Moral Regulation in Victorian Toronto
Victorian Toronto

• Middle classes gain political control of the city from the 1850s
• Determined to reshape urban space to suit their tastes
  – Impose civility on the streets
  – Control unpleasant land uses, activities
  – Modernise the city with ‘improving’ and progressive institutions
Improvement and Progress

• Victorian middle class wished to make modern and progressive innovations:
  • Improvement of public space
    – Parks, public gardens, libraries
    – Streets, shade trees
  • Provision of infrastructure
    – Public transit
    – Water supplies, sewers
    – Street lighting
• Spadina & College 1899
A central theme

- The control of public space
- The modification of public space to assert the power of one social group (or class) over others
- Public space becomes coded with social and cultural values
  - Including attitudes toward bodies
Politics of the Street

• Early Victorian period:
  – The public frequently takes to the street for protests, processions, riots
  – Streets are social spaces, places for work, play, eating, drinking, fighting
  – Not safe for genteel middle class, especially the ladies
Politics of the Street

• Middle class needs to take control
• Policing
  – Control drunks, prostitutes, public urination, street brawling
• Traffic bylaws
  – Streets become thoroughfares, for traffic, pedestrians, but not for playing, social space
• Public washrooms
Street Lighting

• Begins in the 1840s with weak gas light
• Renewed in the 1880s with electric arc lamps
• Renewed in the 1900s with incandescent lights
• Improvements hailed as
  – A way of extending shopping hours, enhancing the pleasures of public space
  – A way of discouraging crime
Trade Follows The Light

Shrewd merchandisers now realize as never before the powerful influence of light upon the mind of the buyer. It has been clearly established that the best lighted stores are the best patronized stores. Our Outdoor Arc Lamps bring business, because your store will "stand out" from all the rest and appear more prominent in the eyes of the buyer. Make your store a "star" with our system. Low cost—maximum service.

The Consumers’ Gas Co’y.
45 Adelaide St. East. - Phone M. 1933

67,168 Gas Meters in Use in Toronto
Politics of the Street

• Promotion of genteel values
  – Laying out of pleasure gardens, public parks
  – Creation of ornamental public space
  – Establishment of promenade routes
  – Creation of femininized shopping environments (department stores, arcades)
The Public Library

• A key innovation of the mid 1880s
• Progressively embodied culture, science and art
• Brings classes and ethnicities together
• Regulate working class behaviour by
  – Segregating the unemployed to the basement
  – Employ security guards to protect ‘lady’ librarians
  – Suggestions of gender segregation
  – Rules banning dirty clothing, dogs, eating and smoking
The Electric Streetcar

• A key innovation of the 1890s
• Essential to suburban sprawl, efficient commuting
• Brings classes and ethnicities together
• Anxieties expressed
  – About streetcar cleanliness
  – About smoking on the cars
  – About uncivil behaviour
“Doing King”, 1870s
Eaton’s

- Established at Queen & Yonge to intercept the shoppers going down Yonge to King
- Issued first catalogue in connection with 1879 Toronto Industrial Exhibition
- Aimed to sell to middle class women “the ladies”
- Created the city’s best women’s washrooms
  - “The ladies waiting room and gallery”
Conclusions

• Assertion of middle-class moral control over public space was comprehensive, multi-faceted
  – Regulated bodies as well as behaviour.