens teenagers in public spaces to Walter Benjamin's *Flaneur*. Matthews argues that mallrats acted as flaneurs because they were always "in" the space of the mall, "highly visible and contained," but rarely "of" that space, rarely part of the adult crowd of shoppers.[447]

Teenagers appropriated standard features of shopping malls for their own purposes. For example, the mall's escalators may have served as a meeting place more than it functioned as a moving staircase.[448] In the *CBS Reports* documentary, there is a shot of a young man taking an escalator up a level but rather than walking or standing on the steps, he is riding the railing.[449] A study in *Adolescence* provides a more clinical description of teenagers' use of the mall:

> Behavioral observations reveal that most adolescents travel in groups of two or three through the mall, stopping occasionally around the central court. They tend to lounge around the seating areas on the first floor of the central court or to lean on the ground-floor railings overlooking the court below. They spend little time around the edges of the mall.[450]

A *Los Angeles Times* article suggests that teenagers "slide along the slickened banisters, bolt up the down escalator, eat French fries until their hands turn greasy. With a wicked laugh they can shove pennies down the quarter slots at the Time Out arcade."[451] Granted, there is a disparaging tone to that article's description of teenagers' manipulation of shopping centers' features, but these are nonetheless examples of teenagers using the space of the mall in ways other than it was designed to be used.

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[444] Wooden, *Renegade Kids, Suburban Outlaws,* 33.
[445] Newman, *Falling from Grace,* 100.
[446] Ibid., 100.
[447] Matthews et al., "The Unacceptable *Flaneur*," 282.
[448] Matthews et al., "The Unacceptable *Flaneur*," 286.
[449] "After The Dream Comes True," *CBS Reports*, 1982.
[450] Anthony, "The Shopping Mall: A Teenage Hangout," 311.
[451] Glionna, "Call of the Mall," B-B4.

In some cases, petty criminal activity became a form of spatial acting out. In a *Journal of Popular Culture* study, one teenager describes the drug-dealing scene at their local mall. "I mean ya [*sic*] can get just about anything out here—pot, acid, hash, right here on Saturdays, when it is crowded."[452] A group of teenaged boys describe a friend's brush with mall authorities to the *Mall City* filmmakers, "[My] friend got caught stealing here," one of the boys explains. The interviewers ask, "What happened to him?" "Nothing," the boy responds. "His mom kicked his ass."[453]

Many mall employees complained of the graffiti left behind by some teenagers.[454] The Del Amo Fashion Center in Torrance, California fell victim to a series of mall and window etchings by a group of seven teenage boys. One of the boys was caught by the mall's security guard scratching his nickname into the bathroom mirror of the mall's Aladdin Arcade. One of the more popular tags, according to the Torrance police sergeant, was "DIS" for "Dissidents in Society."[455]

It can be tempting to ascribe too much significance to the vandalism, petty theft and other illegal juvenile activities to the appropriation of space that this chapter describes. However, I do not want to conflate teenagers' use of space with criminal behavior lest I pathologize them like their many critics. Rather than the *mis*appropriation of space by petty crime, the most significant spatial acting outs occurred on the most subtle of levels. Consider a photograph by Michael Galinsky, which features seven teenagers hanging out by a large planter: it is as a perfect example of a spatial acting out. In the photo, four of the teenagers are sitting on top of the planter, one of them is leaning on it. They are using the planter as a meeting place, a social circle, a couch. None of the teenagers have shopping bags, indicating that they have not spent any money in the commercial shopping center. The group is made up of both teenaged boys and girls—we can assume that they did not all come to the mall together but congregated there. The teenagers in this photograph appropriated the planters, which were meant to suggest the greenery of the natural world—a decorative fixture rather than a utilitarian piece of furniture—and transformed the planters into their own private social den.[456]

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[452] Lewis, "Community Through Exclusion and Illusion," 132.

[453] *Mall City*, 1983.

[454] Glionna,"Call of the Mall," B-B4.

[455] James Rainey, "Del Amo Mall May Press Parents in Youth Vandalism," *Los Angeles Times*, 9 February 1990, B3.

[456] Michael Galinsky, *Malls Across America* (Gottingen: Steidl-Miles, 2013).

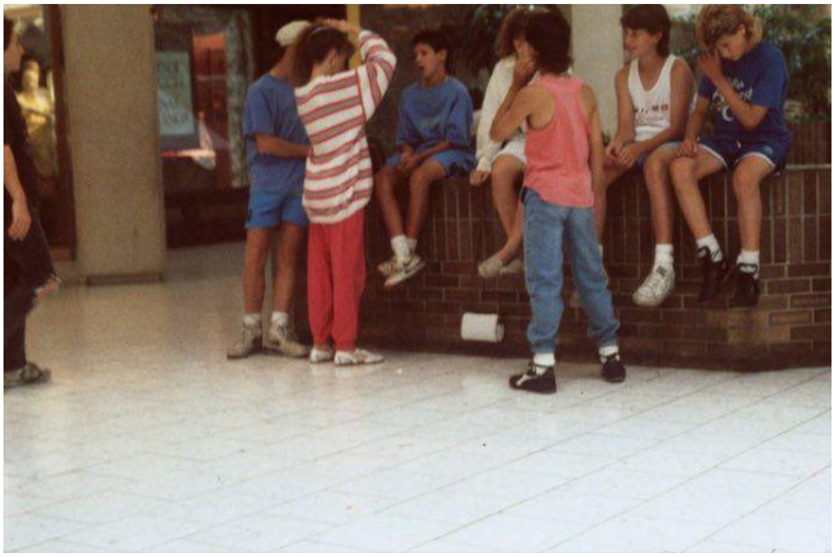

Figure 4: Michael Galinsky, Malls Across America

These teenagers were “free-range kids,” according to Lilian Flynn, a former self-described mallrat.[457] Kowinski observes that teenagers became educated in the ways of the mall: “[T]hey adapt to it and make it adapt to them.”[458] By looking at the mall through the lens of teenagers’ use of it, the public space of the mall becomes transformed and reconstructed into teenagers’ own private space.[459] As *flaneurs*, teenagers understood that their presence in malls was unwelcome, but in challenging that perception by appropriating the space to meet their own sociopolitical needs, they transformed the space itself into something different.

Teenagers’ use of the mall served a mostly noncommercial purpose, which highlighted a tension that plagued shopping centers: that they were neither wholly public spaces nor private ones. This tension culminated in a 1980 Supreme Court case, *PruneYard Shopping Center v. Robins*. The case began when high school students and their teacher sought to solicit the public’s support in opposition to an anti-Zionist United Nation’s resolution. They set up a card table in the central plaza of PruneYard Shopping Center, known as the “Grand Plaza,” to circulate pamphlets and lobby for petition signatures. Soon after setting up, the students were asked to leave by one of the mall’s security guard because “their activity violated PruneYard regulations.”[460] The students filed a lawsuit with the Santa Clara County court, who ruled in the students’ favor. The shopping center then appealed the decision with the California Court of Appeals, who affirmed the court’s decision. PruneYard Shopping Center then brought the case to the California Supreme court, who reversed the decision. Finally, to appeal the reversal, the students brought the case to the Supreme Court of the United States. The Supreme Court summarized their task as determining whether the exercise of free speech and petition rights on the property of a privately owned shopping center to which the public is invited violated shop owner's rights of free speech.[461] The shopping center claimed it had a policy that prohibited any public expressive activity that did not relate directly to its commercial purposes.

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[457] Kurutz, , “An Ode to Shopping Malls,” D1.

[458] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 350.

[459] Matthews et al., “The Unacceptable *Flaneur*,” 288.

[460] PruneYard Shopping Center et al. v. Robbins et al., 447 U.S. 74 (1980).

PruneYard Shopping Center v. Robins was not the first case decided by the Supreme Court that debated whether or not a shopping center was a private or public space. In fact, it was more or less a redemption from a previous ruling on a 1972 case, *Lloyd Corporation v. Tanner*. There are many parallels between the two cases. *Lloyd Corporation v. Tanner* was triggered in 1968 when a group of "five young people" sought to distribute anti-war handbills in protest of the Vietnam War inside the Lloyd Center in Portland, Oregon.[462] They were asked to leave by the mall's security under the threat of arrest, and they continued their hand-billing on a public street adjacent to the Lloyd Center.[463] Ultimately, the protesters lost their case with the Supreme Court, whose justices reasoned that "handbilling was unrelated to any activity within the center and […] respondents had adequate alternative means of communication."[464] The underlying logic to this ruling was that the majority of the court believed that private characteristics of a property retain the usual laws of private property, whether or not the public is invited to use it.[465]

In a scathing dissenting opinion, Justice Thurgood Marshall enumerated a series of contradictions evident in Lloyd Center's supposed anti-handbilling policy as well as contradictions in the ruling itself. He first discussed the relationship between the Lloyd Center and the city of Oregon, and how that relationship infused the shopping center with a public flavor. The security guards, for example, "wore uniforms that were virtually identical to those worn by regular Portland police, and they possessed full police authority."[466] Marshall furthered this point by citing that the city of Portland vacated eight acres of public space for the shopping center and passed a series of ordinances to help the Lloyd Center establish itself. "From its inception," Marshall argued, "the city viewed [the Lloyd Center] as a 'business district' of the city, and depended on it to supply much-needed employment opportunities."[467]

Marshall further complicated the purely private nature of the Lloyd Center by noting inconsistencies in the center's policy against public displays. For example, the Lloyd Center hosted the presidential candidates in its auditorium, which, according to the mall's manager, was permitted because it generated "great public interest" and "brings many people to the Lloyd Center who may shop before they leave."[468] The implication was that not *all* public speech was prohibited in the Lloyd Center, only speech that could be bad for business. Marshall cited another example, that the American Legion sold poppies to raise funds for veterans. Marshall argued that it is only logical that if one side of a debate—the side honoring war veterans—is permitted to speak, then the other side—anti-war protesting—should have the right to speak in the mall as well.[469]

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[461] Ibid., 1980.
[462] Lloyd Corp., Ltd. v. Tanner, 407 U.S. 551 (1972).
[463] Ibid., 1972.
[464] Ibid., 1972.
[465] Ibid., 1972.
[466] Ibid., 1972.
[467] Lloyd Corp. v. Tanner, 1972.

Marshall was critical of the ruling and its empowerment of private enterprises to have "unfettered discretion" to decide when its space can be used as a public forum.[470] Marshall concluded his dissent with:

> Members of the Portland community are able to see doctors, dentists, lawyers, bankers, travel agents, and persons offering countless other services in Lloyd Center. They can buy almost anything that they want or need there. For many Portland citizens, Lloyd Center will so completely satisfy their wants that they will have no reason to go elsewhere for goods or services. If speech is to reach these people, it must reach them in the Lloyd Center.[471]

The justices who ruled on the *PruneYard Shopping Center v. Robins* case, by 1980, had become more familiar with the unique character of shopping centers and understood Marshall's dissent in the *Lloyd Corporation v. Tanner* case as a type of forewarning of the ways in which shopping malls would come to consume the public life of Americans. The justices noted that in all precedent cases, "[T]he shopping center owners had opened their centers to the public at large, effectively replacing the state with respect to such traditional First Amendment forums such as streets, sidewalks, and parks."[472] In the end the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the students. The ruling was not a blanket victory for shopping center patrons—and by extension mallrats—but was rather specifically qualified as not applying to all shopping centers. The Supreme Court left the ultimate decision about the private or public character of shopping malls up to each individual state, of which only thirteen opted to adopt the right of free speech in shopping centers.

PruneYard Shopping Center looked like many malls in America: it occupied sixteen acres with an additional five acres of parking, it had sixty-five shops, ten restaurants and one movie theatre. The mall featured "walkways and plazas designed to attract the public."[473] Kowinski visits PruneYard Shopping Center in his *Malling of America*. The mall's slogan, he writes, was "Treat yourself to PruneYard."[474] Kowinski argues that PruneYard appeared to be serving the "Me Generation," and that it had been firmly establishing itself as the space to meet people's needs for shopping, entertainment and community.[475] He interviewed a marketing representative for the shopping center who bitterly told him that if people want free speech in the mall then the taxpayers should pay for the security.[476] Fran Tonkiss writes that spaces constitute objects of struggle, that there are "politics both *in* and *over* space [emphasis in original]."[477] PruneYard Shopping Center—and arguable all shopping centers by extension—constituted an object of struggle in which young people's use of its space brought that struggle into sharp focus.

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[468] Ibid., 1972.
[469] Ibid., 1972.
[470] Ibid., 1972.
[471] Ibid,, 1972.
[472] PruneYard v. Robbins, 1980.
[473] Ibid., 1980.
[474] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 196.
[475] Ibid., 196.

As we have seen, from the two Supreme Court cases and from teenagers' reappropriation of the space , the boundary between private and public in commercial spaces like shopping malls was always in flux. Shopping malls not only opened their doors to the public but actively promoted themselves as community gathering places. The type of gatherings that shopping centers promote, however, became narrowly prescribed by mall developers and managers and was only ever in service of an underlying bottom line. This left citizens, who were reduced to consumers, with few options. Naomi Klein calls this a "double vision" in which "protesters are thrown out of shopping malls for handing out political leaflets, told by security guards that although the edifice may have replaced the public town square in town, it is, in fact, private property."[478] Teenagers, whether as appellees on a Supreme Court case or as mallrats, bore witness to this double vision and through their appropriation of space and *Flaneurism*, challenged malls' prescription for sanitized, commercially friendly spaces.

In this chapter, I have discussed how teenagers appropriated shopping centers and in turn forced shopping centers to renegotiate the very character of their spaces. The relationship between teenagers and malls seemed to in on a perpetual feedback loop in which teenagers "drive themselves to extremes to create space in which to be themselves. Yet, the commercial machine they think they're escaping is always on their backs, ready to sell them something new."[479] That feedback loop is the epitome of "youth culture," which was discussed in chapter two. Youth culture was co-opted by marketers and sold back to teenagers, who adopted it and transformed it into something new, which was then again co-opted, and so forth.

Teenagers were neither passive actors in accepting advertisers' messages to consume, nor were they unaffected by their desire to belong through a purchased and branded identity. Similar to the way the mall was neither a totally private nor public space, teenagers were neither fully corporate sheep nor anarchist rebels. Sociologist George H. Lewis wrote that shopping malls and the commercial culture they supported "create[d] the warm *illusion* of community, while at the same time quietly stacking the deck against its actual developments."[480] We saw this in shopping centers' emphasis on entertainment over community, through teenagers' lack of choices for third spaces, and through the litigated action malls took against its responsibility to protect free speech. Lewis added, however, that "within this illusion, this false setting of community, the seeds of community have been planted."[481]

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[476] Ibid., 196.
[477] Tonkiss, *Space, the City and Social Theory,* 59.
[478] Klein, *No Logo,* 130.
[479] Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager,* 281.
[480] Lewis, "Community Through Exclusion and Illusion," 123.

The aspects of community were exemplified in the ways teenagers used shopping malls as spaces to act out their identities, the ways teenagers spent time "hanging out" in shopping centers to form social ties, and through the ways many teenagers appropriated the physical space of malls to challenge its commercial intent. Cultural critic Henry Giroux writes, "[F]or many young people and adults today, the private sphere has become the only space in which to imagine any sense of hope, pleasure, or possibility."[482] Shopping centers, therefore, offered limited possibilities for teenagers, and it is within this narrowly defined space that teenagers both resigned and asserted themselves. I think one teenage girl best expressed the resignation that characterizes a society that defines its citizens as consumers:

> I don't know, sometimes I wish I could go to culture. But I can't help it. I'm here and this is what I have. I have the shopping malls. I have, I don't know, here I am and I've gotta make what I want here and maybe when I get older, I can make more of my life but, I dunno.[483]

Teenagers' relationship to shopping malls was complicated. The mall served as spaces of contestation, it fortified teenagers' undesirability in the public sphere, and it often presented itself as teenagers' only meaningful option for community engagement. However, the mall also provided teenagers with a space over which they felt ownership, a theatre in which they could reify and perform their sociopolitical identities and, ultimately, it became a space that teenagers could transform into whatever they wanted it to be within the circumscribed imaginations permitted by the consumer economy.

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[481] Ibid., 123.
[482] Giroux, *Public Spaces, Private Lives,* xii.
[483] "After The Dream Comes True," *CBS Reports*, 1982.

Conclusion

We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning.
—Jean Baudrillard

Sometime in the summer of 2020 I was patronizing a non-essential store because the curve had been temporarily flattened (terms such as “flatten the curve” and “non-essential” had recently entered our collective lexicon). It was a boutique on St. Laurent Street in the typically bustling Mile End neighborhood of Montreal. The store enforced a limited capacity, had a hand-sanitizing station set up at the entrance and a strict mask-wearing policy to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19. I remember walking into the store with a certain apprehension. The other shoppers and I looked around the store, reassuringly making eye contact with one another, intensely smiling cheek-to-cheek so that others could register that we were smiling despite our obfuscated mouths. I browsed the scented candles and soaps that the store had prominently displayed, picked up one candle with my freshly sanitized hands, took a deep breath in and let the candle’s odor pass through my mask into my olfactory system. A sense of calm draped over me. Perhaps it was the effects of the candle’s essential oils, or maybe it was that I was experiencing a joy rediscovered, the joy of shopping.

As I am writing this, a global pandemic is still raging. I am no longer sure if we are in the second, third, or fourth wave, but I am certain that this single event has upended my life and the lives of those around me more than any other historical event in our lifetime. The pandemic has shifted the world onto its head, turning everything logical into something irrational, everything certain into something unknown. At the same time, the pandemic has provided those who are privileged enough to afford it with a certain clarity, a chance to pause and reflect and reorganize life around what matters most. I have viewed the pandemic through the framework that I have viewed most things in the last few years, through the lens of consumption. The pandemic has brought into sharp focus some insights about consumerism in the 2020s. The pandemic did not necessarily shift us into a new paradigm; rather, it expedited trends that were already entrenching themselves into our way of life. It expanded the prevalence of bank and credit cards, further establishing a cashless society. It inflated the monopolizing power of big tech companies, such as Amazon, Microsoft, Apple and Netflix. And, of course, it foreclosed many more shopping malls. These trends were all taking hold before March of 2020—the pandemic simply smashed the fast-forward button.

These patterns aside, the pandemic has exposed a truth that is as devastating as it is obvious: that despite the rhetoric of community, most commercial entities care less about *how* we buy and more *that* we buy. I noted this at the beginning of the first lockdown. As the world seemed to be descending into chaos, television commercials reassured us against the gentle but upbeat piano refrain that “we are here for you.”

Traditional brick-and-mortar stores bent over backward to accommodate at-home deliveries and curbside pick-ups. These accommodations were to allay many fears; the fear of spreading the disease, the fear of going out of business, and the more insidious fear that in the hush of stay-at-home mandates and the tranquility of the lockdown, society would reassess their need for things, their need to consume.

Naively I hoped that without the constant demands to be entertained, to dress a certain way, to purchase one's way into a particular lifestyle, we would forgo it all entirely; we would come to see that the value we placed on objects was in fact misplaced and constructed. But the aggressive reassurances and acrobatic contortions of corporations to stay relevant in our lives succeeded, exposing that we are valued not as individuals or a community, whether in good or poor health, but as consumers.

As disheartening as this might have been, the pandemic also revealed a second, more unexpected truth: that commerce is more public than we might have imagined. While the pandemic might not have prevented us from buying, it has changed the way we buy, illuminating what is lacking when we cannot go out into the world to shop. Despite a bullish market, the economy is on the brink of a recession, the travel and service industries that once buttressed so much of our economy have been hit the hardest by the lockdown's restrictions, and many people have found online shopping an imperfect replacement of in-person browsing. The discomfort we feel by hunkering down and limiting our mobility is a testament to how much we relied on public spaces for peace of mind, for entertainment, and, yes, for shopping. The pandemic might have expedited the shuttering of shopping malls across North America, but it is also highlighting that we are lacking a space to act out our social and consumer citizenry beyond the virtual walls of the internet. And that we feel this lacking deeply and collectively.

In 1990, art historian Neil Harris wrote that "the regional shopping center is now so ubiquitous, that it is surprising how short a history it actually possesses. All the more reason then, to survey its varieties and social implications, as they become more apparent."[484] In this current era, the "dead" mall is becoming more ubiquitous, and these dying malls have found a place in our cultural imaginations. Subreddits, Facebook groups and news media all dedicate virtual space to the bereavement of these fallen architectural icons.

What killed the mall? There are multiple factors that caused the shopping center to fall out of fashion. The signing of the Consumer Goods Pricing Act in 1975, which essentially allowed retailers to offer more competitive pricing, sparked the boom of big box stores and particularly the proliferation of value stores like Walmart.[485] These "category killers" edged out their competition (i.e., department stores and stores in shopping centers) by offering one-stop shops with previously unmatched prices.[486] Many of these big box stores replaced department stores as anchors in shopping malls that were attempting to remain relevant in a changing market.

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[484] Harris, *Cultural Excursions,* 278.

[485] Blaszczyk, *American Consumer Society,* 212.

[486] Farrell, *One Nation Under Goods*, 13.

Additionally, shifting communication technologies altered the way individuals not only socialized, but also the way they shopped. By the 1980s, shopping malls were already under threat from home shopping, in which shoppers could purchase products advertised on TV over the phone. Home shopping deemphasized the sociability of commerce while emphasizing the technological aspects of a growing consumer economy.[487] Home shopping would then be supplanted by e-commerce, which was enabled by the rise of the personal computer—itself a commodity that was quick to obsolescence.[488]

As communities began organizing themselves online, shopping centers lost their appeal as town squares. The principal culprit in the death of shopping centers, however, was the mall itself. The fervent development of shopping centers in the late twentieth century left each old mall that was being replaced by a newer mall in a state of purgatorial abandonment. By the late 1970s, malls were already reaching a saturation point.[489] Stephen DiRado, who photographed malls in the 1980s, wrote of one of his subjects, the Worcester Galleria, "[B]y the time I was concluding this project in 1986, the facility was alarmingly in decline."[490] This unsustainable overdevelopment was a self-inflicted wound that malls did to themselves. This culminated to 2007, which marked the first time since the 1950s that no new mall was built in the United States.[491]

What is of primary interest to me, however, is not what supposedly killed the shopping mall, but society's reaction to its death. The two documentaries that provided this thesis with much quotable fodder—the *CBS Reports* episode entitled "After the Dream Comes True" and the *Mall City*, the documentary by the New York University film students—were available to me by way of YouTube. The comment section on both of these videos was remarkable. "At least they are speaking to one another! Before the phone sickness came," writes Alverthorpe.[492] "People were HAPPIER back then. From teens to the elderly!" exclaimed exionem.[493] Dave C. wrote, "Malls are dying now. Online shopping is killing it quickly."[494] Kris Milko mockingly quoted an interlocutor in the *CBS Reports* documentary: "'I think we're not communicating to each other anymore…' Ha, wait until you get to 2010."[495] These are visceral reactions, ones that evoke a feeling of disappointment, longing and anxiety.

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[487] Gumpert and Drucker, "From the Agora to the Electronic Shopping Mall," 199.
[488] Cross, *An All-Consuming Century,* 224.
[489] Ames, "Shopping Malls," 39.
[490] Stephen Dirado, "Mall Series," *Stephen DiRado,* 2019. https://stephendirado.com/mall-series/ [22 May 2021].
[491] Natasha Gelling Esri, "The Death and Rebirth of the American Shopping Mall," *Smithsonian.com*, 25 November 2014. https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/death-and-rebirth-american-mall-180953444 [22 May 2021].
[492] Hush Tube, "Mall City Documentary 1983 NYU Film of Roosevelt Field Mall Culture + The Song 'Mall City'," *YouTube*, 1 March 2017, comment section.
[493] Ibid., comment section.
[494] Andrew Patrick Ralston, "Oak Park Mall (1982)," *YouTube*, 20 March 2018, comment section.
[495] Ibid., comment section.

There are communities that exist on the internet that are dedicated to the mourning and memorialization of these dying spaces. The *New York Times* recently wrote about these mall forums, which are comprised of "convivial, contained discussions" and are "cataloging brick-and-mortar shifts."[496] The *New York Times*, in fact, has an "R.I.P. Malls" section on its digital interface, and therefore could count itself as one of those forums. One of the pioneers of dead mall memorialization is Dan Bell, whose "Dead Mall Series" on YouTube has earned him over 580,000 subscribers. In the videos, Bell films the interior and exterior of dying, dead or abandoned malls against eerie music, typically juxtaposing his videos with shots of those malls in their heyday. On Bell's video on Rolling Acres Mall, one viewer, Tropic-AI, writes: "Who remembers the 70s and 80s when malls [were] THE PLACE to hang out with your friends? Now it's hanging out at home texting each other…glad I was a teen back then and not now."[497] The videos are certainly affecting—spooky, retro and aesthetically pleasing. "Watching the Dead Mall Series," writes one *New York Times* columnist, "provokes in the viewer a conflicting swirl of emotions. You think of your own happy times in malls and feel sad for the loss, and then you feel stupid for getting all emotional about what was an artificial and manipulative experience built around shopping."[498] It is on these emotions that dead mall nostalgia finds its footing, its significance and its resonance.

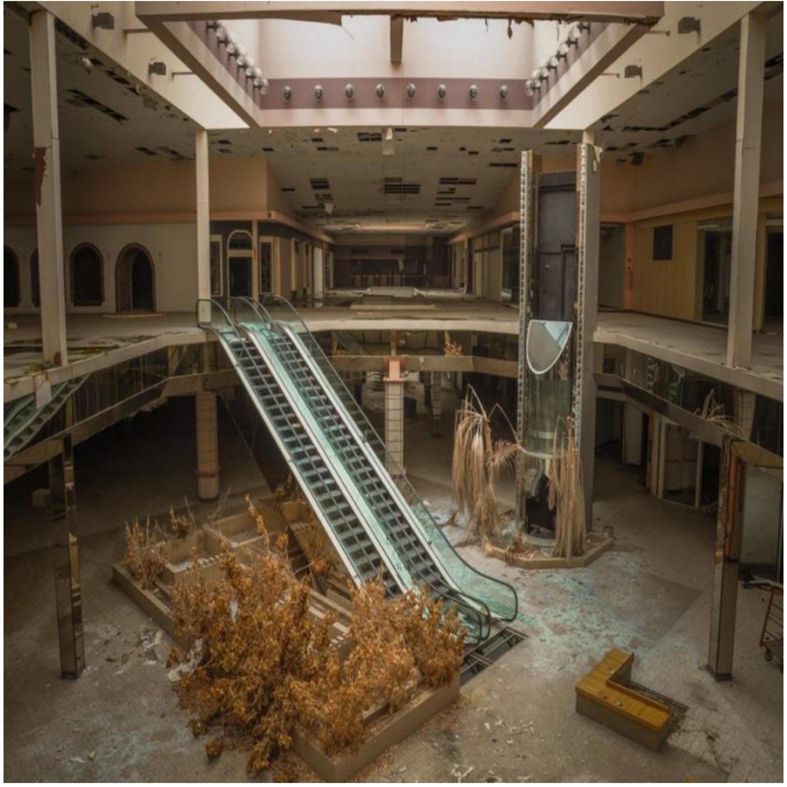

Figure 5: Seph Lawless, Black Friday: Abandoned Malls Series. 2016.

Another digital space for dead mall bereavement is on Reddit. Subreddits like r/RetailApocalypse, which warn that "the Death of Retail is upon us," r/LiminalSpaces and r/DeadMalls are filled with videos, photos and discussions about the current state of shopping centers.[499] Followers of these online groups devour content of dead and dying malls at the same rate that teenagers in the late twentieth century devoured Cinnabon cinnamon buns in their local mall's food court. The digital imprints of dead and dying malls, as well as of malls at their peak, form a sort of digital museum of ephemeral material cultural. These online spaces are a type of ecosystem, one in which likeminded individuals can gather and perform their yearning for shopping centers and in doing so form their own communities.

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[496] Lawrence, "The Collective Memory of American Shoppers," 2019.

[497] This is Dan Bell, "DEAD MALL SERIES: Super Dead, Creepy Owings Mills Mall at Night **DEMOLISHED**," *YouTube*, 18 September 2015.

[498] Kurutz, "An Ode to Shopping Malls," D1.

It is ironic that many of these YouTube commenters can watch these documentaries from the 1980s whose underlying tone is condemnatory of malls' significance in the late twentieth century ("[I]t's pathetic," according to one man being interviewed about mall culture) without realizing that they themselves are condemning their own era.[500] By memorializing the shopping center and thereby fetishizing the recent past, these online communities are erasing the controversy that defined the mall's role in the 1980s and 1990s. When online forums mourn the loss of malls, they are disregarding the fact that in the late twentieth century mall patrons (and critics) mourned the loss of public spaces. When those then-real concerns and anxieties are supplanted by the present day's primarily positive memories, the shopping center no longer feels like it is part of the continuum of the history of a consumer economy; it is somehow revered as the antidote to our current iteration of a consumer economy.

The fetishization of the past reduces the past to service the anxieties of the present. And in doing this, it refuses to acknowledge that the present-day anxieties are a continuation of past concerns and symptoms of a neoliberal regime that focuses on individualism over collective welfare and privatization over public services. For example, the glorification of the teenagers who were hanging out at the mall compared to the disparagements of teenagers who spend all their free time on their phones, fails to draw the parallels between the ways in which teenagers have been relegated to commercial spaces (whether a mall or an app) and how their occupation of those spaces is often treated as a symptom of a society in decline. The fetishization of the past by these online communities places an emphasis on their perceived loss—the exchange of brick-and-mortar stores for digital spaces—instead of placing that loss on a continuum with the loss of community and civic spaces that were forfeited in the so-called golden age of the shopping mall.

The nostalgia for the golden age of the mall gives the shopping center a sort of retro aesthetic, one devoid of any meaning except in its service to present-day visual sensibilities. This brand of retro is part of the adman's playbook, which Thomas Frank describes as:

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[499] Retail Apocalypse: Chronicling the Death of American Retail, *Reddit*, March 19 2017. https://www.reddit.com/r/RetailApocalypse/. [22 May 2021].

[500] *Mall City*, 1983.

> Retro's vision of the past as a floating style catalog from which we can choose quaint wardrobes, but from which we are otherwise disconnected is, in many respects, hip consumerism's proudest achievement: it simultaneously reinforces contemporary capitalism's curious ahistoric vision and its feverish cycling of obsolescence.[501]

Under the retro aesthetic, the past becomes a commodity in itself, and the symbols and signs that suggest the past can be severed from the past itself, packaged and sold to a population who are already experts in its vocabulary, who have already devoured its images. Baudrillard warned that "the fetishized history will preferably be the one immediately preceding our 'irreferential' era," which was the era of the mall—the era in which images of the Wild West and of Main Street, U.S.A. were appropriated by shopping centers to collapse the past and the present into a nonsensical commercial stupor.[502] The mall was a facsimile of a mythologized past, and now the online communities who mourn the death of the mall are reproducing those facsimiles, mythologizing the already mythologized past. "When the real is no longer what it was," Baudrillard writes, "nostalgia assumes its full meaning."[503]

What these online communities are most nostalgic for is not necessarily the ability to buy things but the ability to socialize in a commercial space. The ideology that ran through the veins of shopping malls was one that promoted capitalism; however, the sociality that could be constructed and performed within the windowless walls of the mall transformed it into a space that ran counter to its ultimate purpose. It was a public space within a private enclosure. This is what is lacking with e-commerce. Gary Gumpert and Susan J. Drucker note this when discussing the rise of home shopping (although they could have just as well been talking about the e-commerce giant, Amazon), "The agora has been depoliticized except for the inherent capitalist consumerist ideological sentiment underlying each consumer-oriented message."[504] Amazon is the agora that has been reduced to the purest form of its mandate: capitalism under a consumer economy. It is both a continuation of and a stark break from the shopping mall.

The removal of the public interaction from commerce is no doubt alienating. It has demonstrated that the consumer economy can sustain itself without the burden of human contact and has left us craving something less tangible than the goods we purchase. The mourning of shopping malls in the wake of the rise of Amazon also demonstrates that shopping centers were more than private commercial spaces. One *New York Times* columnist, while discussing the shuttering of more and more retail spaces, writes that "though the strategies of these chains hinge on standardized, replicable experiences, the stories people share about them are often quite personal."[505] The cookie-cutter enclosures that produced a type of sameness that defined mall culture in the late twentieth century did not equate with monolithic experiences, and in the mall's absence, individuals and collectives fill the void with memorials, digital archives, and even stocks.

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[501] Frank, *The Conquest of Cool,* 227.
[502] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation,* 31.
[503] Ibid., 6.
[504] Gumpert and Drucker, "From the Agora to the Electronic Shopping Mall," 198.
[505] Lawrence, "The Collective Memory of American Shoppers," 2019.

In January 2021, a vocal group of Redditors from the subreddit "r/WallStreetBets" made headlines when they banded together and drove up the price of GameStop stock. GameStop, which has been a staple in shopping centers and strip malls since the early 2000s, was declared all but dead by hedge fund investors, who, through shorting GameStop stocks, were essentially betting against its survival. It was not a difficult bet to make. GameStop, like many brick-and-mortar retail outlets, was struggling to remain relevant in a digital age, and the restrictions triggered by the global pandemic seemed to be the nail in the video cartridge.

The bereavement, it turned out, was premature. The members of r/WallStreetBets, in a combination[506] of nostalgia for in-person shopping, a general affinity for gaming, a resentment against Wall Street sharks, hive mentality, and a boredom characteristic of the pandemic, united together to buy GameStop stock, driving up its value from $2 billion to $24 billion in the span of a few days.[507] The meteoric rise of the GameStop stock had a myriad of effects, including enriching everyday people (primarily young Redditors), squeezing hedge fund investors out of billions of dollars, turning the market topsy turvy, and possibly leading to a real discussion on the need of proper market oversight and regulation.

I am struck by the parallels between what transpired during this moment and my own research. Much like dead mall nostalgia, the GameStop phenomenon indicated that in-person shopping has not been totally eclipsed by e-commerce, and furthermore, that there is a resentment toward those who wish to profit off the failures of companies that defined the youth of those who grew up in shopping centers and strip malls. In this way, the overvaluation of the GameStop stock represented a type of collective consumer action that both inflated the value of the stock price itself and demonstrated the sentimental value of GameStop, and by extension, brick-and-mortar retail.

Furthermore, many of those who made money off the skyrocketing GameStop stock were young people; many of whom may not have been alive during the heyday of shopping malls, but who felt similarly disenfranchised and squeezed out of so-called adult spaces. Instead of malls, the new GameStop stockholders spent their time online, on the r/WallStreetBets subreddit, to be more specific. Online forums take on a similar meaning in the twenty-first century to malls in the late twentieth century, a space that young people were relegated to when they were barred from entering so-called "adult" private spaces. As I discussed in the last chapter, teenagers' use of the mall was correlated to not only a general boredom but a lack of options—they had no place else to go. In the context of a global pandemic, this was especially the case.

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[506] For a good breakdown of the variety of motivating factors, see Matt Levine, "Money Stuff: The Game Never Stops," *Bloomberg*, 2021. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/newsletters/2021-01-25/money-stuff-the-game-never-stops.

[507] Matt Phillips and Taylor Lorenz, "'Dumb Money' Is on GameStop, and It's Beating Wall Street at Its Own Game," *New York Times*, 27 January 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/27/business/gamestop-wall-street-bets.htm [2 February 2021].

Due to the restrictive measures in place, these Redditors literally had nowhere else to go but online platforms, and, to an extent, to Wall Street. In a way, the new GameStop shareholders broke into a space in which they were perceived as unwanted (some Wall Street investors refer to amateur investors as "dumb money") and rewrote the rules.[508] Much like the teenagers who loitered in the atriums of malls, skateboarded down railings, and turned a space prescribed for commerce into their own social haven, these Redditor investors turned the market—a figurative space designed to chasten the little guy—into their own domain. All of this is to say that the culture of late-capitalism is constantly in flux and the control mechanisms of its institutions, whether they are the surveillance systems of the shopping mall or the so-called "invisible hand" of the market, can be renegotiated.

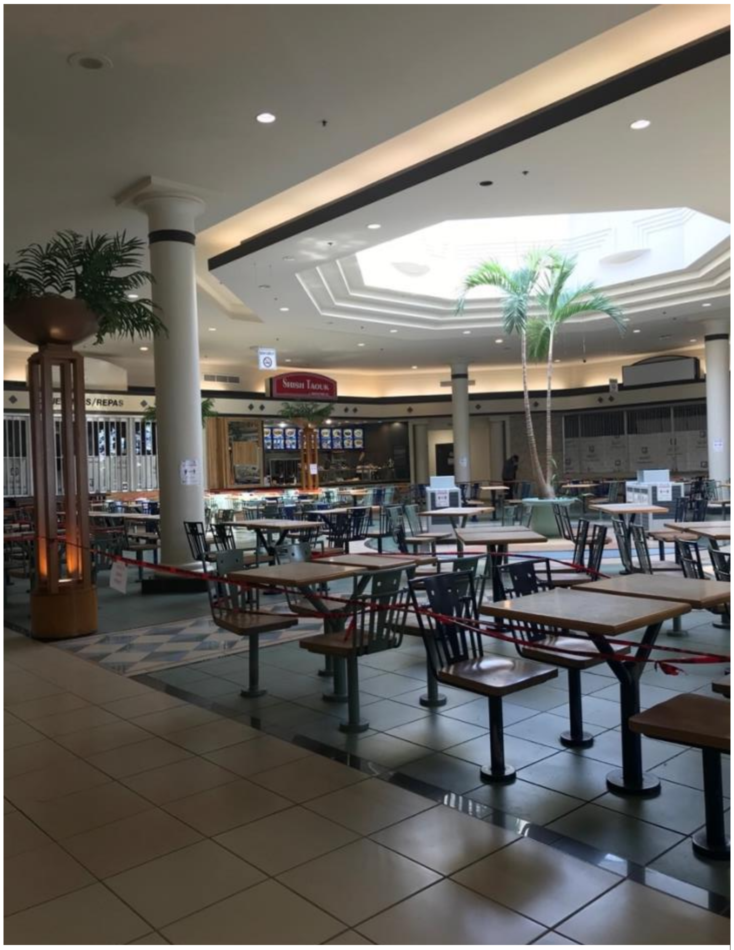

Figure 6: Galeries Laurentides, 2021. Photographed by the author.

Kowinski writes about the exhausted feeling that he experienced after exploring mall after mall, a feeling he called "mall-aise."[509] "Malls affect people," he continues, "they're designed to. But in some ways, either by their nature or by a side effect caused by their main ingredients, they do things to people that people are unaware of or don't understand, but if they knew or understood, they probably wouldn't like it."[510] As I conclude, I suspect my readers (as well as myself, the researcher) are experiencing this "mall-aise." To dissect the mall is to engage in a type of cynicism and defeatism that is arduous. There is so much that can be discovered, said and inferred about shopping centers, and I have only begun to scratch the surface.

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[508] Phillips and Lorenz, "'Dumb Money' Is on GameStop, and It's Beating Wall Street at Its Own Game," 2021.
[509] Kowinski, *The Malling of America,* 338.
[510] Ibid., 338.

It is easy to disregard shopping malls, not only because they are increasingly shuttering, but also because they seem to be superficially barren of any historical significance. I hope that this thesis has effectively historicized the shopping mall and that it has demonstrated that malls have been, since their inception, loaded with cultural and socio-political meaning, and this is largely due to the ways in which it has been appropriated by its patrons (and, by extension, its online mourners). Shopping centers and teenagers are twentieth-century inventions; they are both concepts that have been organized around a commodified society, around an economy fortified by consumption. In the late twentieth century, consumption and culture were mutually reinforced terms, and both teenagers and the shopping malls they patronized demonstrated the impossibility of disentangling the two. That's Mall, folks.

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