



3.10 Privatised corporate space

been totally transformed by the culture of the poor, the homeless, and the new immigrants.

(Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998: 288)

Their analysis not only revealed a lack of macro-scale strategic direction to steer investment into older parts of the city where the public realm was in decline, but also a series of micro-scale design strategies that deliberately foster exclusion: high blank walls, impenetrable street frontage, sunken plazas, hidden entrances (to new spaces), de-emphasised doorways and openings onto the street, no retail, etc., etc. The 'privatised' spaces inside can be seen as a series of spectacles or themed environments that can be packaged and advertised (Figure 3.10).

STATE PRIVATISATION

In the UK, Minton (2006) describes the shrinking local government model whereby the local council acts as enabler as opposed to provider, with private-public spaces not managed by the police but by private security. Often the process happens through public-led urban regeneration initiatives, with resulting developments being owned and managed by a single private landlord. As Minton notes, this is effectively a transfer of power for the management of public space from the state to private individuals:

In terms of public space the key issue is that while local government has previously controlled, managed, and maintained streets and public squares, the creation of these new 'private-public' places means that ... they will be owned and managed by individual private landlords who have the power to restrict access and control activities.

(Minton 2006: 10)

Minton uses the examples of Canary Wharf and Broadgate in London as examples of this phenomenon, whilst the redevelopment of Liverpool city centre has involved Liverpool City Council leasing out 34 streets to a developer to build and manage for 250 years. Graham (2001) notes an altogether more subtle and pervasive privatisation of the streets, in this case



3.11 Café-creep

through the move in the UK (and elsewhere) from publicly owned urban infrastructure, to privately owned. Although the phenomenon has not yet extended (new motorways and bridges aside) to the roads themselves, most of the infrastructure beneath the street has now been privatised, with associated rights transferred to these companies to obstruct, dig up and reinstate public space more or less at will.

A related issue, in common with the US, is the recent rise of business improvement districts (BIDs). BIDs amount to a group of businesses paying an extra financial levy in order to create an attractive external consumer environment (see Chapter 10). The relevant legislation to allow the creation of BIDs was approved in 2004, and by April 2006 there were 27 BIDs in England. These Minton (2006: 17) describes as 'private-public' spaces where private management tightly monitors and controls the public space. For him, BIDs are 'characterised by a uniformed private security presence and the banning of anti-social behaviours, from skateboarding to begging'. The evidence suggests that the UK is experiencing a similar set of changes to public space and public space management to that experienced by the US over the last 20 years: a shrinking local government; changes in land ownership; increasing private ownership of public space; increasing private control and management of public space; and an increased focus on cleanliness and security.

However, citing the impact of the 2001 Patriot Act in the US in evidence, Low and Smith (2006: 12) conclude that 'the dilemma of public space is surely trivialised by collapsing our contemporary diagnosis into a lament about private versus public'. For them, the cutting edge of efforts to deny public access to places, media and other institutions is occupied by the state, and the contest to render spaces truly public is not always simply a contest against private interests. At a less dramatic level, critiques of the instigation and spread of BIDs are based on similar concerns, of the state effectively passing aspects of their responsibility for publicly owned space to private interests. Kohn (2004) identifies another dimension of these same trends in what she characterises as a creeping commodification of public space. In this category she places the renting out of space by local government for commercial events, the sales of advertising space in and around public space, and 'café-creep', or the spread of commercial interests across the pavements of public spaces (Figure 3.11).