Surveillance in the city: Primary definition and urban spatial order

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Abstract

The shift to an entrepreneurial city has inaugurated changes in the surveillance and control of urban space through a myriad of technologies and legal–moral ordering practices. This has occurred as cities attempt to reimage and remarket themselves in the context of regional, national and international inter-urban competition for capital investment. A re-emphasis on the visual in the politics of the street underpins changes in the primary definition over urban spatiality and statecraft. This article examines these powerful definitional processes as a strategy to create visually pleasing space that is impacting on discourses and practices of surveillance that target forms of ‘crime’ and ‘incivility’ and contribute to the spatial production process itself. It is argued that in producing urban spaces of an entrepreneurial kind, contemporary surveillance practices need to be placed within wider debates about continuing urban inequality and the meaning of spatial justice.

Key words

crime; entrepreneurial city; primary definition; social control; space; surveillance

INTRODUCTION

Spaces . . . are made with the visible in mind: the visibility of people and things . . . and of whatever is contained within them. (Lefebvre, 1991: 75)

In an authoritative essay 25 years ago Stan Cohen (1979) characterized the emergent ‘punitive city’ as a spatial complex that was beginning to blur boundaries of control and widen nets of regulation in a manner set to ‘increase the visibility – if not the theatricality – of social control’ (p. 360). In this and other work, Cohen urged criminologists to look beyond ‘social control talk’ – which veils stigma and punitive practice behind a language of ‘community’ and ‘compassion’ – and, instead, cast scrutiny upon the wider changes occurring in urban space and those institutions charged with the construction of
quasi-legal ‘atlases of vice’ that underpin social control practice (p. 358; see also Cohen, 1983; 1985). Taking this cue, we can begin by stating that social control today is strategically entwined with, and organized around, visualized spectacles that promote ways of seeing urban space as benign, ‘people centred’ and celebratory. Such urban management strategies are not only refashioning the look and feel of city space but are also, at the same time, reconfiguring the development and rationale of social control in the city. Just as urban spaces are defined by the ‘reproducible’ character of ‘repetitive actions’ (Lefebvre, 1991: 75), so social control and surveillance practices can be understood as consisting of highly repetitive acts that monitor, censor, as well as promote behaviour in the city in ways that reflect and reinforce particular kinds of social space. Various writers have highlighted an intensification in the surveillance of city streets in the UK (McCahill and Norris, 2002), the USA (Davis, 1990; Parenti, 1999; Ferrell, 2001) and in European cities (Belina and Helms, 2003; Koskela, 2004). Understanding the trajectories of particular social control projects requires comparative international studies within which to place debates in relation to changes in urban spatial justice (MacCleod, 2002; Mitchell, 2003; Peck, 2003), the diffusion of a transatlantic orthodoxy on social control (Wacquant, 1999), the local mediation of control strategies (Raco, 2003) and in terms of the impact of surveillance and control practices upon the urban experience of those targeted (Ferrell, 2001; Hayward, 2004a). Alongside these interdisciplinary concerns critical criminology still has work to do in unmasking the organization of social and political power through exploring the changing terrain of contemporary urban statecraft that guides and rationalizes control practice.

Critical criminological work excavating ‘spatial control’ has done much to ‘recall historical patterns of conflict and injustice’ (Ferrell, 2001: 17) and remind criminologists that the city cannot be understood from crime-mapping exercises alone (Hayward, 2004b). This article seeks to extend such insights and examine what Mitchell (2003) calls ‘the materialization of order’ in the urban form (p. 235). A focus on the materialization of social control practices forces a consideration of the shifting terrain of state power and the rationale for state intervention that works and reworks the definitional problematic of ‘crime’ in a class-based attempt at ‘reclaiming the streets’ (Coleman, 2004a). Through the use of case material from cities in the UK and by keeping a focus on the shifting terrain of political economy (Hall and Winlow, 2004), the article examines the materiality of socio-cultural control and its role in reproducing unequal spatial relations. In this context the emergence of ‘new’ urban forces, or networks of primary definers, whose material and ideological ascendancy in the urban process rule (Coleman and Sim, 2000), has a direct bearing on the shaping of urban narratives of place as well as the production of space and its regulation. It is a contention of this article that current practices and discourses that are uncritically placed under the banner of ‘crime prevention’ are actually better understood as socio-spatial ordering practices that, under entrepreneurial conditions, reinforce and reconstruct particular cultural sensibilities around crime, deviance and incivility. Partnerships between powerful local agencies are central to these practices and promote strategic ways of seeing city space that incorporates the targeting of behaviours, and activities that disrupt primary definitions of urban renaissance. These wider visions and definitions of urban change lie outside the remit of formal crime control.
agendas and, as a consequence, must be examined as crucial aspects of the normative-cultural dimensions inherent in definitional struggles over ‘crime’ and ‘crime prevention’ that are part of the governance of urban space.

Others have shown that these urban crime control projects are informed by depoliticized criminological models, propagated and then exported from the United States, including the ‘broken windows’ thesis (Wacquant, 1999; Ferrell, 2001; Mitchell, 2003) which, through its application in Business Improvement Districts and police-led partnerships on both sides of the Atlantic, has linked crime to its larger cousin ‘disorder’, in targeting petty street level offences, ‘nuisance’ and ‘unconventional’ behaviours. Routine activity theory has similarly come to the fore to stress the need for ‘capable guardians’ to watch over ‘suitable targets’ (Felson, 1998: 52), and has served to justify the proliferation of ‘capable’ eyes now surveying the streets of the UK in the form of cameras and street wardens. As well as airbrushing out the ‘experiential’ found with ‘the complexities and inequities that are such a feature of the daily urban round’ (Hayward, 2004b: 155), this understanding of crime and control tells us nothing of the ideological and material power of the agents and agencies authorized to implement these powerful ideas in securing city spaces (Coleman, 2004a). What follows is an exploration of entrepreneurial urbanism that seeks to place these depoliticized models as active components in the production of urban spaces and political forms of domination. In this way, entrepreneurial urbanism is thought of as a complex, and not entirely coherent, set of strategies to ‘reclaim’ city streets through the fabrication of an idealized class-based performative rationale for citified behaviour. As the latest trope in a reinvigorated pursuit of urban spatial order, camera surveillance in the UK is a normal feature of city development that propagates the idea of ‘capable guardians’ and symbolizes the state imaginary with respect to urban order in the UK.1 But cameras are only one dimension in a wider proliferation of surveillance practices (including private security, public warden schemes, legal sanctions, and local councils and businesses who are developing and funding surveillance networks) that this article explores as a means of scrutinizing the imaginary of the locally powerful. In taking the wider context into account, the article discusses the discourses that shape the urban spatial form and hail a particular kind of citified individual as a forerunner to examining how these discourses over the definition of urban space intersect with the development and targeting of surveillance practices in the city.

PRIMARY DEFINITION AND URBAN SPACE

Following Richard Sparks (2003), criminologists need to explore how ‘transitions between state regimes and changes in the practices and politics of punishment are intimately connected’ (p. 171). In this sense, an understanding of surveillance in the city necessitates exploring the intersection between urban statecraft and social control rhetoric. This points to a number of issues. First, surveillance should not be grasped as something organized around, or relating to, one discrete phenomenon or entity, such as surveillance cameras. Thus interconnections between legal and non-legal sanctions, the rhetoric of powerful actors inside and outside of formal criminal justice arenas and a range of urban
public–private partnership campaigns around local quality of life issues need to be brought to analytical attention. Second, attempting to understand the interconnectedness of surveillance practices in the city leads to a consideration of the city-building process itself and of how the political struggles involved in this process give rise to discourses of socio-cultural censure and perceptions of risk. Third, surveillance practices in the city are increasingly understood as being directed to behaviours outside of, or having a loose relation to, traditional criminal sanctioning categories and processes (Ferrell et al., 2004). An expansion of punitive suspicion in the contemporary city can, therefore, be related to the dynamics of contemporary urban rule in its entrepreneurialized form which points us to the changing nature of the organized definition of space. As contributors to *Cultural Criminology Unleashed* (Ferrell et al., 2004) point out, mainstream criminology has ignored these dynamics of urban change and treated the contours and meanings of urban space as given and static. Most importantly for this article, the mainstream ignores how practices that constitute ‘crime prevention’ are far from inert mechanisms that appear neutrally on the urban landscape but are instead implicated in the spatial reproduction process itself and in the generation of inequalities this engenders. Exploring the powerful networks behind surveillance practices opens up for scrutiny the contemporary urban state imaginary and the processes of primary definition that constitutes this imaginary and establishes the normative boundaries of contemporary urban spatial order.

As developed by Hall et al. (1978: 58–9), primary definition indicates a form of cultural power and political authority through which particular ideologies and preferred meanings are circulated throughout the wider social body so as to set limits upon what is, and what is not, linguistically and practically credible in terms of identifying, understanding and responding to social problems. Originally applied to the media, primary definition points to the exercise of definitional power in society. The authors asked, how do the definitions of ‘the powerful’ become routinized and taken for granted in relation to the framing of particular problems in a wider social sense? For Hall and colleagues, the concern was to locate the ‘control culture’ (that denoted interconnections between criminal justice agents, media agents and moral entrepreneurs) historically, and to position it within particular state forms and political regimes (p. 195). The work of Hall and his colleagues remains important in recognizing the role of powerful definers in relation to the establishment of law and order agendas, their targets and the connections between agenda-setting procedures and the material and ideological power of social definition. The work has been criticized for presenting ‘an atemporal model’ of primary definition which fails to take into account ‘new forces and their representatives’ whose emergence as socially credible and authoritative spokespersons needs to be acknowledged and explained (Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994: 19). For the purposes of this article the concept of primary definition is a means to raise questions about who is articulating contemporary urban spatiality and with what consequences for socio-spatial control and justice.

Today the forces of primary definition can be understood as central to a contradictory and conflictual process towards the construction of the city as a ‘growth machine’ (Logan and Molotch, 1987) that interconnects the spheres of business consortia, City Centre Managers, council departments and chief executives, property development, place marketing, the youth industries, education, senior police and private security organizations.
The networks of institutional power now governing urban space consist of an officially designated ‘partnership’ that is understood as reconstituting city spaces within a ‘synergy of capital investment and cultural meaning’ (Zukin, 1996: 45) alongside ‘the self valorisation of capital in and through regulation’ (Jessop, 1997: 29). These ‘corporatist forms of governance’ (Harvey, 1990: 295) are engaged in a self ‘responsibilization strategy’ (Garland, 2001) that, in rechanneling the meaning of local democracy, heralds a ‘deeply dysfunctional [and] . . . malleable character of neoliberal statecraft’ (Brenner and Theodore, 2002: 345). In the UK particularly, it is the idea and practice of partnership that is bringing these groups and individuals together to forge a new common sense of twenty-first century city rule that is engendering the construction of ‘visionary’ discourses of civic propriety and spatial function. The contours of primary definition and the emergence of specific primary definers in relation to urban spatial rule will vary between localities but, as it is argued here, the discourses of urban primary definition are emerging in a manner that both reflects and reinforces the processes of urban entrepreneurialism that are currently being promoted in international, national and local spheres of influence, including central government policy and European-funded projects.

Current practices of primary definition forge a politics of image that, in permeating local institutions of rule, reinforces a process in which ‘entrepreneurial landscapes – both real and imaginary – are ideologically charged’ (Hall and Hubbard, 1996: 163).2 The selective processes of marketing spatial attributes prioritize particular local, national and international audiences (as tourists, investors, consumers) and sideline public debate around ‘older’ issues to do with social inequality and its visibility so that poverty itself is seen as a normal and/or inevitable part of this landscape (Soja, 2000). The ideological recharging of space as strategically important to the politics of investment is intensifying a notion of space as performative; that is, space as predictable, not least through the imagery of corporate branding along with conventional images of consumerism and advertising. In this context, new circuits of urban spatial definition are articulating an urban vision that collapses distinctions between the look of the urban fabric with other issues to do with the suitability of behaviour in public space.

The process of primary definition is moving the parameters of expectation in relation to the ‘urban experience’ through ideologically reinforcing particular urban subjectivities around who has the right to inhabit, (re)define and utilize aspects of contemporary urban spatiality. This has taken place alongside a concerted effort aimed at rescripting city spaces as ‘spontaneous’ and ‘carnivalesque’ in a careful projection of ‘ordered disorder’ (Featherstone, 1991: 82). The notion of the city as festival market place (Goss, 1996) can be seen as a key component in entrepreneurial urbanism and carefully plays upon discourses of ‘excitement’ and ‘risk’ as positive city selling points, while at the same time promoting discourses of surveillance, safety and ‘the familiar’. In important respects the discourses of play, spontaneity and cosmopolitanism represent a strategy of performed difference – a fabricated celebration ‘the bustling city’ that is in contrast to a ‘non-performed difference’ (i.e. the spectre of poorer, less contrived urban inhabitants), which threatens to destabilize the city’s careful imagineering.3 A ‘new’ vernacular, identifiable in local news media, trumpets a developmental and ‘progressive’ tone of urban sensibility in an attempt to capture and construct a common sense around issues of local quality of
life, crime and safety. The ‘success’ of the entrepreneurial urbanism has been to reinforce these constructs of socio-spatial order ideologically, by placing them within regenerative discourses that play upon a long-standing historical focus on the visible (i.e. the street) as well as intensifying long-established urban fears and adding some new ones to the picture. Primary definition is a competitive and not a complete or ‘resolved’ process (Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994: 21) and contradictions are evident between prevailing aesthetical considerations of space and the discourses and practices of spatial control.4

SURVEILLANCE TARGETING AND ENTREPRENEURIAL URBANISM

In the UK these definitions relating to urban spatiality are encouraged through central government urban design guidance documents where ‘the look’ of the urban fabric is tied to successful regeneration (DETR, 2000; Home Office 2003a). Thus representations of the look, feel and ambience of urban space are evident in national and local promotional documents, local press stories, and city branding and flagship developments. These discursive tracts underpin the construction of spaces for consumption alongside the consumption of places as packaged experiences themselves (Urry, 1995).

The notion of visually pleasing space is tied to aesthetic considerations concerning the moral probity and appropriateness of behaviour in public space. As a managerial (or management in space) discourse the notion of reclaiming the streets from the ‘yobs’,5 over-exuberant youths, petty thieves, drunks, beggars and illicit traders assumes a strategic ideological position within the networks of primary definition and, as already indicated, is buttressed by central government thinking and legislation. For example, the Anti-Social Behaviour Act of 2003 can be connected to the wider rehabilitation of space and is certainly being applied and understood as a desired tool within worked-out strategies for regeneration. The creation of such a space is part of a sustained move towards what Frank Field MP defines as a ‘contract based citizenship’ that would work through ‘a series of contracts which cover the behaviour of all of us as we negotiate the public realm’ (Field, in Grier and Thomas, 2003). It is important to explore the spatial–moral regulation of the kind being endorsed here and its complex relationship to aggressive place marketing and the politics of making visually pleasing space. The wider commitment to ‘civilize’ city space within partnership rule heralds a rejuvenated moral discourse of street civility. Also it is reflected in the emergence of high-salaried anti-social behaviour ‘Czars’ who, under the 2003 Act, target beggars and other ‘harassers’ of the public in, for example, Liverpool and Manchester city centres (Merseymart, 2004).

In a general sense these discourses and practices have a reclaiming zeal in relation to urban public space and are targeted at activities and people that are deemed incongruous in these entrepreneurialized zones. In this sense contemporary primary definition promotes an ideal of performance-enhancing space geared towards orderly risk-free experiences and modes of interaction (Lash and Urry, 1994). Performance-enhancing space is constituted through, to borrow Butler’s (1990) phrase, a ‘stylised repetition of
acts’ (p. 140) underpinned by regulatory and disciplinary discourses that encourage, cajole, support, reward and coerce the actions that make up performative space. Performance-enhancing space works with the visible in mind and encourages not only the performance of consumption and tourism but, increasingly, the performed appreciation of ‘culture’ and ‘art’ in the cities that now form part of the consuming experience. Furthermore, urban surveillance partnerships also work with the visible in mind and expand the power and scope of entrepreneurial agendas. The partnerships are partly managed by local business consortia, chambers of commerce and hybrid organizations sponsored by a mixture of local capital and public grants (Coleman, 2004b). The development of entrepreneurial surveillance practices is increasingly geared to the monitoring of performative space and its potential disruption. For example, the development of automated surveillance cameras that detect suspicious bodily movements (see Graham and Wood, 2003), automatically triggers alarms if people stand or sit motionless for too long, walk around too much or stoop around parked vehicles. Depending on the context, the cameras hone-in on unusual and disruptive acts that negate the normalized fabrications of bodies in urban space and provide evidence of a repetitive and performative rationalization being affected in city street space. Powerful definitions of performative space are embroiled with moralizing discourses that constitute what spaces are and for whom they are intended. As in Liverpool, networks of primary definers, for example, often deploy the phrases ‘family friendly city’ and ‘people’s place’ to describe the city centre (Coleman, 2004a). Urban primary definition spatializes visions for city life and draws upon a range of surveillance techniques in extending the numbers – but limiting the meaning – of ‘capable guardians’ through techniques that draw upon local bylaws to curtail unwanted activities, or at other times relying on national legislation for banishing ‘the anti-social’ along with ‘get tough’ policing measures. Without wishing to conflate these measures, they do share a common concern with curtailing spatial mobility and extending the threshold of transgression that sends a message to those in and around regenerating spaces of ‘perform or else’ (Ward, 2003: 122).

Non-performing homeless

Backed by national legislation, a ‘fear and fury’ discourse at the local level gives expression to class-based anxieties about public space within regentrifying cities across the advanced world (Smith, 1996). For those at the centre of partnership power, the path of homeless people into poverty is irrelevant when placed alongside more pressing concerns to do with the ‘contamination’ of city space that homeless people symbolize. In the UK, attempts have been made to ‘responsibilize’ the homeless into performing entrepreneurial roles by recruiting Big Issue vendors and training them as tourist information guides (Coleman, 2004a). Other training techniques have been geared towards educating Big Issue vendors in ‘non-aggressive’ sales techniques and making them stand in pitch-marked squares while working. ‘Educative’ strategies such as these have taken place alongside intrusive surveillance and a process of criminalization. Developments at the local level can be understood in the context of stigmatization of the homeless (as ‘winos’, spongers and pan-handlers) by national governments in the UK and USA (Mitchell, 2003). In Liverpool, for
example, an alliance between local council officials, police and private security resulted in ‘Operation Manton’ in October 2003. The £50,000 undercover operation was justified by a key primary definer as ‘a major step forward in creating a cleaner, safer and more attractive city centre’. Moreover, according to the Manager, businesses and consumers ‘highlighted the activities of aggressive beggars as the major detraction from the city centre’ (Guardian, 2003). In carrying out the operation, the ‘nuisance’ of homeless people (whether they be rough sleepers, beggars or Big Issue vendors) on the streets was responded to with the arrest of 54 homeless people for dealing cannabis, heroin and crack. Although only 12 of these were Big Issue sellers (out of 150 vendors in the city), the council banned sales of the magazine on the streets indefinitely, with the threat of jail for those found flouting the ban. This ban followed a concerted local campaign over the previous two years encouraging the public not to give money to beggars, with the clear implication that the money would only be used for alcohol and drugs. Curfews on Big Issue vendors had been established in parts of the city as well as restrictions on their use of specified shops and shopping complexes in the city. The orchestration of anti-homeless sentiment by police and council officials ended in the loss of income for the vendors and those that continued to sell were verbally and physically assaulted by some members of the public (Guardian, 2003). The threat of an injunction against the council by the Big Issue Company resulted in the ban being lifted, but the surveillance network had left its mark in coercing the homeless and letting them know their presence was not wanted. In the entrepreneurial city the routines of thought and practice that inform a moral demarcation of space targets the poor people of the city as eyesores or ‘broken windows’, and as Mitchell (2001) suggests in the US context, the idea has been ‘not to repair them but to remove them altogether’ (p. 83). The surveillance and removal of the homeless is a desired goal in entrepreneurial cities and is exemplified in Leeds city centre where they are attempting to ban Big Issue sellers using the rhetoric of anti-social behaviour and a campaign entitled ‘Shape up or Ship Out’ (Yorkshire Evening Post, 2004). The excessive surveillance of the lifestyle and working practices of the homeless in advanced capitalist cities (see Mitchell, 2003) is bolstered in the UK by central government making begging an arrestable offence and allowing Community Support Officers to detain and arrest beggars (with the police) if they fail to provide specific information, or refuse to move on when ordered to (Big Issue in the North, 2004).

Non-performing youth culture

The discourse of cultural regeneration is now a ‘universal phenomenon which has accelerated in the era of ‘the city of renewal’ (Evans, 2003: 417). The discourse is a contested one and its celebratory and inclusive tone (see Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2004) veils attacks on cultural pursuits that fall outside officially sanctioned projects and are instead subjected to surveillance and curtailment. A ‘war on youth culture’ in United States schools (Muzzatti, 2004: 151) and in public spaces (Ferrell, 2001) in advanced capitalist societies has resonance in the UK through the language of ‘anti-social behaviour’ that places contractual expectations on bodily conduct and demeanour in strategically visible space. For example, Liverpool city council – recently lauded with the
title of European Capital of Culture for 2008 – invoked a bylaw to curtail a range of grassroots and spontaneous street activities. The scope of the bylaw means that it can also be used to attack a range of perceived ‘nuisances’ that are tied to the secondary economy in the city. Thus it is an offence for people to sell or tout for business in the streets or other public places, including flower and tobacco sellers in restaurants and bars. The new law also bans individuals asking for money to mind cars and prevents charities stopping people in the street. For the new primary definers, the proximity and management of poverty are central to a politics of vision that seeks to avoid an image of a ‘bargain basement sector’ (Coleman, 2004a: 145).6

As a key tool in the politics of vision, surveillance networks in the UK aid the strategic balance between spatial aesthetics and function and any notion of the city as a space of cultural pursuits for younger people continues to be circumscribed. In Liverpool, skateboarders can be fined from between £250 to a £1000 if they break a bylaw banning skating passed by city councillors in July 2002. Liverpool council claimed that skateboarding should be an offense as it is giving the city a bad image in terms of scaring off tourists and shoppers, as well as damaging statues and memorials. The skaters themselves, who can be regularly seen dodging the surveillance net, preferred an alternative ‘vision’ of the city and their place in it:

skating in the streets adds to the atmosphere and is part of the fun. It’s a real kick in the teeth that the council have decided they want to ban us from the streets in the summer holidays. I don’t think the skateboarders are doing any harm. A lot of people enjoy watching us doing our tricks. (Liverpool Echo, 2002)

While spontaneous street art and skating is subject to control, a two-day annual event does cater for these activities (running since summer 2003) on specially erected skating ramps and walls on Liverpool’s waterfront. The event – though shunned by some – is directed at tourists and shamelessly used to promote and fabricate the city’s idealized cultural scope and status.

In another development, in cities in the counties of Essex, Hampshire, Cornwall and Devon, police and private security enforce a policy, soon to be tried nationwide, to ban young people wearing hooded tops, baseball caps and hats of various descriptions (Independent, 2003). In Liverpool an initiative of this kind is called ‘Hats off to Beat Crime’ because ‘there are connotations when someone is wearing a hood over their head or has a baseball cap on’ (Liverpool Echo, 2004c). As a media-driven symbol and proof of anti-social behaviour, headgear worn by the young people has become problematic in the theatricality of the surveillance landscape as it aids the disguise of bodily identity. As well as infringing upon the fashion sense of the young and reinforcing its association with disorder – and ignoring the umbrellas, hats and wigs fashioned by older people – such measures confirm the surveillance networks’ need for identity to be verifiable and known, and assumes that an individual’s ‘intentions’ in public space can, and should be, ascertained by purely visual cues.

Skaters, Goths, Big Issue vendors, beggars and buskers as unsightly and ‘unwanted’ public spectacles are increasingly lumped together and derided as ‘the raff element’, as indeed one property developer stated before an inquiry into the building of Europe’s
biggest commercial city centre project now underway in Liverpool. The 42-acre site – including exclusive shopping, residential, hotel and leisure facilities – will operate strict access control and remove undesirables under the remit of a private security force that links in with public police patrols and camera surveillance (Indymedia, 2003). This spatial ordering strategy impinges on the right to decide who walks through a city’s streets and promotes ‘safety’ for the leisureed classes in a way that includes removing from public view the right to protest against, for example, shops dealing in sweatshop goods. The corporate branding of space means that those who protest in these spaces are likely to be labelled as transgressors and defilers of the image of apolitical space. However, these processes of primary spatial definition are not exactly instilling ‘new’ landscapes of control from the vantage point of young black people and their experience of police practice (Fryer, 1984). The risk of being stopped and searched remains a feature of the urban experience for many black people. This is indicated in Liverpool by the fact that one in three black people were stopped and searched in 2002–3 – a rise of 112 per cent (Liverpool Echo, 2004a), making them nearly ten times more likely than whites to be stopped and searched in the city.

Working class youth

Entrepreneurial urbanism ‘shows no signs of reaching its geographical limits’ (Ward, 2003: 116) and the peripheral, less affluent neighbourhoods in and around the entrepreneurial city core increasingly enter the frame in terms of the problem they pose for city/regional image making. It is in these areas that demonization accompanies anti-social behaviour legislation and informs the urban experience of working class youth. One of the striking things about the use of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders in the UK is how they target the cultural milieu of the young – whether through the curtailment of quad biking; the disallowing of certain forms of linguistic expression; drinking behaviour (see Guardian, 2004b) and the restrictions placed on youthful free association in particular spaces regardless of whether any ‘anti-social behaviour’ has actually taken place. In 2004, Liverpool police and business groups narrowed the distance between established youthful fun time and criminal activity by launching a poster campaign in the city urging the public to report young people to the authorities on the night before ‘Halloween’. The poster reads: ‘Mischief Night October 30: It’s Not Just Kids Having Fun, It’s Youth Crime and Disorder’. Under Section 30 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003, all 16-year olds can be photographed and banned from designated spaces, as was the case in Wigton, Cumbria, in February 2004. Here the curfew covered the centre of town and came into effect over several nights after 9pm. Youths who were refused access to the town felt their civil rights had been violated as many went out for a night at the cinema or to eat fish and chips only to be turned away by police (Guardian, 2004a). In Liverpool ‘no-go zones for yobs’ have been set up under Section 30 of the above Act which provides police with powers of dispersal and banishment of groups of two or more youths and to arrest them if they return within 24 hours. In Liverpool, business leaders welcomed police action as vital to the maintenance of profits (Liverpool Echo, 2004b). Up to May 2004 18 police forces in England had regularly used these powers backed by surveillance vans to target youths.
and send them home if they were deemed to be ‘inappropriately’ located in time and space. In Liverpool, questioning the legitimacy of young people to be on the streets has been filtered through a number of schemes. From an idea first tried out in New York, what is known in the local press as the ‘yob tank’, tours the city locking up ‘anti-social youths’, fully kitted with internal and external CCTV and costing £20,000 (Liverpool Echo, 2003). Primary definers and youth often come into conflict with particularly punitive consequences for the young that, in the UK context, have a long history (Goldson, 2002). As a result of revanchist discourses and punitive policy in the UK, those ‘children who are seen to transgress prescribed behavioural codes and behaviours and boundaries (whether civil or criminal)’ are suffering a ‘violation’ of their civil and human rights (Goldson, 2005).

The 2003 White Paper ‘Respect and Responsibility: Taking a Stand Against Anti-Social Behaviour’ states an ‘extended police family’, that is, public-spirited community wardens should be developed and draw on a range of ‘powers to designate areas to disperse groups and use the child curfew’ laws (Home Office, 2003b: 54). This ‘extended police family’ of ‘capable guardians’ involves not only local residents but business consortia, developers, private police and local authorities in a remoralization of city streets in a manner that is, although not entirely coordinated, indicative of the attempted orchestration of the definitional processes over public space discussed here. In Liverpool, for example, a staggering 500 wardens will be trained and placed on the streets as part of the city’s ‘revival’ in the run-up to the entrepreneurial gala of European Capital of Culture in 2008 (Daily Post, 2004).

CONCLUSION

The rollout of city surveillance technologies discussed here reflects and reinforces the changing nature of primary definition and its relationship to the production of urban space. In the contemporary setting, the theatricality of social control in the city and its reinforcement in an entertainment-hungry media may in fact represent ‘a continuation of the overall pattern [of social control] established in the 19th century’ (Cohen, 1979: 359). Moreover, it is not so much that the city is subject to ‘governing through crime’ (Simon, in Hudson, 2001: 158) but more accurately it is being governed through very particular images of crime and incivility that, along with the justificatory discourses aimed at combating them, have their roots in nineteenth-century city building. This suggests that Cohen’s original argument is correct in that ‘what is new is the scale of the operation and the technologies’ deployed and not, in a challenge to the idea of a ‘new penology’, what and who is deemed suitable for targeting and punishment by these technologies (Cohen, 1979: 260). Therefore, the propagation of urban sensibilities that focus on the tangible, visible and scenic, has also reinforced some fairly old urban tales of fear and degeneration (Coleman and Sim, 2005). The visible ‘differences’ that homeless people, the poor, street traders and youth cultures bring to the city, undermine the hegemonic notions of ‘public’ spatial utility and function. Indeed, for these groups, it is often merely their visibility alone and not their behaviour that is deemed problematic. As such, surveillance practices work alongside ideas of ‘the visually pleasing city’ and reinforce certain
regenerative claims made for city space. The ideological ‘success’ of current trends in surveillance in their focus on ‘broken windows’ and street propriety can be gauged in terms of their reinforcement of a surveillance blackout when it comes to the spatial habitus and activities of the powerful; whether in the boardroom or in the street camera relay room; or within the machinations of a post-democratic statecraft being driven by the circuits of primary definition. The upshot is the reinforcement of hegemonic definitions of ‘risk’, ‘crime’ and ‘harm’ as categories assumed to emanate exclusively from relatively poor and ‘disaffected’ people. However, questions remain as to what extent these processes are indicative trends between cities across the globe? Scholars have begun to debate the significance of trends in control as they criss-cross between different national and capitalist social orders. This has been debated in terms of the theories of ‘broken windows’ and the assumptions around ‘crime and safety’ they have perpetuated and alongside the promotion of neo-liberal ideology and market growth (Taylor, 1998; Wacquant, 1999). While comparative studies are essential to understanding the unfolding of urban social control, exploring ‘the local’ must avoid relativism and contribute to a wider empirical and theoretical debate. Local/global dialectics must form the focus of study in that ‘every microcosm presupposes a macrocosm that assigns it its place and boundaries and implies a dense web of social relations beyond the local site’ (Wacquant, 2002: 1524). The international exchanges of information between proponents of ‘quality of life policing’ are a part of ‘localized’ control developments both in terms of the technologies deployed and in relation to the shared folk devilry (the usual suspects) that Taylor (1998: 26) identifies as underpinning the ‘thrust-to-exclude’ in many European countries and beyond. The ascendance of ‘broken windows’ spatial control must be understood not merely as a technical set of devices but as constituted alongside, and as a legitimating ‘logic’ for, moral censures relating to public decorum in a context of increasing urban poverty (Wacquant, 1999; Peck and Ward, 2002). As well as being attuned to these wider factors, researchers of social control need to study the control process in and through its particular and general setting, thus highlighting tensions, contradictions and sites of resistance occurring at multiple spatial scales.

Indeed the arguments contained in this article must be placed alongside other studies of socio-spatial control and the continuities and discontinuities they highlight. In critically interrogating primary defined space, however, it is argued that powerless groups are often ‘represented only by their eloquent absence; their silences [. . .] refracted through the glare or gaze of others’ (Hall, 1986: 9). Certainly critical criminologists, wherever they find themselves, will have a role – to use Cindy Katz’s (2001) words – in ‘understanding and “exposing” the ways that things, people, and social relations are made visible or invisible to the public’ (p. 96). Part of this project involves unmasking the institutional organization of primary definition and how urban inequality is maintained through the policing of ‘urban outsiders’ deemed problematic in relation to the current modes of material acquisition (Ferrell, 2001) – not least because, in the visually-obsessed contemporary city, a concern with hiding social problems, or redefining them as criminogenic issues, is being intensified when, paradoxically, spectacles of civic and cultural illumination are being developed. Surveillance in the city – understood in this sense – is tied to a strategy of representation and illumination of urban phenomena as signifying ‘normal’ city life. For
example, so called ‘cities of light’ are being hatched in the cities of the UK. In Liverpool £1.2 million is being spent by a primary defining agency, Liverpool Vision, to illuminate 30 buildings in the city centre. As a key element in regeneration the selective illumination of the facades of Victorian buildings and sculptures aims to establish the city a European City of Light by 2006 (Your Move: Liverpool’s Guide to Property and Life, 2004). The celebratory illumination of spaces in the city has an entrepreneurial social control logic in its orchestration of the public gaze towards an appreciation of historic splendour in a manner that implicitly reinforces an intolerance to that which is, through entrepreneurial lenses, not splendid and, indeed, an eyesore. The value of human activity in public spaces is increasingly assessed using performative criteria that inevitably casts shadows over other spaces and activities not deemed suitable for public consumption through illumination.

The rough sleepers, working homeless, street traders, impromptu youth thrill-seekers and those who rely on ‘the bargain basement’ economy are at risk of being defined negatively (or defined out) of entrepreneurial space. Unhiding their stories provides a role for criminologists, alongside exposing the city building processes that render these stories irrelevant and unintelligible. However, the city is, and always has been, constituted as a contest over space – over its production, representation and regulation; over who is authorized to be in it and who is kept out; over what constitutes an unpolluted space and what constitutes transgression of space. This article has not addressed the spaces of resistance in the city, although more adventurous criminologists have made the exploration of resistance a central task in order to uncover alternative ‘street politics’ that kindle ‘a revolution against public order, and for public life’ (Ferrell, 2001: 197; see also Ferrell et al., 2004). In Liverpool, attempts to criminalize and remove Big Issue vendors from the streets faced opposition through public outcry in the letters pages in the local press and the threat of legal action by the Big Issue in the North that forestalled the removal of working homeless people from the streets. In Liverpool there have also been ‘sleep outs’ by community groups to raise awareness of rough sleeping in the city along with challenges to the punitive rhetoric and criminalization of asylum seekers by groups such as ‘People Not Profit’. Alternative media also exist in the spaces of entrepreneurial city craft and provide important sources of public information and challenge to entrepreneurial regimes.

In the surveilled city it is often bemoaned that ‘difference is not so much . . . celebrated as segregated’ (Bannister, Fyfe and Kearns, 1998: 27; see also Fyfe, 2004). The eyesores currently targeted for removal from the streets are not merely ‘different’ (on what or whose terms are they so?) but, as some of the campaigns above have highlighted, unequal in terms of economic, political and socio-cultural criteria of marginality. In the 19th century, city policing acted as an ‘urban prophylactic’ that cleansed from view, by a seemingly ‘pointless ritual’ (Brogden, 1991: 116), the eyesores of respectable discomfort while maintaining the geographies of inequality (Brogden, 1982). Tracing the dynamics of inequality in the entrepreneurial city today remains an important task (MacLeod, Raco and Ward, 2003) and so too does tracing the role of surveillance practices in reproducing spatial inequality. Inequality is not merely a variation on cultural expression even though the processes of primary definition now constructing cities promote a ‘politics that celebrates marginality rather than seeking to redress it’ (Mitchell, 2001: 82). Challenging
the power behind the gaze remains a significant and difficult task, not least because surveillance in the city is primarily defined as a set of technologies beneficial for the public interest. The material and ideological power of primary definition and the experiential head space of transgressors (including an examination of the experience of social exclusion (Hayward, 2004a)) are two sides of the same coin in the struggle, not only to represent the city, but contextualize these alongside shifts in urban inequality. This debate may be in need of constant resuscitation by critical academics that have to constantly remind others of corporate activities and their anti-social and harmful effects on city life. Moreover, injurious acts taking place on the streets that generate harm for women, racially victimized groups and victims of corporate harm are off the radar of current urban surveillance discourse and practice and rendered unimportant by the established definitional matrix of city rule. In thinking about the wider constitution of space, entrepreneurialized forms of rule are revealed, not merely as sets of technical devices, but as powerful relational strategies that are unevenly impacting on spatial practices, victimization rates and surveillance targeting. Challenging the domain assumptions of urban primary definers presents important and fruitful challenges for criminologists with concerns around the equitability and justice of current trends in surveillance, social control and the city.

Notes

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1 Under New Labour, the ‘roll out’ of social surveillance surpassed Conservative enthusiasm for the technology with the allocation of £170 million of Home Office funds to extend closed circuit television (CCTV) by 40,000 extra cameras in 1999 (Home Office, 1999). Between 1992 and 2002 it is estimated that over a quarter of a billion pounds of mostly public money was spent on camera networks with upwards of three billion for the same period when maintenance costs were included (McCahill and Norris, 2002). As it stands today, the UK is the largest market for CCTV in Europe (Graham, 2000: 45) and accounts for one-fifth of all CCTV cameras worldwide (The Independent, 2004).

2 Studies are beginning to show how the marketing of place and the manipulation of image involve the misrepresentation and even abuse of local cultures (Jones and Wilks-Heeg, 2004).

3 Such responsibilized play is, in Liverpool, written through city slogans and branding such ‘European Capital of Culture’, ‘A World Heritage Site’ and ‘The World in One City’. Such slogans fabricate ‘tolerance to difference’ in the city.

4 The images of exuberance and transgression in the promotional discourses of city marketing are contested within the networks of primary definition. For example, police, businesses and councils have come into conflict over the growth of the service-based economy and, in particular, its impact on levels of policing public drunkenness and the perceived drain this is said to be having on police resources (Coleman, 2004a).

5 ‘Yobs’ is a political and media-favoured term used in the UK to deride young people and comes from the 19th-century bourgeois ‘respectable’ fear of working-class boys (i.e. ‘yobs’) in and around the spaces of the city.

6 The need of local people for so called bargain shopping is born out of the fact that three areas...
in Liverpool are ranked by the government as being among the top five most deprived areas in the UK in terms of unemployment, health, home ownership and educational attainment (The Times, 2004). Liverpool was ranked the poorest area in the UK in terms of average incomes with a high proportion of families surviving on around £8,000 a year (Liverpool Echo, 1999). This reality of the working class city has been hard to reimage for local marketers.

7 In the UK Indymedia exists as an alternative internet news forum for urban activists and commentators in cities up and down the country.

8 Surveillance and policing of women's safety in the public realm continue to be marginalized in the UK (Stanko, 1990; Koskela, 2002), particularly in the face of drug rape that affects the safety of younger women. In UK cities, police and private security are failing to combat this danger and instead prefer to blame the victim. Meanwhile women have resorted to their own forms of protection (see 'Spiked', shown by Channel Four Television in 2004). Indeed, there is now ample research that shows how classist, racist and gendered stereotypical assumptions underpin surveillance practices (Brown, 1998; Norris and Armstrong, 1998; McCahill, 2002).

References


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