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Crime does pay!

The Structure-Building Power of Crime for Urban Planning and Urban Experience

In an ironic depiction of a bourgeois economy, Marx argued more than 130 years ago in his “Digression on Productive Labor” that the capitalist society was already so perfectly developed that it knew how to functionalize even its declared enemies for its own ends. [1]

According to Marx, the criminal not only produces the crime itself, but also all measures directed *against* crime. In other words, the criminal produces the police, the penal code, the criminal justice system and the prison, as well as all forms by which criminality is reported, whether in the fine arts, scholarly publications, or the mass media. For criminals, crime doesn’t necessarily pay; for their hapless victims, it doesn’t pay at all—but according to Marx it does for society as a whole.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the thrill of crime became a central sales factor in a profit-oriented culture industry. [2] Crime sells, in daily newspapers, wax museums, detective novels and later in the cinema. Likewise, for the anonymous public in the big city, crime as a conversation topic serves the function of constituting a common reality and identity.

Representations of crime in the mass media help the mutually foreign, spatially distanced residents of the big city to unite into an imagined community, and help the unfamiliar spaces, empty of experience, to be filled and made accessible to the public, albeit as sites of crime or misfortune. The history of urban studies is also marked by the productive force of crime.

“Nosing around,” Robert Ezra Park’s central metaphor for the method of participatory field research, which brought worldwide fame to the Chicago School in the 1920s, derives, according to Rolf Lindner, from the practice of the new, genuinely urban profession of the reporter. [3] On his or her “run” or “beat,” the reporter is constantly on the trail of usable new information, as is the police officer—and the reporter is also often on the trail *of* the police officer. Along the way, city reporter borrows both the terms and the methods from police detective work, which, as we know, serves to maintain law and order and the hunt for crime.

Observation, the interview, the undercover investigation, even photography, were all originally the techniques of policing.

Not only the perceptual tools of the big city, but also the concrete developments in architecture and urban planning that structure our daily lives, have been fundamentally advanced by this productive power of crime. Threat scenarios in which oneself becomes the victim of a crime, but also mere traces of disorder on buildings or in public space, which can be read as signs of social disintegration, elicit feelings of the uncanny, of insecurity or fear. The management of these subjective fears and the minimizing of objective risks comprise the essential sources of modern architecture and planning.

The spectrum of measures implemented by these two fields is highly diverse. It ranges from architectural details to citywide surveillance networks that include the improvement of locks to alarm systems, public lighting, video surveillance of urban space, the securing of objects or military-strategic urban layouts, social control through transparent designs, the settlement of consumer zones that make places perceived as dangerous seem livelier and thus safer, and so on. These measures can be directed at both enemies from without and enemies from within—and they can provide real as well as symbolic defense.

Protection always also means the control of those who need protecting. Walls do not only shut out; they also shut in. The one who seeks protection from attackers within secure city walls also submits to the regulations that are effective there. For example, electronic access control systems in modern high-rise office buildings, club facilities, or ski resorts not only keep unauthorized persons out; they also allow the movements of authorized users to be closely monitored. Moreover, surveillance is always a normalizing technology—and here, the architect takes on a key role.

The various types of so-called crime, or more accurately, of deviant behavior, are met with an increasing diversification of preventive measures; the criminal's increasing knowledge about measures of control is countered by an increasing complexity of security technologies. Distinct, specialized professional fields develop that require more advanced qualifications than those of the "honorable craftsmen," of which Marx wrote. The criminal functions as a factor of disproportionality, whose task is to disturb the balance in order to, according to Marx, "spur the productive forces." Crime impels the productive forces to innovation; it

generates a productive force development surplus, which can go far beyond the mere technology of control.

Consequently, the putative crime—whether real or imagined—opens up a considerable market. According to Marx, it contributes more to the increase of national wealth than more respectable industries, and whenever crime indeed threatens to vanish, it is invented all over again by those who profit from fear: these include the press, police officers, populist politicians, and planners, as well as the construction, security, and insurance industries, but also academically trained authors—such as myself—whose critiques, in Marx’s words, are thrown “onto the general market.”

Diversification of Fear

Since the founding of the first cities, the objective danger of falling prey to an act of crime against life and limb has clearly decreased with the advance of civilization and the increasing monopolization of violence by the state. Nevertheless, the spectrum of threat scenarios has not reduced—as might have been expected—but has instead radically diversified.

In the early 1980s, the invention of a volatile concept of perceived, subjective security would prove highly productive, directly inviting instrumentalization by neoliberal security and economic policies. In exactly the phase of societal upheaval that for broad sections of the population was heralded by a destabilization of living conditions, this destabilization made them particularly vulnerable to additional insecurity: thus, globalization has not only radically accelerated an exchange of ideas, capital, and commodities, but has also made corporations and individuals more mobile. Opportunities for affordable conditions are leading more and more businesses to relocate, just as the idea of a possibly better life is driving more and more people to migrate.

In this late-modern, flexible society, the different forms of uncertainty or insecurity seem to enhance and play on one another. The English language maintains three clearly semantically differentiated terms: “security,” “certainty,” and “safety.” In German, for example, only the idea of safety from within can be expressed. Zygmunt Bauman describes increasing social

insecurity, dwindling reliability of income sources that are able to ensure sustenance for individuals and families, and fear of criminality as a complex that produces increased demands on a state system that, in turn, is no longer able to meet them. The frustrated actors increasingly respond with strategies of social and spatial retreat and enclosure into private, into their own respective subcultures and neighborhoods. [4]

Thus, today, in Marx's sense, not just burglars and terrorists are productive; the sheer presence of difference or poverty can also be productive when it makes an individual feel uncertain, when it questions the value of private property, or impairs the consumer spirit in shopping malls.

Architectures of Fear

There are two opposing, preventive strategies competing on the market. Luckily, neither is financially viable or politically feasible in its pure form. The first strategy is to secure buildings as much as technically possible, in order to isolate individuals or groups with common interests in absolute safety. Thresholds between outside and inside are monitored by surveillance cameras and security personnel; reinforced concrete and bulletproof glass are preferred. This is the model of a city of bunker architecture, patrolled on the inside by private and on the outside by public security guards. The second—more democratic—strategy is to see every individual as a risk carrier who can be prevented from breaking one of the rules through his or her visibility. This passive surveillance entails the absolute transparency of every nook and cranny, the elimination of all possible hiding places, the illumination of the entire urban area—also underground, in basements, parking garages, subways—and so on. This utopian model of the safe city consists of glass and light, and the entire population takes on the task of surveillance.

In the U.S. and Great Britain, crime prevention through building was established early on as a field of academic research and an objective of planning practice: Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is a counterstrategy to traditional protective architecture. It is fundamentally based on research done by Jane Jacobs and Oscar Newman. [5] In addition to access control and police presence, this strategy relies on social control (Jacobs) to establish a defensible space (Newman). CPTED's key terms are *territoriality*, small manageable units; *surveillance*, a view of the entire area; *image*, design improvements to encourage stronger

identification with the neighborhood; *environment* and *communities of interest*. The users' inhabiting of the space and identification with their surroundings make outside intruders immediately recognizable as such. This is settlement by the like-minded, which, according to the American conception of culture, is the only way to achieve community solidarity. Hence, a criminological line of argument was able to develop from the debate about security that supported New Urbanism and was consummated in the formation of gated communities.

Paradigm Shift to Control

This tendency was supported by the transition from the society of discipline to the society of control, which—according to Gilles Deleuze in his “Post-Script on the Societies of Control” [6]—is characterized by the replacement of the state with the corporation. The service of selling is the so-called soul of the corporation, profit is its purpose, and marketing is its instrument of social control. Societal dominance by the corporation also has an effect on the development of architecture and public space: investment banks, pension funds, international consulting firms, and politicians are taking possession of public space. At the MIPIM (Marché International des Professionnels de l'Immobilier, one of the most important international real estate fairs, held annually in Cannes) there are fewer real estate agents, contractors, and architects than regions, banks, investment funds, international advisory agencies, and politicians presenting themselves and their projects. [7] Urban macrostructures are changing, and are increasingly determined by investors. Shopping centers are replacing public boulevards. Train stations are becoming corporations, and are intended and designed to be run accordingly. The first function of new urban structures is now to turn a profit. Thus, train stations are becoming shopping malls, airports are becoming plazas with event culture, manufacturing plants are becoming adventure parks.

The increasing privatization and management of previously public spaces has led to segmentation of territories and their control. The individual, too, is increasingly confronted with the fragmentation of identity. Social status constantly changes as societal subsegments are traversed: in the morning, a father in his second marriage; at midday, employee in an office; in the afternoon, a freelancer in his own apartment; then to the fitness studio, sporting association, or club with friends, or continuing education classes with strangers; on the weekend, an excursion with children and pets from the first marriage, and so on. Patchwork families and patchwork incomes characterize existence in the deregulated economy.

At the same time, according to the German criminologists Michael Lindenberg and Henning Schmidt-Semisch, in Western countries, generalized consensus-based value judgments that apply to everyone are being replaced by countless subcultures. What was previously regarded with suspicion as eccentric or flamboyant behavior, and sometimes even punished as transgression, is currently marketed as a leisure trend for high-income groups. It is difficult for the authorities to assess whether a 45-year-old martially clad Harley Davidson motorcyclist is a gang member or a well-paid businessman in leisure clothing, or both. Like corporate marketing concepts, the dispensation of authority is being reorganized: “In the society of control, the state responds to the disappearance of a universal morality with a ‘demoralization’ of control. Ideas such as resocialization, improvement and treatment lose their significance and are replaced by the ‘amoral,’ technocratic concept of security.”

“The society of control thus relaxes its ‘moralizing’ grip on the individual—not in order to grant absolute freedom, but in order to subject the individual to a reconditioned, now spatial-situative mode of control.” The individual no longer passes through society’s great control milieus in chronological order alone, through his or her personal biography, first as a child in a family, then in school, at university, in the military, in a factory, at a hospital, and so on, as Michel Foucault suggested, but moves on a daily basis between the different control milieus.

“The all-pervasive and ever more technologically mediated surveillance refers with instrumental purity to the interest of every space owner. Foucault’s image of society as an all-pervasive prison network has been replaced by the new image of a beehive of different spaces of control belonging to different private governments: ‘You can do as you please, but do it in the allocated space and in the intended manner – this guarantees your safety from us and our safety from you.’ The state is no longer the guardian of morality,” Lindenberg and Schmidt-Semisch write. “The state’s guards now only patrol the permeable boundaries of space.”

The new forms of control have certainly not supplanted the old forms of discipline, but have made them more refined, more flexible, cheaper, and thus, more comprehensive. “They are not confined to areas ‘protected’ by walls, but, through inclusion of new forms of control, and above all, through the rhetorical reference to ‘community,’ are spread through the entire social space.” [8]

Police Work in the Risk Society

According to the traditional notion of police work as formed by the media, the policeman *hunts down* the criminal and provides the judicial system with indices that will lead to the criminal's conviction. Today, police expertise no longer serves only the law or crime statistics; it also contributes to a system of fragmented, multiply networked institutions. Information is not only exchanged among the police forces of different countries but, according to criminologist Richard Ericson, is also requested by other government institutions and private companies: by social, educational, and financial institutions; by health care organizations, crime prevention bodies and motor vehicle departments; by insurance companies for risk estimation, by suppliers of security technologies to market their products, by personnel departments to check up on applicants. "The police are gathering more and more data in certain pre-structured categories that are of significance not only to internal police work, but also to their clients." [9]

All relevant data is gathered, all risk factors are identified, ordered and managed, and individual potential risks detected by the insurance companies are converted into institutional norms applicable to all. With negative logic, this ever-increasing knowledge generates ever-increasing risks and justifies armament with ever more powerful measures. Fear ultimately proves itself.

To compensate for the restriction of traditional police powers, new images of the enemy are constructed: organized crime, the criminality of foreigners, and the increasing violence of young people. International terrorism has proven to be the most effective: the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York in 1993, on the Oklahoma City Federal Building in 1995, and the massive car bomb attacks by the IRA in the center of London in 1992 and 1996 legitimized expanding the surveillance activities of the secret services.

They also significantly raised the standards for security technology and systems for controlling access to high-rise office buildings. They have even generated the fast-growing industry known as Business Continuity Services, with its own specific building type. Instead of being housed at the address that represents a corporation, these data backup centers are deliberately removed to anonymous camouflage buildings far from the metropolis, so as not

to present attack targets and to be able to continue business without interruption in case of a catastrophe. Martin Pawley has called this “parallel architecture.” [10]

If security industry experts have their way, then parking lots will be housed separately from office buildings and centrally administrated, computer-driven access controls, which are linked to building services, video surveillance, fire alarms, sprinkler systems, burglar alarms, and special locking systems, will be installed for vehicles and persons. Disruptions or alarms are displayed on a computer and conveyed to service firms, providers of surveillance, police, ambulance corps, and the fire department. The use of elevators is only enabled for authorized persons within their limited area of authorization: a chip card automatically brings employees to their floor, and opens only those doors for which clearance has been granted.

Simultaneously, the chip cards are used to record time spent working, and allow the daily movements of all employees to be traced within the corporations’ buildings and grounds.

However, these modern spatial-situational control methods are not restricted to the workplace. Throughout the day, individuals increasingly find themselves in a continuum of different control milieus. Particularly in the US, the trend of voluntary (self-) confinement is also on the rise in the home and in the consumer and leisure industries. The individual sleeps in a gated community, a sealed-off, fenced-in and guarded housing development, and seeks provisions and distraction in equally fortified shopping malls, urban entertainment centers, and leisure parks. Even on vacation, the supposed escape from daily routine, people are divided, according to economic class, into categories of hotel—if possible, fully enclosed All-Inclusive Clubs—or distributed among computer-controlled skiing regions. On vacation, the individual can get used to being watched at all times. And by watching reality shows like *Big Brother*, he or she can learn to adopt the viewpoint of an amused guard who can exclude undesirable types from the game via the Internet. While the hero of *The Truman Show* was trapped unwittingly and involuntarily in the artificial world of the entertainment industry, today nobody has to be *forced* to play the game anymore, quite the contrary, it has become an enjoyable matter of course.

In contrast to the fortification of military compounds, financial service companies, international airports, or the residential enclaves of the super rich, control of access to everyday milieus is carried out by the economic regulative. Although each person understands the codes that indicate membership to a particular milieu—business class versus economy

class, Prada versus H&M, Hollywood Hills versus Working Class District—not everyone is willing to give up their right to freedom of movement. Even though most people humbly subject themselves to self-selected or allocated boundaries, for many, the thrill of urban life consists specifically in transgressing these limits and taking possession of forbidden space.

Where informal bounds are transgressed but physical barriers are deemed undesirable, as in shopping centers, continuous video surveillance helps to identify so-called undesirable subjects. However, the individuals concerned also develop tactics to evade exclusion criteria: impoverished American senior citizens, wanting to spend their afternoons in the social atmosphere of expensive shopping malls, disguise themselves as affluent customers by carrying empty shopping bags.

To drive away undesirable elements—that is, individuals who, in the view of the owner of the space, could possibly disrupt the majority's shopping pleasure—the use of physical violence by private security forces is no longer the only recourse. The German railway (Deutsche Bahn) has incorporated the latest strategies for expulsion in their new publicity campaign: “Service, Sicherheit, Sauberkeit” [service, security, cleanliness]. In their stations, transformed into “profit centers” in the wake of privatization, a video clip lauds the round-the-clock video surveillance intended to guarantee the safety of all. At the same time, security headquarters regularly sends out squads of patrolling cleaners to pursue “undesirable” persons throughout the station, and to harass them with incessant cleaning wherever they come to rest, until finally they give up and leave the premises.

Occasionally, instead of guards or cleaners, it is building services that perform the task of expulsion: in bathrooms, besides the special black light bulbs installed to prevent junkies from being able to distinguish their own veins in their blue-white skin, the floors are also uncomfortably cooled (instead of heated), or the humidity levels are raised, to make staying in there for too long—as the homeless might do—physically unbearable. And in the newest German shopping centers, the air-conditioning can be manipulated to create a strong draught or a cold wind to blow away, so to speak, undesirable persons who have not come to shop but to get warm. The soothing muzak, which is designed to suggest high spirits and safety, so that customers load their shopping carts in a state of bliss, can be temporarily replaced—just where undesirable persons happen to be lingering—with empirically tested intolerable music, until the area has been vacated after only a few harrowing minutes.

From Architecture of Fear to Architecture of Diversity

Hence, many urbanists are lamenting the increasing loss of public space, and the stricter segregation of the city into communities of interest, which are in a position to be more or less hermetically sealed off from one another according to financial purchasing power. Here, the threat is a city of privatized and privately administered and guarded zones of consumption, business bunkers, and gated communities, with remaining between-spaces guarded against potential violations by the controlling authorities of the state. However, these sociospatial islands are not so hermetic as they first appear. In the course of daily life, it is only through crossing their boundaries that workplaces, schools, or consumer and leisure facilities can be reached. Conversely, service providers must be let in, in order to provide the desired milieu and status-adjusted lifestyle. Interestingly, it is specifically people from socially disadvantaged milieus that were previously considered threatening, who are now being invited inside the protected zones of the well-to-do.

In effect, there results a scarcely observed permeability through countless boundary crossings—as when babysitters, cleaners, and security personnel from the poorer districts of the city visit the homes and workplaces of the wealthiest. This boundary crossing takes on particular significance when the night shifts begin at hospitals and homes for the elderly, and the already large percentage of nursing staff with migrant backgrounds increases even more—as if, at night, the entire care of the sick and elderly middle-class is turned over to immigrants.

The absolute security that is longed for by so many could actually also be the death of political community, or so the science fiction author J. G. Ballard suggests. In his crime novel *Cocaine Nights*, [11] he sketches the bizarre picture of a vacation and retirement home in Southern Europe. For the saturated northern European middle class, the residences and clubs, surrounded by walls, with guided leisure activities, access control, video surveillance, and private security guards, are recognized status objects, so-called secure investments, and places of retreat, that enable isolation from the home country as well as from the surrounding area, and thus from any kind of social conflict. In these paradisaic enclaves, there is no trace of political community. The “inmates” simply vegetate between bed, private swimming pool, and satellite TV; even the sports centers and the marina restaurant remain unused. A host employed in a club finally finds a way to escape the crippling lethargy: he simulates break-ins

and vandalism, facilitates drug consumption, sexual harassment, even prostitution, and soon uneasy residents seek contact with their neighbors, meet in the clubhouse, and develop political structures similar to those they had once fled: they form a civil defense, a municipal council, and even cultural institutions like artist's studios and theater groups, in which they attempt to work through their experiences and fears.

In fact, in urban central Europe, many members of the sheltered, educated middle class use their leisure time to seek out areas that are frequented by heterogeneous social groups, or that at least enable a safe view of other, perhaps more interesting social milieus. It is even the case that, in regional and international competition, cities are called upon to exhibit zones of authentic urban culture, through which they put on view their so-called tolerance of various marginal social groups. The highly mobile creative milieus seek these specific zones as they develop in the vicinity of defunct urban wastelands and informal, migrant markets. The presence of social groups that some would consider a prompt for exclusion and isolation, for others can be an indispensable attractor.

Even the scenes of real crimes, sites of political conflict, and previous or current urban danger zones can be reassessed as tourist attractions for urban tourists seeking authenticity. In turn, the educated middle class goes beyond the beaten paths of the tourism industry to experience the true myths of the city. On the prowl, nosing around as city reporters once did, they go in search of Others, the excluded ones, whose keen and penetrating view they hope—in their imaginations—to share.

Ironically, the increasing implementation of security strategies in architecture and urban design simultaneously produces an opposing impact on community life: For one, more security contributes to the enclosure and sealing off of the self. For another, the potential for retreat and safety in the integrity of protected private space is the precondition that enables individuals to venture, fortified, secured, and thus self-assured, into the semi-public and public spaces of the city. But a minimum amount of security is needed to encourage an adequately large number of individuals from different subcultures to use the semipublic and public spaces of the city actively. Security is thus the prerequisite for community-forming, face-to-face interaction in public space.

However, self-enclosure can itself have the opposite effect: it can lead to the complete isolation of actors—resulting in the breakdown of community. But it can also contribute to

producing small, well-ordered social groups or subcultures whose specific identity-constituting cultures, signs, and rituals arouse the curiosity of other actors. Consequently, what had once been shut in, shut out, or closed off can produce a new desirability, sometimes *ad hoc*, but as a rule, after a period of time.

At the beginning of the boom, the increasing implementation of security measures in architecture and urban planning led to the generation of largely homogenous and segregated urban landscapes: business parks, residential areas, and shopping malls. The emergent opposing reaction, the need for identity and diversity, has been handled by developers to the effect that the separated functions were brought into closer proximity in so-called mixed-use developments, and locations that are historically important to a city, and thus identity-constituting, were made into focal points (such as harbor fronts). Such developments were given the diversified face of theme parks. But this top-down staging of diversity might also be met by the ample creative resources countless urban subcultures, which certainly allow a bottom-up staging. In this way, from an economically highly productive architecture of fear, it would be possible—in the long term—for an architecture of diversity to grow.

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NOTES

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