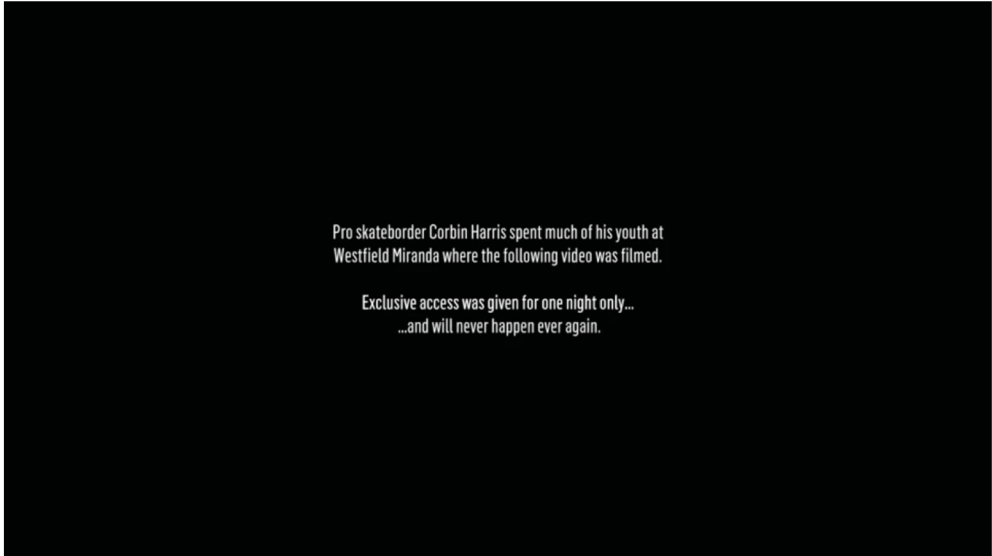


#makeityours



These are screen-caps of a 2014 advertisement for the Westfield “Miranda” shopping centre.

The music comes in softly at first, a wavering synth that grows louder as white text appears over a deep black background. We see skater Corbin Hariss’ head silhouetted as the sound of a helicopter’s rotary blades slips into the sound bed. The music rises as he approaches the destination, swelling as the Westfield logo hoves into view.

Plunged into the mall, we survey Harris, skating down empty corridors and promenades. Carving through deserted car-parks Hariss’ clothing billows summoning to mind some manga styled mythical hero. When the footage fades to black we are left with the Westfield logo and the tag line “#makeityours”.

The inspiring and uplifting tone of the bulk of the video sits uncomfortably with the opening text:
“Exclusive access was given for one night only...
...and will never happen ever again.”

This advert seems to represent the apotheosis of a stream of double-think that malls and shopping centres everywhere make their business perpetuating. A desire to have us read private as public and respond with a similar ease and familiarity, while simultaneously obeying the extra-legal pronouncements of an entirely alien space.

While the standard forbidding of skateboarding hardly strikes at the heart of our civil rights this video speaks to a disparity between perception and reality which is rife within the conception of malls, and which if left unchecked will have serious ramifications for the state of our city.

Shopping centre codes of conduct, while seeming petty, enforce a wide range of behaviours in addition to banning “running, skating (including ‘Heelys’), roller-blading, skateboarding, riding a bicycle, scooter or Segway”. This code also prevents “congregating and loitering in groups of three or more”, specifies clothing standards (including a prohibition on hoods) and outlaws any “non sponsored” activity or activity that impinges on the “commercial functions” of the centre*.

While it may not be unreasonable to enforce a code of conduct in a shop these spaces are something quite different, due simply to their scale. Privatised shopping corridors now occupy almost half of the city blocks between Swanston and Elisabeth Streets and La Trobe and Flinders.

This is a region of increasing size where codes are not constructed piece-meal but rolled out, homogeneously, through an entirely inwardly focused realm. Creating a huge portion of our city-centre no longer primarily under the control of democratic law, enforced by a publicly run police force, but a privately ordained law, exercised for commercial ends and enforced by privately hired security teams.

These centres represent a dead zone of true civic space in which rights, such as the right to protest are repeatedly impinged upon. In QV in July 2011 people protesting outside the Max Brenner chain were driven out at the behest of centre management. While this may seem insignificant, raising the question: ‘why can’t the protest just take place somewhere else?’, the increasing scale of these developments renders this highly problematic as we have seen internationally.



In Minnesota, USA, the Mall of America exercises an incredible commercial role, to the extent that it has arguably become the social and commercial centre of the state. Accordingly Black Lives Matter protesters chose it as a place to demonstrate. In this case, despite the failure of the mall to stop the protest with a court order the protesters were again driven out and several arrested.

The right to protest can only be legitimate if these protests can happen in a public forum and when that public forum increasingly shifts into a private realm we are effectively stripped of that right.

These centres represent a real and present danger to civic life of which protest is just the most overt part. As the Melbourne Central/Emporium/Myers agglomeration cements itself within our city it will continue to monopolise metropolitan activity dragging money and people from all corners of the city. We must remain vigilant and not be won over by stirring music and saccharine hash-tags.