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Walled Gardens: Privacy within Public Leisure Space Online and Offline

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Abstract

Social network sites are the new urban parks where people congregate, socialize and exercise leisure. Its web architectures however are being walled in, dictated by market systems and State ideologies. These cyber-enclosures are justified along the lines of privacy that garners protection, efficiency and functionality. There is significant concern for the potential irrevocable loss of the 'public' and 'open' character intended of internet infrastructures, fearing the fostering of social segregation, homogenization and corporatization of leisure and a loss of civic sense. This paper addresses these concerns by looking at contemporary material architectures that are shaping public social and leisure space, particularly gardens within gated communities and malls. It argues that for a comprehensive understanding on privacy and public leisure architectures, we need to recognize the parallels between these virtual and material spheres as social norms, values and laws permeate these boundaries.

Keywords: web architectures, social network sites, walled gardens, privacy, internet, information infrastructures

INTRODUCTION

Public leisure space both offline and online is becoming more privatized and commercialized in this current era. From the 19th century ideal of the urban park as a democratic and open space to gardens within gated-communities, there is a significant shift in public leisure from a common good to select enclosures for private pleasure (Grant & Mittelsteadt, 2004). Boundaries are

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drawn based on economic status, ethnicity, age, nationality and other factors, creating a more discriminatory definition of the 'public' (Vesselinov, Cazessus & Falk, 2007). These closed arenas are meant to serve as protective and safe havens to foster open leisure practices, and this discourse of fear serves to particularly shape spaces for youth engagement. The value for exclusivity in one's social networks is driving the all-inclusive architecting agenda of scaling gated environments to encompass work and play, consumption and production through partnering with other private sector entities (Low, 2003). Such realms are becoming more corporatized, converting public enactments and choices into a commodity. As these spaces become transnationally pervasive, deep concerns surface on implications of commercialized and privatized social space on public participation and civic sense.

In shifting our attention to the virtual leisure and social sphere, we can see common patterns. Social network sites (SNS) such as Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube are now recognized as dominant leisure spaces in this Web 2.0 era. There is a marked shift from open and public sites such as MySpace to now semi-private digital social grounds such as Facebook (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Niche SNS have emerged such as 'beautiful people' and 'black planet' that form exclusive hubs of leisure along lines of appearance, race, and other social indicators. Within Facebook, the popular 'liking' feature fosters a segregation of taste and lifestyle that filters these spaces to create a homogenous leisure platform which intends to foster "a common understanding of the world, a shared identity, a claim to inclusiveness, a consensus regarding the collective interest" (Livingstone, 2008, p.9). As people choose to socialize in such online spaces, the commercial potential of their interactions have attracted the private sector, extending their brands and marketing strategies to cater to this captured audience. Social information, the key currency here, is being filtered, curated and customized by platform designers driven by

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corporate need for targeted advertising, creating serious privacy concerns and a demand for State intervention (Milbery & Anderson, 2009). Basically, after almost a decade, SNS have matured, creating ‘walled gardens,’ spaces that are more privatized and exclusive, arguably moving away from its democratic, open, standardized and global expectations.

This commonality between online and offline leisure space is hardly a coincidence given that it is by now well-accepted that online space is not completely distinct and novel but is often in fact an extension and reproduction of offline social practice, influenced by similar ideologies. That said, while there is general theoretical acceptance, there are few studies that explicitly draw these linkages and associations for a wider understanding of the sociology of spatial practice, in this case, on the ideologies, tensions and actions surrounding the issue of privacy within public leisure space. While there are some critical and thought provoking discussions and studies within both the new media and the urban planning and geography fields in this area of focus, there are few studies that capitalize and connect them to gain a fresh and broader perspective. By weaving together the virtual and material realm, this paper strives to highlight some pervading and often implicit values and concerns dictating the design, structure and governance of these architectures.

Walled gardens serve as a useful and bonding metaphor between the digital and the material leisure space. We need to ask who is being protected by these ‘walls,’ what purposes do they serve, and which actors participate in constructing and sustaining such structures. In what ways are these walls ‘protective enclaves’, ‘safe enclosures’, “collapsed contexts” (boyd & Marwick, 2011) or ‘barriers’ to social practice? The blurring of the private and public realm challenge how we apply values of privacy to these spaces and how it affects the shaping of its architectures. To illustrate tensions and parallels between the digital and material dimension of

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public leisure space, this paper delves into specific avenues of concern regarding ‘walled gardens’ and its growing enclosures, namely, a) secluded social enclaves b) scaling of enclosures and c) protective playgrounds for the youth.

Here, privacy is seen through the lens of accessibility, choice, and ownership and illustrated through key architectural trends of public leisure space - gardens within gated communities, urban malls and community gardens. The intent is to allow for a cross-engagement of discourse between these fields to shed light on larger political/economic ideologies influencing notions of privacy in this digital and leisure age. To put it more dramatically, this helps unravel the “soul of cyberspace” (Kramer & Cook, 2004, p. 178) as trust and vulnerability become central to the gauging of the social conscience of public leisure space.

(Web) Architectures, ideologies, and the value of privacy

The notion of privacy has been and continues to be conceived in relation to space (Lessig, 2005). The focus on values within technical systems comes from a larger discipline of science, technology and society. Hoven and Weckert (2008) argue that there are different dimensions to consider when embedding values within web architectures, namely at the a) technical mode where designers strive to balance efficiency and functionality with the larger legal and political system of the State; the b) philosophical mode where questions of the origin and sources of values of the creators of technology are brought to question and the range of consequences are made explicit both at a technical and material level. Here, less emphasis is on the design of the space and more on the recognition of the nature of this designed space. This could lead to a means of rationalizing these decisions or critiquing for further change; and lastly, at the c) empirical mode where such experimental inquiry is essential to ascertain whether the design of a

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particular technical space embodies intended values.

Currently, the value of privacy is being fought on an ideological battlefield and its ramifications manifest in the shaping of architectures, both virtual and material. From a political economist position, there is belief that privacy within web architectures cannot be considered without looking at the broader capitalist power relations in our society (Brown & Blevins, 2008). These are posited as being shaped by corporate interests and thereby, hardly neutral. From a neoliberal perspective, privacy is viewed as a constraint on architecture, blockading free market ideals. From a libertarian point of view, the rules for privacy is not ad hoc and anarchic but rather its dynamism and flux is proof of the ingenuity of collective human action that performs through social norms, stigmas, peer pressure and reward systems (Lessig, 2005). As such, many online interactions are in fact “situated within protocols that operate in material space and possess spatiality that so far has been little explored” (p.23). While undoubtedly, the power of community can compellingly shift the direction of the Net towards a more open and democratic ideal, the forces of the State and corporate interest are always at play. After all, the Net since its onset has been viewed as a deeply valued property; hence several actors have a vested interest in the ways in which the ‘wilderness of cyberspace’ should be architected, zoned and managed. The dynamism of technical affordances of social media has accelerated the urgency for such conversations as with each affordance, there is real threat that social practice can be changed radically and irrevocably, particularly on how privacy is exercised, granted, and gained. One could view such affordances along the following dimensions (boyd & Marwick, 2011, p.7):

- Persistence: Digital expressions are automatically recorded and archived.
- Replicability: Digital content is easily duplicated
- Scalability: The potential visibility of digital content is great
- Searchability: Digital content is often accessible through search engines

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These new features raise the alarm for dystopic scholars who view these inventions as powerful tools of continuous Foucaultian surveillance in our daily lives, stimulating further architectures of control and management and naturalizing these boundaries of containment. This dystopic perspective positions such infrastructures as a means of ultimate territoriality and global imperialistic agendas spreading across domains. Hence the discourse on oppression, domination and neo-colonialism are evoked. However, the more utopic lens celebrates that with the advent of the World Wide Web, an opportunity to create a global community surfaces, possibly overcoming the age-old stranglehold of the nation state. This is reflected in one of the most important designs of the Web architecture, namely the URL (Jacob & Walsh, 2004). Basically, as a value and a construct, privacy has always been negotiated. It is understood that an act within a public arena does not necessitate that it be a public act. Perhaps a more useful way of looking at privacy is to view it as “contextual integrity,” bounded by boundaries of a) locatedness-physical and virtual b) relationships and networks and c) capital-social, cultural, informational, economic; “we do not have a dichotomy of two realms but a panoply of realms; something considered public in relation to one realm may be private in relation to another (Nissibaum, 2004, p.215).

We have come quite a ways from the declaration of independence of cyberspace where it was asserted to “keep your hands off the Internet” (Barlow, 1996). Spaces however continue to be encrypted through the making of rules of access and use of such ‘public’ property. As we find ourselves subject to more rules to abide by whereby, we volunteer to be regulated, there are as Greenleaf (2000) points out an essential characteristic of a vibrant architecture that one sees in both physical and virtual space, that being its ‘high plasticity.’ Here, flexibility is itself a value

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and plasticity can be inscribed in the planning stages of our environments, promising for a more responsive approach to changing value systems.

Walled Gardens: The growing enclosures of public leisure space

A ‘walled garden’ refers to a closed or exclusive set of information services provided for users. This is in contrast to giving consumers unrestricted access to applications and content. These spaces are differentiated from open/interoperable access ‘commons.’ In other words, a ‘walled garden’ is

a type of IP content service offered without access to the wider Internet: for instance, most mobile telephone networks provided walled gardens to their subscribers. This has wider regulatory implications, involving the development of ‘gatekeepers’ rather than open access models. (Jacob & Walsh, 2004, p. 26)

This analogy draws on its similarity with the physical ‘walled garden’ where a user is unable to escape this area unless it is through designated entry/exit points or the walled garden is removed. This phenomenon of closure of the theoretically limitless digital space was driven much by media ownership from the early years where such content environments “lure consumers and discourage linking outside the environment” (Aufderheide, 2002, p. 518). Basically, whether it is a physical or virtual garden, one of the most significant elements protecting or eroding privacy here is that of the architecture. Based on the design, structure, and governance of these leisure architectures, we can gain a better understanding of its consequences on the exercise of privacy. Parallels are drawn between contemporary and material public leisure spaces with digital social network spaces to illustrate aspects of inclusion/exclusion, commercialization and activism and regeneration of public leisure spaces. In doing so, we delve into key trends in urban planning across cultures and nations that are emblematic of contemporary spatial planning: gardens within gated communities, and malls.

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We start by looking at some key dimensions of ‘gatedness’ of public leisure space that elicit privacy and the discourse/practice surrounding its virtual and physical architectures, namely: secluded social enclaves that focus on the creation of fortified spaces as a retreat from civic life and a reinforcement of social fragmentation; scaling of enclosures that address the stretching of ‘walls’ to create self-contained communities to dissuade users from leaving these confines; and protective playgrounds for the youth that fence their activities into deliberate ‘safe’ spaces that are simultaneously corporatized. Here, gated communities, and malls are distinctly chosen as they are semi-private spaces that are “markedly leisurely in nature” (Hook & Vrdoljak, 2002, p. 213), serving thereby as appropriate virtual-real comparisons.

Secluded social enclaves

The internet has been celebrated as a space for the public but in practice, these publics are more segmented and diverse, entrapped frequently in semi-private social spaces. Popular social network sites such as Facebook and twitter, while catering to a large and diverse audience, encapsulates within it a plethora of sub-groups that exclude others based on interest, religion, race, education and other social boundaries (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Other SNS are created explicitly to restrict access by class and appearance, for example “aSmallWorld and BeautifulPeople, intentionally restrict access to appear selective and elite” (p. 6). Further, while SNS are expected to serve as a global platform, there is some current momentum to move more locally, where sites such as Nextdoor strive to revive age-old neighborly practices “for people near enough to each other to borrow a cup of sugar” (Stross, 2012). This ethos is reflected in the infrastructural design of this site where those who want to join this neighborhood network has to live in it, and in fact, has a sophisticated mechanism for verifying members physical place of

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residence and identity to their online self. There is little room for anonymity. Interestingly, this site is able to resist the web property tycoon Google as it deters substantively the indexing of information of its users, giving them more privacy than the typical SNS users.

Granted, the ideal of an open public can be perceived as naïve as society naturally segments into social enclaves. As society scales and expands, there is a need to reinforce community and that sentiment prevails in choices of more private-oriented architectures. The moral panic ensues however when it is perceived that these communities are seen as retreating from the public sphere and into defensible and discriminatory spaces, abdicating civic responsibility (Hunter, 2003). More importantly, these semi-private leisure enclaves are seen to come at the expense of public domains. Here, modes of surveillance are seen to re-assign the public as private, and stimulate a shift from common good interests to that of private concerns. It is argued that conventionally public leisure space has excluded groups such as women, gays and lesbians, black people, disabled people, and homeless and poor people, and that the architectures of the web are meant to serve as a pro-active, inclusive and corrective mechanism for these social failures. As Hess (1995, p.116) notes, “cyberspace is an elite space, a playground for the privileged...here is a global glass ceiling, and for many in the world a large part of technoculture lies well above it.” As a consequence, to be within a virtual world is to have an intrinsically geographic experience, as “virtual worlds are experienced fundamentally as places” (Adams, 1998). Adams contends that one way to understand cyberspace is to examine spatializations commonly employed within it, drawing parallels between sense of place imbued in particular network architectures with those of geographic spaces.

Let us shift our attention to a parallel spatial planning phenomenon that has brought much concern on this very issue of retreating from the ideal of common public spaces

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that are unmediated and inclusive in the name of privacy- that of gated communities. These are privatized public spaces with designated parameters or 'walls' that control the membership and movement through these spaces. The ideology driving this architecture is that public social space is unregulated and uncontrolled, fostering security issues, undermining communal relations, and quality governance. Hence, these "enclaves can attract consumers searching for a sense of community, identity, and security" (Grant & Mittelsteadt, 2004). In recent years, these gated communities have sprung across nations, moving away from the initial elitism to a more middle-class phenomenon. And within these gated domains are embedded leisure spaces in the form of playgrounds, semi-private gardens, entertainment, and sport amenities. While indeed this new social architecting is internationalizing, it is also bounding itself along lines that are more discriminatory and socially fracturing: umpteen examples of segregation pervade such as gated communities structured along the lines of religion in Israel (Rosen & Razin, 2009), race in South Africa (Hook & Vrdoljak, 2002), caste in India (Falzon, 2004), and urban inequality as in Shanghai (Pow, 2007). Hence, there is a strong argument that challenges this notion that gated communities represent a communitarian ideal or private choice which lacks wider social repercussions. (Atkinson & Flint, 2004). Here, architecture serves to insulate these groups against unwanted encounters. Pow (2007) argues that these extended contemporary segregators require a policy response to curtail the creation of such havens of social withdrawal.

Basically, the formation of gated communities have given rise to some strong critique where these communities are seen as symptomatic of the imminent breaking-down of society, culminating in these fractured social enclaves and the retreat of citizens from the meaningful public sphere (Low, 2003). By and large there is common agreement that this growing spatial formation comes at the price of fostering certain social tensions and that excessive encroachment

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by private forces on public spaces undermines traditional forms of citizenship bonding, civic trust, urban equality, integration, and ultimately a meaningful public life (Low, 2003; Pow, 2007). These are seen as a neo-liberal agenda where ‘government’ gives way to ‘governance’ (Vesselinov, Cazessus & Falk, 2007). Some lend a stronger voice, viewing this as an ‘urban pathology’ and ‘splintering urbanism’ (Graham and Marvin, 2001). Overall, actors that participate in the shaping of these architectures –designers, developers, residents, and the municipality, or basically the state, market and civil society, are beseeched to consider questions of the potential strategies of privatization of public spaces and its consequences (Grant & Mittelsteadt, 2004).

The relationship between a negative social value and architecture is made evident through a number of troubling examples. For instance, Hook and Vrdoljak (2002) point our attention to the “spatial logic of apartheid” (p.217) that permeates the design of gated communities in South Africa where these “security-park” complexes insulate and divide groups based on race. It is argued that this ideology can filter down to ever more micro-levels of exclusion, separation and division. Much of the discourse of security and safety is seen to translate to an “architecture of fear” (Ellin, 1997). Living behind these walls, Low (2003) suggests can actually promote fear of the unknown and foster a more inward-looking public. Another example of division is drawn from the case of Israeli gated communities wherein barriers between Israeli and Palestinian communes are looked at as more than just a security measure; in fact, a high court ruling suggests that these walls of development should not be reduced to security concerns but should take into account aspects of human rights (Rosen & Razin, 2009). Shanghai provides for another situation of segregation wherein ‘civilized enclaves’ are created that draws its walls alongside that of urbanization and modernization (Pow, 2007). This “moral ordering of urban spaces” is

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fundamental in shaping territoriality and exclusion in Shanghai's gated communities between the urbanites and the peasants. Such discourses are masked and depoliticized through the lens of modernization and 'civilizing' of the populace.

Moreover, these spaces aim to be generic and global to attract a wide audience by subscribing to a globalization of architecture in its aesthetics, (e.g. corinthean pillars, picket fences, etc.) and usage of common international semantics, for instance, calling of street names and parks within it as 'Willow Park' and 'Manhattan street' (Hook and Vrdoljak, 2002). However, this homogenous nature of "stereotypical European emblems of class" is not limited to emerging markets alone, as it is seen as a worldwide trend such as communities in Los Angeles. Governing these spaces require not just laws to subscribe to but routinely performed micro-governance that enables and normalizes the servitude to these larger structured mechanisms. Soja (2000) notes that such collective measures of gradual servitude to authority will enable 'private governments' to play an increasingly public role. The understanding of the privatization of space is fostered through the classic Simmel doctrine where it's two properties relevant here are exclusivity (or uniqueness) and the nature of boundaries, which are not spatial by origin but produced by people in the context of their relationships. Through this lens, we can better understand the impact that architecture has on social stratification. After all, public space ideally is meant to contribute to egalitarianism and liberalism by fostering unplanned social interactions between individuals who would not otherwise associate with one another. However, as public goods are encroached in the name of privacy, we lose not only public space but also the "opportunities for shared experience and positive interaction among individuals from diverse backgrounds" (Caldeira, 2000, p. 306). Thereby, a case can be made of how design principles of gated communities are antithetical to what constitutes an open and unmediated structure such as

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urban parks, which embed within it the need for free access and circulation of diverse audiences.

To summarize,

...gated communities appear as segregated spaces with a social ecology that is planted into the fabric of the city; where the wall starts a new social area begins, whether one lives inside or out. (Atkinson & Blandy, 2005, p. 180)

While there is some evidence that inhabitants within gated communities are becoming more hostile to the strictures to which they have signed up, there is pressure to continue to reside within these spaces as they begin to believe that enclaves are still the only rational choice within this contemporary society.

Basically, it doesn't take much of an imagination to create linkage between these discourses on gated communities of segregation, fear and exclusion to current concerns as we see new media sites exercising micro-governance through small design and coded features where individuals voluntarily sacrifice more of their privacy even while recognizing their discomfort. We see the filtering of information and the homogenization of these digital common spaces of leisure where alternative perspectives are slowly and systematically blocked out by a combination of our own choices and the underlying web infrastructures of efficiency and functionality. By immersing ourselves in the critical discourses that are circulating regarding gated communities, we can learn to draw from this the essential message that the ideal of the digital global and social commons is being systematically eroded by strategic architectural manipulations that orient more towards fortified and fractured communities . These mediated spaces circumvent spontaneous social encounters and interactions have serious repercussions on our civic sense and social empathy as we get more architecturally cocooned.

Scaling of enclosure

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Movements within and through these gated communities are of deep interest to both virtual and physical builders. After all, adding a new online property to the existing network enhances it as these extra nodes increase the flow of traffic in the network (Milbery & Anderson, 2009). There is commercial incentive to maximize this captured audience by sustaining them within these spaces for as long as possible. This follows the classic Reed's law that utility and value of a social network can scale exponentially with network size. The addition of new spaces, services, and tools extends the network and reduces the need for participants to leave a media conglomerate's complex of properties. Yahoo for instance is an example of an online media company that has substantial and diverse media holdings having bought up SNS tools like Delicious, a social bookmarking service, and Flickr, a photo sharing application, while also developing its own social networking space, Yahoo! 360, "adding these properties enables Yahoo! to provide all the major media needs for online participants while creating an integrated network of media nodes that feed traffic to each other, rather than to competitors" (Milbery & Anderson, 2009). These cyber-enclosures are deepening and widening as corporations shape web architectures to limit the movement of participants from outside their marked boundaries (Brown & Blevins, 2008). There is a growing trend of major synergies among corporate entities to expand their outreach. New media conglomerates are developing a novel kind of synergy, with prescribed circuits that less and less lead to the 'outside' as they are redirected and channeled towards properties owned by the parent company or its partners. (Conway et. al., 2007). These efforts give the illusion of diverse spaces to users while continuing to sustain them within these contained realms. Currently, most personal contents can only be securely shared within the same walled garden. Indeed, this is an alarming trend as the ideal of the Web architecture as open and

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free from corporate interest is being challenged and one may add, systematically eroded through these architectural constraints.

Interestingly, the argument on scaling of such walled gardens is echoed in the explanation given for the scaling of gated communities as an all-inclusive work-leisure and consumer-producer space. Here, strategic partnerships with different private actors are fostered by these communities to provide a range of amenities and services such as adjoining golf-courses, restaurants, squash/tennis courts, private bars, children's play-areas, swimming-pools, and shops, all playing their role in keeping these spaces "recreationally self-sufficient" (Graham & Marvin, 2001, p. 33). The unstated agenda being that most recreational activities can be catered for within these security-parks, hence an ever decreasing need to leave the premises. These planned arenas curtail and influence the movements of the inhabitants into predictable navigations. In fact, these gated enclaves market these ideas to the inhabitants as a consumer friendly effort that is driven by user needs for convenience; "most advertisements stress the advantages of staying within the walls in that they attempt to relocate aspects of daily life which are usually performed in public space (jogging, playing, etc.) to private, fortified spaces" (Falzon, 2004, p. 149).

To conclude, this framing of online and offline space serves as a refuge where attached networks of leisure, pleasure and workplace are streamlined to avoid unwanted and unexpected social contacts. These are deeply problematic designs as such self-containment makes invisible other social groups and encourages social apathy, indifference and ignorance of the diversity of public social life.

Playgrounds of safety

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Decades ago, Hunter (1985) predicted “our revolution will not be in gathering data--don't look for TV cameras in your bedroom--but in analyzing the information that is already willingly shared” (p. 32). Indeed, this was an astute remark as today we have become complicit in the erosion of our own privacy as we voluntarily make our private lives public on SNS. This is particularly of concern regarding the youth as they are looked upon as deeply vulnerable in this domain (Sullivan, 2005). As new communication behaviors emerge amongst teenagers where they explore, construct and play with their identities on digital playgrounds such as Facebook, measures to protect these youth from being exploited become of paramount concern. Importantly, teens view the SNS realm as a recreational space, and socializing here is mainly viewed as entertainment, making them feel more disarmed than if this were a utilitarian space (Sullivan, 2005). Comparing SNS sites such as Facebook and Twitter that serve as “networked publics” to “unmediated publics like parks,” boyd (2007) makes the point that youth use these sites in a freer and playful manner to socialize and build a culture around them. Studies have shown that youth perceive SNS as private and thereby safe spaces given its design features of sign-up, friending and the like. It is found that given the extraordinary time they spend within these spaces, they are more susceptible to believing that these realms are more private than they actually are; “those engaged exclusively in recreational domains probably feel this illusion most strongly” (Barnes, 2006).

Recent studies by boyd and Marwick (2011) however dispute the common understanding of youth naiveté on issues of privacy on SNS based on large scale surveys of attitudes and practices on Facebook of 18- and 19-year-olds in the United States in 2009 and 2010. They find that teens have developed sophisticated socio-linguistic strategies that grant them privacy within Facebook’s structural constraints. In other words, by communicating through personally

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manufactured codes that are understood mainly by their peers, they are able to be public and private at the same time. Also, much in line with the framing of privacy online of Nissibaum's contextual integrity, boyd and Marwick agree that youth practices "in networked publics are shaped by their interpretation of the social situation, their attitudes towards privacy and publicity, and their ability to navigate the technological and social environment" (p.1). Further, studies of SNS usage by 11-16 year olds have shown that in spite the semi-private nature of these platforms, bullying, and interaction with strangers online continue among a substantial minority (Sharples et al., 2009). Interestingly, new SNS sites or 'e-safety gardens' are being formed by educators that believe that especially for children, there is a need for deeply curated and mediated spaces that are less at the mercy of corporate interests and objectives. We wonder then if these values are being reflected and mirrored in the real world when it comes to the socializing of children in public spaces. Do children inhabit more semi-private walled gardens nowadays that allow for closer monitoring and supervision? Which actors are tracking their play and what are the socio-cultural consequences of such protective mechanisms? Are these necessarily safer spaces than the traditional public play spaces? To what extent is this watchful gaze benign and nurturing and how are corporate interests infiltrating these 'safe' havens? It is well worth taking a look at how these questions are addressed in the material realm as this is a significant concern pervading society as parents, educators and the government strives to uphold values of providing secure spaces for youth to explore themselves freely and innocently without manipulation.

A spatial comparison is evoked to understand social behavior of the youth by boyd and Marwick (2011) where "social network sites have become the modern day equivalent of the mall" (p.7). So let us take this parallel further briefly of mall spaces to understand how youth engage with these corporatized environments. Here we basically need to keep in mind that there

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is a rich history of youth being drawn to malls from its onset as a new kind of sociability (see Fiske, 2000). Malls basically collapse the distinction between public and private as it is seen to “fulfill people’s longing for sociability in a context that incorporates the appeals of private life: security, familiarity, identity, and (for some) control (Kohn, 2004, p. 193). Staeheli & Mitchell (2006) argue that the youth within these spaces are regulated through the architectural designs to create “community rather than a public” (p. 977). In other words, it provides a public forum for youth socializing amongst their peers without the discomfort of unfamiliar members infiltrating their space. These are viewed as safe and clean spaces of civility where youth can freely mingle among the public gaze for their security and protection. More importantly, they argue that malls encourage these youth gatherings as they are able to target and appeal to them more efficiently through the platform of consumerism. Hence, the layout, music, visuals and other navigational features are deliberately oriented towards youth culture where consumerism serves as a powerful glue; these “new community spaces blend public and private in ways that can be used to enhance the profitability of malls and to muffle political opposition and critique in the name of civility.” (p. 978).

While youth perceive these spaces as rather open platforms for their interaction, their sociality continues to be implicitly mediated by numerous architectural arrangements and constraints. The quality of their expression is affected as these spaces do not encourage a wide range of speech and participation as the youth are socialized to engage in a more peripheral rather than political and civic means. After all, these spaces are framed as primarily platforms of entertainment. Interestingly, given the centrality of malls in our contemporary society, there is much demand from governments and its surrounding communities to become more public; “malls take the place of town squares, parks, streets, and other spaces that are publicly owned.

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That should imply a heavy responsibility. Putting limits on speech—even when you have the right to do it—is dangerous” (Kohn, 2004). Also, malls are under great pressure to increase the nature of its sociality and incorporate more civic functions. While currently malls are allowing for this broader spectrum of public engagement of politics and civil life, these continue to be packaged and regulated by corporate interests and are still subject to the permission of the private association in terms of access, extent of interaction and its nature.

Another repercussion of walled gardens on the socialization of the youth is the transformation of this new generation as a “bubble-wrap generation” (Malone, 2007). Karen Malone addresses the currently preferred choice of semi-private spaces for children’s play over that of the traditional public parks as society becomes more inward and dominated by the culture of fear. While no doubt these spaces protect children from unwanted and undesirable advances of strangers, they come at the cost of restricting opportunities to “engage in free play” and decreases children’s “independent mobility” and choice-making (p. 513). She argues that as gates are drawn around play spaces and made into semi-private domains, it instills a broad pattern of risk-averse behavior and inward-looking sensibility. This “climate of fear” has meant that “many parents are restricting children’s movements to such an extent these children will not have the social, psychological, cultural or environmental knowledge and skills to be able to negotiate freely in the environment” (p. 514).

No serious scholarship disputes the fact that children need protecting; the question however is to what extent it should prevail and what are we trading away in today’s society and further, the need to critique the belief that semi-private spaces are indeed ‘safe’ spaces. In doing so, Elkind (2001) has pointed out the fact that as precautionary measures increase in the constructing of a walled garden, the boundaries of what is age appropriate impose standards that

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propel the growing up of children, mimicking adulthood spaces. Fascinatingly, if we look at popular metaphors that frame children's spaces, Froebel, the German educator came up with the term 'kindergarten' that translates as the 'children's garden.' While indeed children are freer to play within these walled gardens as they are watched over, there is a constant temptation of micro-managing this generation. As gated communities proliferate, so too does the semi-private nature of parks, confining children to fortified play spaces that are more socially homogenous and selective based on class, ethnicity, race and other factors as explained in the earlier section. The predictability of such play spaces is embedded within 'McMansionlands,' estates of closure where order pervades all other concerns.

To conclude, the impact of highly regulated play is turning this generation into an inward looking demographic that is driven by the element of fear where the outside world is presented as dark and dangerous and a high risk place.

CONCLUSION

The focus on public leisure space may appear trivial but in actuality, is a critical space within which we spend more of our time and effort than ever before. The ideal and rhetoric of the 19th century public park as a communal and open space has carried over to this day, especially to the virtual sphere. Environments of leisure both offline and online for the public and by the public are seen as essential to foster a community that values diversity and freedom of practice from private-sector mediations. However, as this paper has reveals, recent trends in gating and scaling of public space as semi-private 'walled gardens' bounded by corporate interest are seen as deeply troubling. Such network architectures are embedded with fear and distrust of the unknown, a value that threatens to shape future geographies. This ideology can filter down to ever more

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micro-levels of exclusion, separation and division, creating a designed public that is averse to unmediated public leisure, which this paper argues is fundamentally antithetical to an egalitarian and outward-looking society. Architectures are value driven; hence it is argued that we need to pay special attention to the moralities dictating its design and governance. Thereby, this paper capitalizes on the understandings of material leisure spaces of gated communities and malls and serves it as an appropriate metaphor for the contemporary concerns influencing web architectures of public sociality. We learn that globalizing of such spaces can be the homogenizing of these terrains; governing these spaces require not just laws to subscribe to but routinely performed micro-governance that enables and normalizes practice within these structured mechanisms; and that architectural cocooning can come at the price of civic responsibility and the breeding of a new generation of risk-averse youth. Further, we see that scaling of architectures both virtual and real simulate an illusion of sufficiency and diversity of choice. These enclosures are deepening and widening as corporations shape architectures to limit the movement of participants from outside their marked boundaries. In the name of efficiency, predictability is fostered at the price of spontaneity and openness to the unexpected. This particularly has a negative impact on youth as their vulnerability is capitalized on to portray the corporate space as the norm for their play under their watchful gaze impacting the nature and quality of their interactions. To conclude, this paper emphasizes that this is not a deterministic outlook but a means to create urgency in fostering alternative web architectures that value openness and non-corporatized mediated action.

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