3.17 The creep of the private security industry

MANUFACTURED PLACE

This manufacturing of place occurs in a wide range of contexts, as do Zukin's factors for success, with the creation of entirely fictitious theme parks at one end of a spectrum, to ubiquitous shopping centres featuring specific place references (e.g. Milan's Galleria), to the reinvention of historic urban quarters at the other. At all scales there is one over-riding objective, 'to attract attention, visitors and – in the end – money' (Crang 1998: 116–117). In this sense, such places are undoubtedly popular, and invariably full of human activity. Returning then to the components of place, one might conclude that 'placelessness' is not a product of the lack of activity or carefully considered physical form in the places that lack authenticity, but instead an absence of place-derived meaning. For Sircus (2001: 31) even this is not a concern. He argues:

> Place is not good or bad simply because it is real versus surrogate, authentic versus pastiche. People enjoy both, whether it is a place created over centuries, or created instantly. A successful place, like a novel or a movie, engages us actively in an emotional experience orchestrated and organised to communicate purpose and story.

Ultimately, therefore, the challenge may not be to create authentic or invented places, but simply to create 'good' places, recognising that to do that, many factors over and above the original design will be of concern.

Scary space

Kilian (1998: 129–131) argues that restrictions can be broken down into power relationships of access and exclusion, and that it is these relationships that are the important factors in space. For Kilian, urban spaces contain three categories of people: inhabitants, visitors, and strangers; and each group has different rights to access and exclusion:

- Inhabitants, the controllers; these are often seen as the state/government, but are frequently the private sector such as a large corporation. Inhabitants have rights to access and exclusion.
- Visitors, the controlled; these are the users of public space, with rights to access for certain 'purposes' and no rights to exclusion.
- Strangers, the 'undesirables'; they have no rights to access and are excluded by definition.

He freely admits that these are fluid categories that are controlled by the subjective definitions that inhabitants give to visitors and strangers, and concludes that the debate over the loss of public space relates to the processes of social relationships that control the function of urban public space.

For Minton (2006: 24), fear of crime (rather than actual levels of crime) have often been the driver of moves to privatise parts of the public realm, segregating communities in the process. She argues, however, that whist the ubiquitous reporting of crime in the media has undoubtedly driven much of the increased fear (at a time when actual crime is consistently reducing), processes of polarisation and the associated atomisation of communities also drive a heightened fear of 'the other' (strangers), and a further withdrawal of those with choice from public space. Research in the US, for example, has revealed that the perception of crime is linked to the presence of visibly different groups with mutual suspicions of each other sharing the same space, such as the presence of homeless people in public space (Mitchell 1995).

Minton (2006: 2) describes the potential for social exclusion in terms of 'hot spots' of affluence and 'cold spots' of exclusion. 'Hot spots' – such as urban regeneration areas or BIDs – are characterised by having clean and safe policies that displace social problems. On the other hand, 'cold spots' are characterised by the socially excluded who are unwelcome in the hot spots. By this analysis, public space management is actively creating socially polarised urban public spaces. Minton (2006: 21) also identifies the slow creep of the private security industry in the UK, effectively supplanting the role of the publicly funded police force in those areas that can afford it (Figure 3.17). On this issue, she quotes Sir Ian Blair, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police who has described Miami where despite 19 per cent of streets being policed by private security, the city remains the murder capital of the US. For her, 'private security does not equate with safety', but it does represent a further degree of privatisation of public space, and a further withdrawal of the state from this, its traditional territory.

Murphy (2001: 24) highlights how exclusion practices are not always the work of the private sector through processes of privatisation, but are increasingly supported in public policy aiming to counter undesirable social activities. The 'exclusion zones' that result vary, but control factors such as smoking, skateboarding, alcohol consumption, begging, use of mobile phones and driving. This raises concerns about personal freedom