



THE UNACCEPTABLE *FLANEUR*

The shopping mall as a teenage hangout

**HUGH MATTHEWS, MARK TAYLOR,
BARRY PERCY-SMITH AND
MELANIE LIMB**
University College Northampton

Key words:
cultural politics of place, hanging out,
shopping mall, teenagers, thirdspace

Mailing address:
Hugh Matthews
Centre for Children and Youth, University
College Northampton, Park Campus,
Northampton NN2 7AL, UK
[email:
hugh.matthews@northampton.ac.uk]

Childhood [0907-5682(200008)7:3]
Copyright © 2000 SAGE Publications
(London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi)
Vol. 7(3): 279-294; 013711

This article considers the importance of the shopping mall to a group of young people living in the East Midlands of the UK. It shows that for many young people the mall provides a convenient place for hanging out. Yet their occupancy of this setting is not unproblematic. Many adults, for example, perceive the public and visible presence of young people as uncomfortable and inappropriate. Despite constant attempts to move them on, however, young people stubbornly remain within the mall asserting a right of presence. In order to (re)interpret these behaviours (both that of teenager and adult), the study draws upon the new literature of the cultural politics of difference and identity. It suggests that through their various attempts to assert a right of presence, young people assume the mantle of the hybrid. Here, young people are no longer child, nor quite adult. By locating themselves in settings that transgress and so question the spatial hegemony of adulthood, young people journey into the interstitial territory of 'thirdspace'. From this perspective the mall assumes a cultural importance over and above its functional form.

Introduction

Within late modernity, boundaries between adults and children have become even more contested. Children, today, are 'less subsumed within an adult world of discipline and control', partly because adults are more likely to recognize them 'as able, willing and reliable contributors within their own significant social contexts', albeit home and school, and partly because children themselves are more likely to think in terms of competencies and capabilities rather than subordination (Wyness, 2000: 1). Hengst (1987: 74), in a slightly different vein, suggests that childhood is gradually becoming liquidated because 'society is invading all those areas in which formerly children

had been trained to meet the qualitatively different demands of adulthood'. A consequence is that the gap between generations is constantly narrowing and 'the processes of upbringing . . . increasingly lose their effectiveness'. In essence, children are becoming less child-like, as links with parents have been weakened, and through actions that contest parental control and responsibility.

For many adults, however, social ambiguity of this kind provides contexts with which they find difficulty in coming to terms, especially beyond the home and school, for it fundamentally challenges what the Stainton-Rogers have termed the 'masonry of the mature' (Stainton-Rogers and Stainton-Rogers, 1992: 146). Wyness (2000: 24) describes how this conception rests on 'the notion of a child as a fixed material object with little or no social status'. From this viewpoint the child is invisible and 'childhood is a transitional phase which is only complete once children enter adulthood'. In effect, children are little more than adults-in-waiting or less-than-adult (Matthews and Limb, 1999) and 'not part of the social world that counts' (Wyness, 2000: 24). As adulthood is approached, so children become progressively more visible and more adult-like, and a process of social integration begins. However, with the 'alleged loss of authority and abdication of responsibility within families', children are being propelled into situations where their presence is uncomfortable for many adults (Murray, 1990) and where they are perceived to be less than ready. Wyness (2000: 24) colourfully suggests that here 'we are presented with the image of the man-child, the demonic precocious deviant who has become all too readily visible. "Visibility" . . . signifies a problem for society.' Discomfort is all the more acute given the way that children are still positioned on (or rather 'off') the political and social policy agenda. Despite the proclamations of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Children Act (1989),¹ children form a structurally disenfranchised group within society, especially so given that 'institutions and politicians are by and large not accountable to children' (Wyness, 2000: 25). Accordingly, children are rarely provided with opportunities to make their voice heard and they are not expected to have a claim within the public realm (Matthews and Limb, 1998; Matthews et al., 1998, 1999a).

While the new sociology focuses on how these boundary disputes are contested in social space (James et al., 1998; Jenks, 1996), geographers have begun to explore their spatial outpourings. Valentine (1996a, 1996b, 1999), for example, considers how managing children's use of places is a constant 'headache' for most parents. While parents are torn between wanting to protect their children from danger and wishing to give them increasing independence, children are seemingly becoming keener to claim their autonomy, especially in the face of peer pressure 'to "play" outside the home, further, longer and later' (Valentine, 1999: 137). Sibley (1995) observes how the way in which space is organized is deeply invested with cultural values. He

suggests that the regulation of space by adults is closely associated with the social production of identities in young people. By defining limits and drawing boundaries based upon age-related assumptions, adults attempt to shape and command the process of growing up. Where it is acceptable to be and what is meant by 'out-of-bounds' are socially constructed. Massey (1998) notes that this spatiality of childhood is mapped by differing rationales. Some age lines are drawn for *control*, so playgrounds are perceived as acceptable and safe places for toddlers at particular times of the day but deemed as unacceptable places for teenagers, especially during the evening when unregulated by the adult gaze (Matthews, 1995; Sibley, 1995). Others are drawn for (moral) *protection*, such as the age limits that define entry into places serving alcohol and showing certain sorts of films. Whether for protection or control, Qvortrup et al. (1994) suggest that young people are increasingly becoming confined to acceptable 'islands' by adults and so are spatially outlawed within society. In effect, adults have (re)defined the public domain as their own private space (Valentine, 1996a), where children have no right of presence. It is when they are out and about that young people are frequently defined as a problem. Their visibility in public places is often seen as discrepant and undesirable. Young people, here, are a polluting presence, because by congregating together they are seen to be challenging the hegemony of adult ownership of public space. Children have no place on the landscape.

Elsewhere (Matthews et al., 1998, 1999b, 2000), we have considered the importance of outdoor places in the lives of young people. We use the term 'the street' as a metaphor for all public outdoor places where children are found, such as roads, cul-de-sacs, alleyways, walkways, shopping areas, car parks, vacant plots and derelict sites. We have noted how older children, especially teenagers, frequently use the street as an important social venue. The street affords opportunities away from the adult gaze, where young people, devoid of other meeting places, retain some autonomy over space. To these young people the street constitutes an important cultural setting, a lived space where they can affirm their own identity and celebrate their feelings of belonging. 'In essence, these places are "won out" from the fabric of adult society, but are always in constant threat of being reclaimed' (Matthews et al., 2000).

We see considerable synergy here, when observing young people on the street, with Bhabha's (1994) observations on cultural oppression. Bhabha is concerned with what happens when people from different cultures meet and learn about their different traditions, prejudices and assumptions. Historically, this has happened when one group of people or country colonizes another. Conquest frequently leads to oppression, but it can lead to creative resistance. Bhabha (1994: 219) introduces the concept of 'hybridization' to describe 'a particular intersection of cultural knowledge that emerges in a negotiation of authority and power'. He suggests how in the history of

colonized peoples, they often become active agents rather than passive victims. 'Hybridity is a fraught, anxious and ambivalent condition. It is about how you survive, how you try to produce a sense of agency or identity in situations in which you are continually having to deal with the symbols of power and authority.' We liken young people on the street to Bhabha's notion of 'the oppressed', a group caught between two cultures, yet constantly asserting their right to autonomy and independence. In this sense, the street can be regarded as an interstitial space, a terrain between childhood and adulthood, 'where strategies for elaborating selfhood, whether singular or communal, that initiate new signs of identity' (Bhabha, 1994: 1) are continually being contested. When out and about on the street young people are 'the hybrid', a group in-between, 'neither One [adult] nor the Other [child], but something else besides'. From this perspective the street becomes a 'thirdspace', a dynamic zone of tension and discontinuity where the newness of hybrid identities can be articulated (Rose, 1995).

In this article, we consider young people's use of a particular type of street site where boundary disputes between adults and children are common, the shopping mall. We suggest that these temples of mass consumption constitute an important cultural space for young people that defines a kind of thirdspace. We recognize, however, that the mall is a special kind of 'street' setting, a delimited, overseen and regulated place that is far removed from the anarchic voids that comprise many outdoor environments. The implicit nature of the mall, with its effect of panoptic surveillance, defines a 'safety' that is seldom experienced elsewhere when young people are out and about. First, we briefly examine the findings from a number of studies that have considered how young people use these places and then discuss the results from a detailed survey of young people 'hanging around' in five shopping malls in the East Midlands (UK). In so doing, we draw heavily upon the views and expressions of the young people themselves in order to get as close as possible to their worlds of experience.

In titling this article we have drawn upon the notion of the *flâneur*. Benjamin (1973) employs this concept in his critique of the 19th-century poet Charles Baudelaire. The *flâneur* is the stroller or the window shopper who came into existence with the development of the Paris arcades during the 1840s. Benjamin describes how the glass covered arcades with their elegant shops represented miniature worlds, 'where the boulevard had been made into an interior and the *flâneur* found a particular dwelling place' (Brooker, 1999: 84). Wolff (1994) has further re-examined the concept with respect to women's place in the city. She notes how the *flâneur* is essentially a male figure leading the female *flâneur*, the *flâneuse*, to be seen as an invisible or an unacceptable figure. Like the poet, Benjamin suggests that the *flâneur* while being 'in' was never 'of' the urban mass, at best only a spectator of the throng. The *flâneuse*, therefore stands even more removed, 'unattended and unowned, although chaperoned and regulated' (Wilson, 1995: 61).

We extend this analogy to those young people who ‘hang out’ in shopping malls. We are suggesting that like the *flaneur/flaneuse* their presence ‘in’ these places, although highly visible and contained, is frequently viewed as unacceptable, such that they are rarely ‘of’ the (adult) shopping crowd.

Young people and shopping malls

Although there is a growing genre that considers various aspects of the ‘mall of society’ (Kowinski, 1985; Miller et al., 1998; Shields, 1989), few studies have looked carefully at how young people ‘see’ and experience these places. Working in California during the mid-1980s, Anthony’s (1985) observations provide a starting point. She noted that many young people spent a great deal of time hanging out in malls. In her study of suburban Los Angeles she found that a large proportion of her sample visited the mall at least once a week, with an average stay being from 3 to 5 hours. When there, most of the time was spent chatting, watching or standing around. The mall provided a place where young people could enjoy a ‘respite from the treadmill between home and school’ (Anthony, 1985: 311) and develop their own social life. Lewis (1989) focused his attention on these regular users. He identified a group of ‘core kids’, which he termed ‘rats’ (boys) and ‘bunnies’ (girls), who attended a New England shopping mall on a daily basis. For these young people the mall was a social magnet that drew them away from the hassles encountered at home and school towards a haven of warmth and safety. He describes the mall as a kind of ‘neutral ground’, a place where congregation was possible and where these young people were able to ‘create a fragile but mutually supportive community of kind’ (Lewis, 1989: 881). However, when young people are together in a shopping mall their presence is often interpreted as discrepant. In his study of the massive West Edmonton shopping mall, Shields (1989) considers the moral code of well-ordered consumption that frequently places young people beyond the pale. He identifies an acceptable form of strolling (‘flanerie’) that young people must perfect if they are not to be targeted by security guards. Shields notes that the young people in the West Edmonton mall must observe ‘bourgeois forms and norms of social docility and conservatism both in dress and action’ (Shields, 1989: 160) if they are not to be moved on. Beyond these studies, there are few other systematic accounts of young people’s experiences of shopping malls, particularly in the UK. Watt and Stenson (1998), for example, make only passing reference to the groups of young people hanging out in the mall at Thamestown. Nonetheless, they draw attention to the fluidity of these groupings, observing how ‘groups would form, break up, regroup with different members, all propelled along by the attempts of the security guards to keep the young people on the move and to at least look like bona fide shoppers’ (Watt and Stenson, 1989: 255). In all of these accounts, however, what is missing are the voices of the young people themselves. In the next section

we describe a survey undertaken with young people that attempts to listen to what young people have to say about their experience of mall life.

Methodology

The study was undertaken in five shopping malls in the East Midlands² of the UK. In each case self-completed questionnaires and taped discussions were carried out with groups of young people seen to be hanging out in the mall. All of the interviewers were registered outreach youth workers. We targeted young people aged 9–16 years and more than 400 respondents took part in the survey (Table 1). In the largest mall, the Grosvenor Centre, we carried out informal interviews with another 32 young people (Table 2). While it was not possible to gain parental consent from the young people prior to their participation, we asked each person if we could write to their parents informing them about the project. If the parents had objected to their child's participation it would have been possible to withdraw that child's contribution. No parents did object, but we did find that not all of the young people (about 7 percent) wanted us to inform their parents and we respected their feelings in this matter.

Tables 1 and 2 reveal a skewed age and sex distribution. The majority of those taking part were aged 12–16 years and largely comprise groups of young girls. While the overrepresentation of 12- to 16-year-olds provides a reasonably accurate reflection of the age groups most seen to be hanging out in the mall, the gender imbalance was an outcome of a higher refusal rate among boys when invited to take part in the survey.

In presenting the results we draw attention to three recurrent themes: the mall as a teenage hangout; the mall as a zone of conflict; and the mall as a cultural boundary zone. Our work is grounded upon a conviction that there is no such thing as 'the child', nor is there a universal experience that can be termed 'childhood'. We emphasize the importance of difference and diversity among young people and the multiple realities that define how each person encounters place and space (Matthews and Limb, 1999). As such, our results provide a mere glimpse into the social complexities of mall life and many more studies are needed if a clearer representation is to emerge.

Results

The mall as a teenage hangout

A recurrent dilemma commonly faced by young people looking for a place to be together in postmodern societies is that they often have nowhere else to go except to outdoor public spaces and these places are often situated 'so that their use (by young people) conflicts with the interests of other groups' (Lieberg, 1995: 721). Whereas adults can withdraw to the confines of their home, workplace, pub or club, teenagers have no obvious right to these

Table 1 Age and sex distribution: self-complete questionnaires (frequencies)

<i>Age</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
9	1	7	8	2
10	4	7	11	3
11	10	24	34	8
12	27	32	59	15
13	27	36	63	16
14	20	64	84	21
15	22	38	60	15
16	28	27	55	14
Missing values	18	12	30	6
Total			404	–
Percentage	38	62	–	100

Table 2 Age and sex distribution: informal interviews (frequencies)

<i>Age</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
12	1	3
13	3	6
14	2	6
15	3	4
16	–	4

places. Sibley (1995) has drawn attention to how the home, in particular, is often an unsatisfactory social environment for young people, where boundary disputes between children and adults are common. Katz (1998), too, acknowledges that increasingly young people are faced with decreasing choice and fewer opportunities of where they can go, without adult interference. She describes an eroding ecology of youth and childhood, an outcome of the ‘pernicious effects created by the decay and outright elimination of public environments for outdoor play or “hanging out” ’ (Katz, 1998: 135). Lieberg (1995) distinguishes two kinds of social realm currently available to young people: places of retreat and places of social interaction. Each type of place is imbued with social meaning. Places of retreat are ‘backstage’ places, areas away from the adult gaze, where teenagers can pull back and withdraw from the adult world to be with their own peers, that is ‘the backyards, stairwells, basements, parking lots, or other isolated places’ (Lieberg, 1995: 722). Places of interaction, on the other hand, are ‘on stage’, where young people are on display and out and about to see and to be seen by others. Typically,

Table 3 What young people like about shopping malls (in percentages)

Place to meet friends	76
Good place to shop	54
Warm and dry	40
Place to sit/stand	32
Lots to do	28
Watch people	14
Safe	13
Meet new friends	11
Bright lights	6

the shopping mall acts a convenient social theatre providing an important social venue for young people.

Of those interviewed, 90 percent visited the shopping mall at least once a week and 18 percent visited every day. Daily visits increased with age, such that 31 percent of 16-year-olds declared themselves as regulars. Saturday was the most likely day for a visit among those who were not daily users. On average, young people would stay for nearly 4 hours at the mall before moving on.

When asked to give reasons as to what they liked about a shopping mall (Table 3), most young people suggested that it was a warm, dry place (40 percent) where they could stand or sit (32 percent) and meet up with their friends (76 percent). Anthony (1985) refers to the 'magic of the mall' and how teenagers are pulled by its social and physical qualities. In discussion, there was a strong sense that the mall was a place of excitement, where special things happened.

We hang around a lot here . . . a group of us, usually three or four of us . . . its cool . . . there's always something . . . there's a buzz when we stand here. (Girl aged 13, Grosvenor Centre)

It's better here than out there, its always bright and warm in here . . . good place to be really . . . can sit and watch the world go by . . . wait for things to happen. (Girl aged 14, Grosvenor Centre)

Young people maximized the 'buzz' by hanging out in those parts of the mall where there was continual flux, lots of noise and a rolling stream of people. Balconies, lifts and escalators provided common meeting places, where young people could alternate their attention between members of their own group and the lively surroundings. Music, mirrors and flashing lights added to the experience.

I like it here [outside HMV music shop] . . . we can listen to the music, chat with each other . . . see our friends . . . two or three of us will turn up here and soon there'll be five maybe more of us . . . we know that we will see someone we know. (Girl aged 15, Grosvenor Centre)

Table 4 Local gang names

Goldings Crew, Thorplands Crew, Abington Crew, Abbey Crew
Standens Barn Crew, Flygal Crew, HMV Crew
Bad Boys, Rude Boys
The Swinging Sisters, Stanionettes
Chase Gang, Gang Bang
Anthill Mob, Douglas Mob, Pluto Mob
Five, Two Eleven, Threes

For these young people the shopping mall is a setting of social inclusion, a convenient and accessible meeting point where they can gather to assert their sense of belonging and group membership. In their accounts there was a strong sense that hanging around with friends in a shopping mall confers a certain social credibility.

It's good here cos you can see what's going on . . . you know, who's going around with each other, catch up on the gossip . . . chill out together . . . you know, working out the moves. (Boy aged 15)

Yeah, we're always here . . . our mob. (Girl aged 14, Grosvenor Centre)

We meets here and then moves on. What's good is that you don't get bored. There's always someone to talk to, somebody to see . . . We can check out the clothes and that too . . . See what's new . . . see the latest fashion . . . can't afford none of it . . . just look and that. (Girl aged 13, Grosvenor Centre)

When hanging about the mall young people almost always associated together within a group. There was a considerable dynamic to these groups, both in size and movement. Through observation we noted how teenagers would congregate together, then break away into smaller groups and move on to join others in another part of the mall as if taking part in scripted social choreography. Group members were usually of about the same age, but whereas all-boy groups of about five to six members were common, most of the girls were found either in mixed groups or in smaller groups of two to three members. Rarely did any group exceed six to seven members. One-fifth of those interviewed identified their group as a local gang, 'crew' or 'mob'. Evocative names were often used to distinguish one group from another (Table 4).

I come on my way home from school . . . have a can and a bun . . . have a laugh . . . with me mates. . . . I usually come with D who lives by me . . . it's really good when it's cold and wet outside, 'cos you can stand around, pull some girls and all that, mess about . . . having a laugh no trouble like. . . . We're the Goldings Crew. . . . Always up for it. (Boy aged 15, Grosvenor Centre)

Me C, N and K come down here nearly every Saturday . . . (Interviewer: Does your group have a name?) Yeah. We're the 'Swinging Sisters' (altogether). (Group of four girls, all aged 14, Grosvenor Centre)

We have noted elsewhere (Matthews et al., 2000) how being together when outdoors confers a feeling of safety, a view particularly expressed, in this case, by girls and younger children. When interviewed, 42 percent of girls and 38 percent of 9- to 10-year-olds suggested that the shopping mall was a safe place in which to hang out. Similar findings are reported by Pearce (1996) in her study of teenage girls in the east of London and by Watt and Stenson (1998) in their work within Thamestown.

It's really safe . . . no hassle, no traffic, older kids don't do anything to you . . . there's plenty of people around. (Boy aged 12, Grosvenor Centre)

You don't have to worry around here . . . there's always someone passing by like . . . me sister works in Boots, sometimes I look out for her. (Girl aged 13, Grosvenor Centre)

The shopping mall, however, is very different to the environment afforded by most local outdoor places. For example, both Corrigan (1979) and Valentine (1996b) have noted how, for many young people, public space becomes (re)constructed as their own private space, especially with the retreat of adults after dark. Hanging out together in the local neighbourhood provides security, freedom and social opportunity at times and in spaces that are largely unfettered by adults. For these reasons most 'streets' can be likened to (semi-)autonomous space or the 'stage' where young people attempt to play out their social life while maximizing their informal control (Matthews et al., 2000). In contrast, when in the shopping mall young people are never out of sight. Malls are places of scrutiny and the geography of the mall, with its open spaces, bright lights and busy walkways assures visibility and exposes their presence. In the next section we consider some of the problems that ensue through exposure of this kind.

The mall as a zone of conflict

Shopping malls have been identified as an important site for young people to mix socially and to develop their own identities. They are also places where the values of consumerism define the mainstream. For young people with limited resources malls are often contradictory places. On the one hand, they represent the images and consumption to which many young people aspire; on the other, much of what is available is out of reach and underlines their marginality within society. When young people gather in shopping malls their presence is often deemed to be unacceptable, partly because these places are commonly interpreted to be an extension of the public realm of adults (in which young people have no place when adults are around) and partly because their behaviour is perceived to be at odds with the norm. The hiring of private security guards and the use of surveillance cameras ensures a moral regulation of public space that controls both access and behaviour and those who do not belong are moved on (Fyfe and Bannister, 1996). Rose (1991) and Breitbart (1998) suggest that the continual growth of privately managed public spaces of this kind is symptomatic of a trend that attempts

to remove all young people from the street, 'delimit their geography and enforce their invisibility' (Breitbart, 1998: 307).

Through attempts by adults to define and regulate the mall for their own purposes, collisions and conflicts with young people are commonplace. From our survey, nearly half (46 percent) of those interviewed had at some time been asked to move on. The proportion was higher for boys (57 percent) than for girls (39 percent). Regulation of this kind was mostly carried out by security guards (89 percent), but also included shopkeepers (30 percent), police (20 percent) and vigilant adults (14 percent).

Most instances of being moved on occurred when young people were hanging out in those places that were perceived to be for movement and flux, even though design afforded opportunity and space for small groups to gather.

We were moved the other day . . . just chatting and that, looking over the balcony over there . . . we were told that we can't stand there as we were blocking the way, yet there was plenty of space for people to pass. (Girl aged 15, Grosvenor Centre)

I'd only just turned up . . . I saw me mates sitting around outside HMV . . . went across and this security geezer comes up and tells us we got to go . . . we weren't doing nothing . . . having a fag . . . we says why? He says just get going. (Boy aged 15, Grosvenor Centre)

On other occasions, young people were moved on when their behaviour was seen to be out of keeping with the purpose of the particular setting. For example, we observed in one of the malls a group of teenagers being moved when sitting on the wall of an indoor fountain. Around the fountain there were several benches, but elderly adults had taken these. We asked members of the group what had just happened:

He says that we can only sit on the benches, what a tw(!) . . . but we can't sit there with those grannies there (Girl aged 14, Newlands)

Even when not being asked to move on, many young people felt that they were under constant surveillance (70 percent).³ This feeling was common among boys (73 percent) and girls (69 percent). When asked why they were being watched, answers highlighted feelings of social exclusion and of being outsiders within the public realm. Reasons ranged across 'they think we'll steal something/are shoplifters' (30 percent), 'we're young' (14 percent), 'to make sure we behave' (10 percent), 'they think we're bad', 'they think we're loud' and 'they suspect us'. It is not surprising that young people's reactions included feelings of being 'angry, bad, not trusted, like a criminal, stupid, dodgy, paranoid, judged, guilty, insecure and victimized'. Two accounts distil some of these negative perceptions and experiences.

When we enter a shop they think we're shoplifters . . . I was trying on some clothes in T.S. when one of the assistants comes up all high and mighty like and asks me have I got any money and if so, to prove it . . . what a b(!) nerve . . . it is as if they are forcing you to buy something. (Girl, aged 14, Grosvenor Centre)

They make you feel that you do not belong, that you should be outside. (Boy aged 14, Newlands)

The mall as a cultural boundary zone

In this section we discuss why, despite hassle and confrontation, young people continue to assert their right of presence in the mall. We use the concept of thirdspace to make sense of young people's place use. According to Soja (1996), those 'who are territorially subjugated by the workings of hegemonic power have two inherent choices: either accept their imposed differentiation and division, making the best of it; or mobilise . . . and struggle against this power-filled imposition' (Soja, 1996: 87). Both of these choices are inherently spatial and inevitably result in 'division, containment and struggle'. Foucault (1982) had earlier suggested that cultural politics of this kind can be both oppressive and enabling, 'filled not only with authoritarian perils but also with possibilities for community, resistance and emancipatory change' (Soja, 1996: 87). As subalterns within adult society, young people have responded in both of these ways to their sociospatial marginalization. On the one hand, their withdrawal to the street after dark and to other backstage places without adults can be interpreted as a spatial concretization of their lack of choice. Here, young people are pushed into settings that have been abandoned by adults and their presence further labels them as 'outsiders'. On the other hand, young people's occupancy of some settings, such as the mall, can be interpreted as counterhegemonic or a manifestation of a cultural politic that challenges their marginality. From this perspective the mall becomes a symbolic site of contest and resistance, a place infused through and through with the cultural trappings of thirdspace. When there, young people are asserting the right of the 'hybrid', no longer child but not quite adult, to be active agents in the spatiality of place. By stubbornly hanging on, so these young people begin to test the borders of identity.

The ideas of bell hooks (1989, 1990) further add to these observations. Her essays on the cultural politics of difference and identity examine the ways in which cultural groupings (notably African-Americans) choose to develop and envelop symbolic spaces where they can begin a process of 'revision' that both contests their marginality and disputes, disorders, and disrupts the boundaries of power. hooks (1990) examines how these journeys into thirdspace are routed along paths that push against the borders of oppression and domination and define a 'profound edge' (hooks, 1990: 149) of resistance along the margin. From this perspective the shopping mall becomes both a site of defiance and of 'openness and opportunity', a radical location where young people can attempt to redefine their position in both cultural and geographical space. Hanging out together in the shopping mall can thus be interpreted as the spatiality of inclusion not of exclusion, a behaviour that connects and combines young people into 'polycentric communities of identity and resistance' (Soja, 1996: 99).

In this vein, our survey uncovered a range of strategies that were used by young people when faced with the demand to move on. The most common strategy was to move to a different part of the mall (45 percent) or to leave then return after a short period (31 percent). Only a small minority (9 percent) felt sufficiently intimidated not to return.

See that geezer [a security guard], he picks on us. What a prat! We don't go though. If he says get going or something, then we smooch around a bit until we find somewhere else where he can't see us . . . we won't leave until we wants to go. (Boy aged 15, Grosvenor Centre)

Young people found it difficult to rationalize why they were being targeted in this way. We noted a strong sense of injustice and incredulity as to why they were being excluded matched by an insistence on their right to these spaces.

Why pick on us? It's not fair, we're not doing any harm . . . not troublemakers. Why can't we meet here? Look at them there . . . they're standing and talking [pointing to two adult couples] . . . why don't they get picked on? We have a right to be here like anyone else. (Girl aged 14, Newlands)

Why should we go? . . . we're human too. (Girl aged 16, Grosvenor Centre)

Lieberg (1995) provides an additional insight into young people's tenacious occupancy of these sites. For him the mall is symbolic of a space outside place. 'While one is in a place in a physical sense, the . . . spatial construction and organisation refers to other places and other worlds' (Lieberg, 1995: 737). Through the intense commercialization of the mall, teenagers have access to cultures and values that supersede the parochial. The mall symbolizes the modern and the exciting and by hanging out there teenagers are demonstrating an awareness of an international (youth) culture that (re)invigorates their attempts to be counted as visible and full members of society.

In their responses too, there was a strong sense of wanting to belong. When asked about how they would change a shopping mall, suggestions included providing more places where young people could hang out without fear of being moved on (40 percent) and encouraging shopkeepers to be more tolerant of their presence (27 percent). Only 3 percent suggested removing or reducing the number of security guards, the vast majority valuing the policing of place. For these young people, moral regulation and control was seen to be an acceptable part of that society to which they sought access and membership.

By valuing the security afforded by the mall, these young people are perhaps hinting at a larger issue, one that relates to their underlying relationship with and continued dependence on adults. From this perspective the panopticon of the adult gaze provides a safety net that enables young people to develop their identity, individuality and even promulgate acts of rebellion, without real danger. In so doing, the mall becomes the liminal space of the

hybrid, a place where young people can safely challenge the ‘oppressors’ (adults) while casting aside the trappings of niceness, servility and politeness that define the myth of the ‘proper’ child as envisaged by many adults.

Conclusion

In this article we have considered the importance of the shopping mall to a group of young people living in the East Midlands of the UK. We have shown that for many young people the mall provides a convenient meeting place where they can hang out together, within a ‘bright’ and safe environment. Yet their occupancy of this setting is not unproblematic. Like the *flâneur* of history, many adults, for example, perceive the public and visible presence of young people, especially in a site that is beyond the home and school, as uncomfortable and inappropriate. Despite constant attempts to move them on, however, young people stubbornly remain within the mall asserting a right of presence.

In order to (re)interpret these behaviours (both that of teenager and adult) we have drawn upon the new literature of the cultural politics of difference and identity. We suggest that through their various attempts to assert a right of presence, both ‘backstage’ and ‘on stage’, young people assume the mantle of the hybrid. Here, young people are no longer child, living within the safe haven of the home, nor quite adult, with powers to move freely and unassailably within the public domain. By locating themselves in settings that transgress and so question the spatial hegemony of adulthood, young people journey into the interstitial territory of thirdspace. From this perspective the mall assumes a cultural importance over and above its functional form. In this scenario the mall is both ‘a real and imagined space’ (Soja, 1996), a lived place where young people, through their shared subjectivities, contest and challenge their marginality. Like hooks (1990), in her observations on people of colour, we contend that through their collective action of being together young people within the mall are often engaged in a process of ‘counter-hegemonic cultural production’ that both challenges and revises what is meant by being ‘out of place’ (hooks, 1990: 1–2). By not giving way, young people carve out a cultural space that both redefines their position within society and continues to reposition the boundaries between adults and children.

Notes

We are grateful to all the young people who participated in our surveys and to Gemma Hartop whose assistance in data collection was invaluable. Chris Philo, Mike Wyness and Fiona Smith all generously contributed to the shaping of this article. The project was funded by a grant from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) ‘Children 5–16: Growing into the 21st Century Research Programme’ (award No. L129251031).

1. Children Act (1989) or England and Wales requires local authorities (and courts) to consider the wishes and feelings of children when making decisions concerning their welfare.
2. The malls were all located in Northamptonshire and were the Grosvenor Centre, Northampton; Weston Favell Centre, Northampton; Newlands, Kettering; Corby Centre, Corby; and Swansgate, Wellingborough. The Corby Centre was a covered mall not an indoor shopping area.
3. These feelings of being excluded and watched were not universal. In our survey 56 percent of young people had not been moved on and 30 percent did not feel that they were under surveillance. These observations emphasize the need to recognize the multiple realities of young people's lives and how the same setting may offer a range of different possibilities, opportunities and constraints.

References

- Anthony, K.H. (1985) 'The Shopping Mall: A Teenage Hangout', *Adolescence* 20(78): 307–12.
- Benjamin, W. (1973) *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. London: New Left Books.
- Bhabha, H. (1994) *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Breitbart, M. (1998) '“Dana” Mystical Tunnel: Young People's Designs for Survival and Change in the City', in T. Skelton and G. Valentine (eds) *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures*, pp. 305–27. London: Routledge.
- Brooker, P. (1999) *A Concise Glossary of Cultural Theory*. London: Arnold.
- Corrigan, P. (1979) *Schooling the Smash Street Kids*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Foucault, M. (1982) 'Afterword: The Subject and Power', in H. Dreyfus and P. Rainbow (eds) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, pp. 208–26. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Fyfe, N. and J. Bannister (1996) 'City Watching: Closed Circuit Television Surveillance in Public Spaces', *Area* 28(1): 37–46.
- Hengst, H. (1987) 'The Liquidation of Childhood: An Objective Tendency', *International Journal of Sociology* 17: 58–80.
- hooks, b. (1989) *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations*. New York: Routledge.
- hooks, b. (1990) *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- James, A., C. Jenks and A. Prout (1998) *Theorizing Childhood*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Jenks, C. (1996) *Childhood*. London: Routledge.
- Katz, C. (1998) 'Disintegrating Developments: Global Economic Restructuring and the Eroding Ecologies of Youth', in T. Skelton and G. Valentine (eds) *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures*, pp. 130–44. London: Routledge.
- Kowinski, W.S. (1985) *The Malling of America: An Inside Look at the Great Consumer Paradise*. New York: William Morrow.
- Lewis, G.H. (1989) 'Rats and Bunnies: Core Kids in an American Mall', *Adolescence* 24(96): 881–9.
- Lieberg, M. (1995) 'Teenagers and Public Space', *Communication Research* 22(6): 720–44.
- Massey, D. (1998) 'The Spatial Construction of Youth Cultures', in T. Skelton and G. Valentine (eds) *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures*, pp. 121–9. London: Routledge.
- Matthews, H. (1995) 'Living on the Edge: Children as Outsiders', *Tijdschrift voor Economische et Sociale Geografie* 89: 123–202.
- Matthews, H. and M. Limb (1998) 'The Right to Say: The Development of Youth Councils/Forums in the UK', *Area* 30: 66–78.
- Matthews, H. and M. Limb (1999) 'Defining an Agenda for the Geography of Children', *Progress in Human Geography* 23(1): 61–90.

- Matthews, H., M. Limb, L. Harrison and M. Taylor (1998) 'Local Places and the Political Engagement of Young People', *Youth and Policy* 62(4): 16–30.
- Matthews, H., M. Limb and M. Taylor (1999a) 'Young People's Participation and Representation in Society', *Geoforum* 30: 135–44
- Matthews, H., M. Limb and M. Taylor (1999b) 'Reclaiming the Street: the Discourse of Curfew', *Environment and Planning, A* 31(10): 1713–30.
- Matthews, H., M. Limb and M. Taylor (2000) 'Reclaiming the Street: Class, Gender and Public Space', in S. Holloway and G. Valentine (eds) *Children's Geographies: Living, Playing, Learning and Transforming Everyday Worlds*, pp. 63–79. London: Routledge.
- Miller, D., P. Jackson, N. Thrift, B. Holbrook and M. Rowlands (1998) *Shopping, Place and Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Murray, C. (1990) *The Emerging British Underclass*. London: Institute of Education Affairs.
- Pearce, J. (1996) 'Urban Youth Cultures: Gender and Spatial Forms', *Youth and Policy* 52(1): 1–11.
- Qvortrup, J., M. Bardy, G. Sgritta and H. Wintersberger (eds) (1994) *Childhood Matters: Social Theory, Practice and Politics*. Aldershot: Avebury.
- Rose, G. (1995) 'The Interstitial Perspective: A Review Essay on Homi Bhabha's The Location of Culture', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 13: 365–73.
- Rose, T. (1991) 'Fear of a Black Planet: Rap Music and Black Cultural Politics in the 1990s', *Journal of Negro Education* 60(3): 276–90.
- Shields, R. (1989) 'Social spatialization and the Built Environment: The West Edmonton Mall', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 7: 147–64.
- Sibley, D. (1995) *Geographies of Exclusion*. London: Routledge.
- Soja, E. (1996) *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Stainton-Rogers, W. and R. Stainton-Rogers (1992) *Stories of Childhood*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Valentine, G. (1996a) 'Children Should Be Seen and Not Heard?: The Production and Transgression of Adults' Public Space', *Urban Geography* 17(2): 202–20.
- Valentine, G. (1996b) 'Angels and Devils: Moral Landscapes of Childhood', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 14: 581–99.
- Valentine, G. (1999) "'Oh Please, Mum. Oh Please, Dad". Negotiating Children's Spatial Boundaries', in L. McKie, S. Bowlby and S. Gregory (eds) *Gender, Power and the Household*, pp. 137–54. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Watt, P. and K. Stenson (1998) 'The Street: It's a Bit Dodgy Around There. Safety, Danger, Ethnicity and Young People's Use of Public Space', in T. Skelton and G. Valentine (eds) *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures*, pp. 249–65. London: Routledge.
- Wilson, J. (1995) 'The Invisible Flaneur', in S. Watson and K. Gibson (eds) *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, pp. 58–79. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wolff, J. (1994) 'The Invisible Flaneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity', in *The Polity Reader of Cultural Theory*, pp. 200–9. Chatto and Windus.
- Wyness, M. (2000) *Contesting Childhood*. London: Falmer Press.

