



3.9 Shopping malls as consumer space

they also note that public spaces in the US were undergoing significant increases in security during the neo-liberal era of the 1980s and 1990s as well.

The clampdown on public space ... is not simply due to a heightened fear of terrorism after 2001, and it has many local as well as national-scale inspirations. Many public uses of space are increasingly outlawed and policed in ways unimaginable a few years previously, but these rights were already under concerted attack well before 2001 (Low and Smith 2006: 2).

Low (in Low and Smith 2006: 82) makes the links with the privatisation of public space by corporate or commercial interests, arguing that:

during the past 20 years, privatisation of urban public space has accelerated through the closing, redesign, and policing of public parks and plazas, the development of business improvement districts that monitor and control local streets and parks, and the transfer of public air rights for the building of corporate plazas ostensibly open to the public.

The argument is now widely accepted that urban public spaces in the US are more highly managed and policed due to the increasing private ownership of public space and the consequent spread of private management strategies. Ellin (1999: 167–8) argues that this privatisation is both a cause of the decline of public space, but is equally a consequence of it, as the desire to control private space has grown. For him, the move of facilities and amenities from public city centres to privatised

suburban locations, and their reincarnation as inwardly focused fortresses surrounded by moats of car parking, epitomises the problem. It represents an appropriation of public space by private corporations.

Madanipour (2003: 215–16) notes a further cause of privatisation inherent in the urban development processes that give rise to many new urban spaces. As development companies have grown in size and complexity, small locally based companies with links to local decision makers have increasingly given way to companies whose centre of operations typically resides outside the locale. Hand-in-hand, the financing of projects and ownership of commercial properties are increasingly the responsibilities of national and multi-national companies. The result is a growing disconnect between those responsible for development and the locality. Therefore, 'if particular developments had some symbolic value for their developers in the past, it is now more the exchange value in the market that determines their interest'; space becomes a mere commodity. In such a climate, a safe return (the investor's primary interest) will most easily be guaranteed through responding to the needs of occupiers, whilst those of the wider community will be a low priority. In the absence of strong planning controls to rectify the situation, and a general unwillingness of public authorities to take on the responsibility and cost of managing new spaces themselves, privatisation is the inevitable result.

Boyer (1993: 113–14) recognises a 'city of illusion', arguing that it is inappropriate to call something public space when in fact it is not. In central areas, she suggests, the emphasis is firmly on the provision of luxury spaces whilst ignoring the interstitial places between. Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee (1998: 280) agree, arguing that postmodern design eliminates unwanted and feared political, social and cultural intrusions:

Space is cut off, separated, enclosed, so that it can be easily controlled and 'protected'. This treatment succeeds in screening the unpleasant realities of everyday life: the poor, the homeless, the mentally ill, and the landscapes of fear, neglect, and deterioration. In the place of the real city, a hyper-real environment is created, composed by the safe and appealing elements of the real thing, reproduced in miniature or exaggerated versions.

For them, the subjugation of public space to market forces is a recent phenomenon. Thus, in the US, downtown urban design, because it is determined by private interests, has become reactive and opportunistic rather than proactive. By contrast, the public sector typically reacts to the initiatives of the private sector for downtown building.

Increasingly the new downtown has come to be at odds with the traces of the old downtown; the Main Street of yesteryear. The public life of the Main Street downtown is vestigial at best and has