YOUNG PEOPLE, COMMUNITY SPACE AND SOCIAL CONTROL

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THE SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL CONSTRUCTION OF URBAN SPACE IS A CRUCIAL element in the manner in which policing and the criminalisation of young people occurs in Australian society. For it is the conflict over the use of particular urban spaces which in many ways forms the basis of the relationship between young people and the police, and hence the initial phases of the formal processes of the criminal justice system.

At one level it could be argued that it is the heavy-handedness of the police and/or the misbehaviour of young people, which is at the heart of "street crime" and the clashes that do occur on the street between these groups. The routine use of violence, harassment and threats by the police has been ably and convincingly documented (Alder 1991; White et al. 1991; Cunneen 1990a; Burdekin 1989); but so too has the chronic disrespect for the law and law officials on the part of many young people (Alder et al. 1992).

A focus exclusively on the immediate relationship between young people and the police would, however, beg the question of the wider structural contexts and parameters of the form and content of this relationship. Simply put, while it can be demonstrated at an empirical and descriptive level that young people and the police are each in their own right "at fault" when it comes to the tensions and conflicts at street level, this in itself is not sufficient to explain why and how these are occurring.

The recognition and acknowledgment of broad structural forces in the shaping of particular social relationships has important strategic and policy implications. For if the source of conflict is perceived or theorised as lying simply in the immediate antagonism between the "actors" (individual police officers and young persons), then any "remedial" action taken will tend to concentrate primarily or solely on reforming these "actors". In and of themselves, measures such as better training for the police or legal education for young people, while useful perhaps, are nevertheless limited. They will remain so to the extent that they are not linked to significant changes in the context within which police carry out their work and the uses which young people make of the streets (see Youth Justice Coalition 1990).

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The basic argument of this paper is that the social effects of depressed economic conditions, combined with the further intrusion of commercial relations into the sphere of general community spaces, invariably leads to conflict between the police and young people over the use of public spaces such as the streets and malls.

The profound economic polarisation in Australian society—as evidenced in high levels of youth unemployment, homelessness and poverty—is casting an increasing number of young people into extremely vulnerable situations (Australian Youth Policy and Action Coalition 1992). Individual young people, families and whole communities are progressively being structurally marginalised from the processes of production (for example, paid work), consumption (for example, income, goods and services) and community life (for example, politics, neighbourhood activities). Social alienation and disaffection with a social system which has not provided for their specific needs is one outcome of such economic trends. And the echoes of class situation are seen in random vandalism, "making trouble", survival crime and public displays of defiance and resistance to authority, including the recent student demonstrations (White 1989, 1990). Such are the social effects of the de-regulated economy.

So called "public" urban space is one site where the state in the form of the police and on behalf of particular business interests confronts the marginalised layers of the working class. The vulnerabilities of small businesses in particular, especially in a period of economic downturn, are such that any perceived or potential threat to trade is matched by ardent calls for state protection. The visibility of the dispossessed and the marginalised in the public spheres of the malls and shopping centres, the streets and the pedestrian strips, is manifestly "dangerous"—the shoplifter is also perceived to be a main culprit in creating the consumer shopdrifter. The demand to regulate the "riff raff" and the "rough" is in effect the demand to extend the regulation of public space. The re-definition and closing off of "public space" to the young is at one and the same time a transformation of public space into private space depending upon the activities, dress and behaviour of the people in these areas (see White 1992).

The Contested Terrain of Urban Space

The theme of this paper is that of "space" in the urban environment. It is argued that an aetiology or dissection of the nature of urban space is essential if we are to understand fully the dynamics of police-youth contact. This in turn has major implications for policy development, given that the criminalisation process often stems from or is associated with activity and relationships forged on the street.

Fundamentally, it is argued that many attempts to "reduce crime" or to "treat offenders" misconstrue the nature of the problem. It could well be argued, for instance, that unless significant socioeconomic changes take place (for example, in areas of income support, paid work and social welfare provision generally), there is little hope of significantly altering the extent and nature of current crime patterns (see Box 1987). Present objective
conditions relating to the overall allocation of community resources in Australian society provide the causal context and impetus for offensive behaviour of various kinds and of different degrees of seriousness.

Simultaneously, the particular manner in which social relationships in the public domain are socially constructed and "played out" also has a great effect on the processes of criminalisation. In other words, policy decisions and policing practices, particularly as these relate to the construction of community or public space, have a significant impact on how "offensive behaviour" is defined and on the nature of communal and group relations at the local level. So too, the physical structure and availability of shared communal space will likewise affect the nature of social interaction.

Uses and users of public spaces

The urban environment is divided into a wide range of private and public domains, often with distinct gender, class and ethnic differences in their use (see White 1990; McRobbie & Nava 1984). Those areas where young people congregate in the public sphere include places such as street footpaths, parks, ovals, roller skating rinks, school grounds, cafes, train stations, malls, shopping centres and public toilets. The keynote aspect of these places is that they are publicly accessible, even though, as with public toilets, they can represent a bounded domain of privacy and freedom from direct surveillance in the case of young women (Carrington 1989).

The particular venues where young people gather can be further distinguished in terms of their location in the overall metropolitan urban system. For instance, the venues and activities available in local neighbourhood areas (LNA) tend to vary from those in the central business district (CBD) of a city or local council area. So too, the type, extent and nature of policing in these areas has a different character insofar as LNAs incorporate multiple venues and sorts of activities, while CBDs tend to be restricted to purely commercial activity revolving around the sale of a good or service.

In addition, it needs to be emphasised that often LNAs have distinct class and ethnic compositions. The patterns of urban settlement into identifiable "neighbourhoods", with income and employment commonalities and visible cultural and physical similarities among the population group, is also associated with particular patterns of policing. This is especially evident in the case of economically and socially marginalised groups—for example Aboriginal people in the Sydney suburb of Redfern—where police practices have tended to be heavy-handed and at times brutal (see Cunneen 1990b). Indeed, it could be said that the nature of policing in any particular LNA is, in part, contingent upon the class and ethnic composition of the residents. This is concretely borne out, for example, in studies of policing with respect to Aboriginal communities and places where Aboriginal people congregate en masse (see Cunneen 1988, 1989, 1990a, 1990b; Cunneen & Robb 1987; Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody 1991; Moss & Castan 1991; Gale et al. 1990).
The concern of this paper, however, is more with the type of policing which occurs in the CBDs. A CBD includes those areas located in the heart of a metropolitan system (such as Hay Street Mall in Perth or Bourke Street in Melbourne) and areas of significant commercial size in outer towns or suburban areas (Mirrabooka in Perth Metropolitan area as one example). The significant factor relating to such areas is that they tend to be multi-class and poly-ethnic in nature. That is, people from all parts of the city or urban region tend to travel to or through such areas on a regular basis. They are true meeting grounds for all types of people, with different social and economic backgrounds.

While it could be argued that policing in LNAs involves varying degrees of accommodation (and resistance) between the local community and the police in defining the particular criteria to be used in constructing "appropriate" methods of policing for that area (see Cohen 1979), the same cannot be said with regard to CBDs. The heterogeneity, transient nature and commercial focus of CBDs means that specific policing objectives (tied to the overarching function of such centres—that is business activity) are dependent upon the application of universalistic norms and obligations.

To clarify what this means in practice, it is necessary to briefly identify different usages and different users of "public spaces" in the CBDs. The overriding functional imperative of CBDs is to facilitate (legal) commercial transactions. Part of the means by which to do this includes the establishment of various "honey pot" inducements to bring people into the commercial arena. These take the form of such attractions as fast food outlets, video retail shops, cinema entertainment complexes, restaurants and pubs, leisure and recreation centres, as well as the usual advertising and product displays which characterise shopping areas. Public transportation and road systems are also designed to either facilitate access to the CBD or to make it an unavoidable stopover point in intra-city travel. The net result of this is large congregations of people and the attractions of bright lights and varied activities concentrated in relatively small areas of the city.

The users of such spaces vary in terms of why they are there and what they do with their time. Certainly the majority of people using CBD areas are there for the purposes of paid work (office or service work), as part of a population commuting from one part of the city to another, and/or as buyers of goods and services. Commuting, producing and consuming are all seen as legitimate activities in the CBD. Public space in this instance is predominantly defined as "commercial space". For financially and culturally the CBD is the commercial heartland of particular urban systems, and anything which pertains to this is of course treated favourably.

But the CBD is a centre for alternative non-legitimate activities as well. For example, the CBD is a pole of attraction for the homeless and destitute. Public parks and public walkways can thus be transformed into "welfare" spaces—as temporary receptacles for the urban down and out—and charity bins transformed into "home". Refuge is sought here because behind the businesses and shops are boxes for shelter and places to stretch out; and in most cases the "day workers" leave the area before dark. The streets and venues of the city are also the sites of serious criminal activity (for example
robbery), crimes against property (for example shoplifting) and illegal economic activity (for example fencing of stolen property). Finally, it is the place where people can get together to spend their time (if not their money) among peers and friends, in an atmosphere of relative anonymity and excitement of the senses.

For young people, the movement from LNA to CBD can be motivated by or stem from a number of factors. In addition to the "pull" factors mentioned above (relating to the evident attractions of a city centre), there may be several "push" elements shaping the movements of young people. These include, for example, such factors as few local leisure or recreational services in a LNA, the impact of over-policing on street life, financial and other tensions in the family home, and sheer boredom with one's own neighbourhood communities.

If we assume for the moment that CBDs do have great attraction for young people, then the question of what young people actually do in these areas becomes of prime importance. For the CBD is socially constructed first and foremost as a "commercial space"—not as a space for non-commercial activity. The young consumer does have a place here and will indeed be very welcome by businesses of all kinds, including those which offer youth-specific goods and services. The problem lies in those young people who do not or cannot consume what the commercial enterprise has to offer.

Here it can be suggested that the rapid growth in and high visibility of young people who have been marginalised economically and socially has and will continue to have a significant impact on social relationships within the CBDs, and thus the police. While it could be said that the poor and the homeless "have always been with us", as documented in various welfare histories (Dickey 1987; Garton 1990), the scope of the problem certainly has not been of such grave proportions over recent times, at least since the Great Depression of the 1930s. This has a number of ramifications and implications at the level of street relationships and the use of "public space".

One of the defining characteristics of the post-war period with regard to young people was the rise of the "young consumer" and of a myriad of cultural trappings associated with this (in areas such as music for example). The expansion of a mass "youth culture" was in essence linked to the purchasing power of children whose parents were experiencing the fruits of the long economic boom. This situation has of course now been transformed greatly.

The dilemmas and problems experienced by an ever increasing number of young people in Australian society are demonstrated in figures across a range of key social indicators: a real growth in the number of children living in poverty (Australian Council of Social Services 1992); a majority of full-time workers under the age of twenty-one being in the lowest quarter of income recipients (McDonald 1991); a dramatic decline in the value of youth wages relative to adult wages (Australian Council of Trade Unions 1989); youth unemployment rates fluctuating between 25 and 36 per cent in 1991-92 (Pisarski 1991; Australian Youth Policy and Action Coalition 1992); unemployment benefits and allowances consistently being paid at well below
the poverty line (Sheen & Trethewey 1991); large numbers of homeless children (Burdekin 1989); and the list could go on.

The vast numbers of young people who are no longer in a position to consume in the manner of previous eras poses a series of problems within the context of the CBD economic and political framework. First, it is not always easy to distinguish the marginalised from those who are not, at the level of appearance alone, given the nature of youth fads, fashion and subcultural styles. Second, the fact that so many young people are economically destitute carries with it the additional threat of petty crime and efforts on the part of the young homeless in particular to survive via any means possible, legal or illegal. Third, an extended period of recession has made it even more important for businesses to successfully compete with other businesses for the shrinking consumer dollar. Any person or group which gets in the way of commercial transaction or impedes the exploitation of a potential market is immediately deemed to be an enemy to be eradicated or displaced as soon as possible. Significantly, it has been estimated that shoplifting constitutes half of the total direct costs for juvenile offending (Potas et al. 1990).

Together these facets of the present situation constitute a strong inducement for businesses to put pressure on the police to make sure that any potential trouble by young people be ameliorated beforehand. It also means that all young people have effectively become targets for state intervention due to the widespread nature of the marginalisation processes in society.

In stark terms, the crux of the issue is encapsulated in one of two possible alternatives within the existing economic framework:

- **Young people in general are provided with significant boosts in income.** This would involve major improvements in social security payments, at the least to over the poverty line. It would also involve considerable increases in youth wages (or training wages and allowances) to much higher levels. With increases in the spending power of the student, the unemployed and the working poor, young people would once again occupy commercial space in the appropriate manner.

- **Young people in general are excluded from the use of commercial space and/or are subject to heavy surveillance and regulation of their activities.** This would have the consequence of defining and reinforcing their worth as human beings simply in commercial terms; it also sets in train a backlash effect from the young people themselves, based in part upon their continued use of public space as community space.

Unfortunately, it is the second of these options which has prevailed in the current fiscal climate. And this in turn is manifest in the ways in which young people' presence and activities in the CBDs are currently being managed.
Protection and regulation of public space

The recent National Youth Affairs Research Scheme report on *Perceptions of the Treatment of Juveniles in the Legal System* found that young people from a wide range of economic and social backgrounds, and of both sexes, had had interactions with the police (Alder et al. 1992). The report found that of the young people interviewed (in Tasmania, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia), 80 per cent had been stopped by the police, and of these all but 17 per cent had been stopped on the street (Alder et al. 1992, p. 21). The study also asked police officers where they thought young people were of particular concern. The most frequently specified places were malls (53 per cent of police officers) and shopping centres (60 per cent of police officers). In other words, it was clear from the findings that the police basically concentrate on monitoring the activities of young people where they are especially visible to the general consuming public (Alder et al. 1992, p. 31).

The protection of urban spaces of this sort demands the imposition of a narrow, specified definition of public space, one which clearly centres on the commercial dimensions of its use. While diverse communities may enter into these kinds of public spaces for many different reasons and uses, any sharing of the space—venues, facilities, open areas—is not permitted beyond the parameters set by the dictates of the consumer prescription.

Under such circumstances police activity is guided by universalistic rules of public behaviour centring on very specific types of activity. Public behaviour is thus evaluated in relation to economic activity. People occupying these spaces are considered in relation to whether or not they are legitimate or illegitimate possessors of property, and whether or not they are undertaking legitimate or illegitimate activity in this social context (see Cohen 1979). The transient nature of the population, coupled with the multiple class and ethnic backgrounds they possess, do not allow for ready negotiation of the "groundrules" by which police-youth interaction is to take place. Just as importantly, the heterogeneity of community users of the CBD, the visibility of public interactions, and the varying purposes and lengths of time people are in these areas, mitigate against any kind of perceived positive special treatment on the part of the police.

The work of the police is in essence designed to protect property, and to protect commercial activity and commercial investments. In the first instance, foot patrols and electric golf carts provide manifest evidence of police concerns to prevent theft or vandalism in the commercial district, and to respond quickly to any personal attacks on patrons and passers-by which may occur in these areas. Secondly, the police facilitate the flow of commercial transactions by offering tangible deterrents to potential offenders (as in the case of shoplifters) and add an element of coercive insurance to the carrying out of normal enterprise. In its own right, neither of these functions is especially problematic. However, when linked to particular kinds of policing perspectives and police practices, problems do arise.

In summary form, we can refer to three contradictory features of the police role in the urban environment:
in enforcing the law in defence of private property the police must be vigilant against any potential or actual threat to the owner. Given the low incomes available to a significant number of young people (via paid work or state welfare), the threat of widespread offending activity as part of the criminal economy and of increasing instances of survival crime, is both real and immediate.

in attempting to facilitate the normal operation of commercial enterprise the police are called upon to protect all aspects of the consumption process. Again, where large numbers of young people are no longer in a position to buy goods or services, but have a need to partake of activity in the public domain, the police are faced with dilemmas relating to the presence of the marginalised in areas where they are seen as a threat to the ordinary consumer.

the police are also made responsible for the general social welfare of those people needing assistance in the commercial city areas. The visibility of the young homeless, issues of exploitation and prostitution, and obviously distressful living situations put pressure on the police to actively intervene—forcibly if necessary—in order to save the children of the streets (through moving them on or referring them to social welfare workers). This phenomenon is also related to the position of the young people in paid work, as welfare beneficiaries and as consumers.

The struggle over territory between police and young people is by no means a new phenomenon. Indeed, it features throughout Australian history, from the days of the larrikins and pushes through to those of the bodgies and widgies (Grabosky 1977; Stratton 1992). But the character of the contact between the police and young people at any point in time is crucial to consider if we are to understand fully the possibilities for reform or change.

Today, for example, the widespread disenchantment with the police on the part of young people is due in part to the frequency and nature of police intervention in their lives. It needs to be repeated and stressed here that, while particular groups of young people (for example Aboriginal young people, street kids) are especially prone to experience police harassment, over 80 per cent of a wide cross-section of young people who were recently interviewed said that they had been stopped and spoken to by the police at some time, with 50 per cent having been taken to a police station (Alder et al. 1992). This shows an extraordinary degree of police intervention in young people' activities.

This is partly due to policy measures at the state level designed to clean up the streets. As well, there are local government concerns with security and the adoption of measures designed to enhance the business environment. The role of local government in the criminalisation process is in fact one area where more research and discussion needs to occur (see Palmer 1991). A thorough analysis of the functions and politics of local government could, for example, look at the role of developers and retailers in narrowing the extent
of public space openly available, in enticing people into spaces defined as consumer space, and in rejecting those who cannot afford the costs of entry and use.

Parenthetically, we might also mention another area of concern which has implications for the use of public walkways and malls; namely, the use of publicly owned institutions such as schools. These places do not require the cost of an entry ticket and thus are commercially "free". However, school grounds are policed heavily out of school hours, partly due to the real threats of vandalism and arson. The policing of public spaces such as schoolyards and sports ovals alerts us to the fact that it is not only private commercial space which has been closed off or which is highly regulated with respect to young people.

With regard to the CBD, it could well be argued that measures adopted to "prevent crime" and "assist the unfortunate" can lead to a criminalisation of all young people—at the least in terms of suspicion and intervention—even if this is not explicitly recognised in the terms of the policy or strategy. The "City Safe" approach adopted in Perth in 1989 was clearly targeted at monitoring the activity of a minority of young people—yet the ideological connotations and practical implementation of the program negatively reflected upon all young people present in the inner city area.

It is useful to briefly outline the objectives of the program as a means to illustrate how and why this is the case (City of Perth 1989). The "City Safe" approach involves several different strategies:

Developed within a Community Policing framework, the strategies include the prevention of crime through control measures, rapid response mechanisms to avert potential criminal or unsafe situations, and improved access to support services, especially for young people.

While the planners comment that "There is a careful balance between prevention, active help and support, and control measures", the main thrust of the program is obviously with public order and control priorities, within the context of which welfare measures are to play a subsidiary and complementary role.

The City of Perth and the Police Department have for some time, been concerned at the growing rate of crime and anti-social behaviour occurring within the central city area. The cost in having to respond to these along with the loss of potential patronage of central city businesses and services, is considered a significant problem. CITY SAFE is expected to reduce criminal activity and attract greater patronage of business and services.

The central city area attracts many sections of the community including families, shoppers, tourists, rural visitors and young people, all seeking different things. CITY SAFE aims to ensure that the needs of these visitors can be met as effectively as possible. CITY SAFE will assist by providing pathways to information, referral and support services.
To achieve these ends, the most controversial aspect of the "City Safe" program involved the setting up of a closed circuit television system providing 24-hour surveillance of key public areas within the central city area. Politically, the program legitimated the widespread intervention of police in these areas, centring predominantly on the activities of young people. The policy has been accompanied by novel uses of technology (for example, spy cameras, golf buggies) and the normalisation of "move on" powers and "name checking" as part of the police routine.

While instances of mistreatment and harassment tend to congeal around particular populations of young people (for example, Aboriginal people, street kids, gangs), the differential treatment of these young people is set within the context of universal suspicion and wariness of youth in general. This is not unique to Western Australia. For example, during the Christmas holidays in 1991 the Queensland police instigated operation "Youth Watch". The campaign was based on the incorrect assumption that young people (especially young men) were responsible for 80 per cent of property crime (see Alder et al. 1992, p. 51). The suspicion of young people has been accentuated by the economic recession and the extraordinary burdens which young people have been forced to carry with regard to poverty, low wages and unemployment.

Furthermore, the resentment, fear and apprehension of many young people is generated not only by the existing level of intervention by the police in their lives, but by the actions of the police in relation to specific groups of their peers. What happens on the street, and what happens to particular young persons, is not a matter confined to the immediate protagonists—it permeates the wider youth population in the form of stories, myths, legends and tales. Instances of police bashings or particularly nasty run-ins with the forces of authority will be relayed far beyond the immediate vicinity or youth group involved in a particular incident. Personal experience is not a necessary requirement for one to feel the repressive impact of police powers.

The rationale behind policing, the targets for policing and the techniques of policing are thus crucial factors in the frictions and tensions between young people and the police. But all of these are, in turn, shaped by the relationship between the state, business interests and the economic contingencies of youth.

**Conclusion**

Discussions of crime reduction and treatment of offenders too often ignore the deep structure of the problem of juvenile crime: namely, rampant youth unemployment, poverty, and inequality. This is first and foremost at the heart of the issues and should under no circumstances be treated lightly or simply relegated to the status of conceptual backdrop. Putting such concerns into the "too hard" basket in effect postpones the crucial issues of necessary societal reform and re-consideration of political priorities. It also tends to push people in the direction of short-term and medium-term "solutions" which, ultimately, do not address the real determinant factors behind youth offending or the substantive role of official social reaction in shaping the criminalisation
process. It also raises the question of whether juvenile crime prevention policy is seeking genuinely to change the existing situation or merely trying to control it.

Certainly the increased regulation, monitoring, surveillance and regimentation of "public space" is not going to solve the problem of either "street crime" (namely youth crime) or of negative police-youth relationships (linked to lack of "consumer" status on the part of some young people). Politically, the expanded use of public order offences by local and state governments as a means to control street life will exacerbate the tensions and conflicts already evident in most urban centres. Similarly, attempts to squeeze young people out of formerly "public spaces" by redefining this space according to commercial, consumerist criteria directly challenges the needs and desires of young people to assert their autonomy and to congregate with their peers in places outside of close adult or state control.

The constriction of social space for these young people, plus the pressures on the police to protect the public and the business community, is premised upon an attempt to limit the visibility of young people in groups or gangs and to displace the more overt effects of the current economic crisis. The net result of this, however, is to present young marginalised people as the enemy. These layers of the working class are thus transformed into the "dangerous classes" of the late twentieth century. The content of official prescriptions regarding appropriate behaviour, respectability and legitimate activity—and how these have changed—is yet another area which warrants further consideration if we are to appreciate the full impact of the demise of the "youth as consumer" in the post-1970s period (see White 1992).

While the police try to come to grips with community policing in its different manifestations, they are necessarily caught up in the contradictions generated by class inequality, social oppression and deep poverty. It is their role to be the boundary police of the class structure, to enact whatever form of control is deemed to be the most effective in maintaining a semblance of social peace and commercial viability. But diverse activities designed so that the police can be both part of the community whilst policing that same community are inherently contradictory. The techniques of policing (for example, the use or threat of force, name checks, harassment, move on powers, uniformed street presence) coupled with the orientation of street policing (for example, clearing the streets, ensuring the comfort of consumers, fostering commercial activity) means that the relationship between the police and young people will be an uneasy one at best.

While not wanting to sound overly pessimistic about the possibilities of reform and constructive crime prevention, my own view and that of others is that the overseas experiences of urban unrest and riot will be repeated here in the not so distant future. For without income and space of their own, without social respect and personal self-esteem, young people have nothing to lose in rebelling in whatever fashion or manner they may choose against a system which for all intents and purposes has forsaken them.
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