The production of private space and its implications for urban social relations

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Abstract

The paper focuses on what has been termed the privatization of urban public space and the negative consequences attributed to this transformation. The first part examines this dichotomy between public and private space and finds it to be more apparent than real, insofar as it is difficult to claim a sharp conceptual distinction between the two; moreover, the social benefits of public space are shown to be overdrawn, while those of private space are shown to be commonly overlooked. Having begun to dismantle the dichotomy, the second part of the paper discusses the public–private spaces in a rapidly growing metropolitan area in the Southwestern US and explores their implications for social relations. Given that these newer spaces are less different than is sometimes claimed, it is not surprising that they display some familiar forms of social interaction.

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Introduction

This paper deals with one of the more important changes to occur in the contemporary American city, one that has been identified in the literature as the ‘privatization of public space’ (Kohn, 2004). This restructuring of the urban landscape has been facilitated by the interlocking components of the real estate, finance, construction and design sectors, and reflects the influence of the latter at the expense of municipal oversight. In conceptual terms, this may be of only limited importance, insofar as cities in the US have been both shaped and produced by corporate interests for a very long time. What is changing is the apparent fragmentation of
the city, as urban space ‘splinters’ into more complex entities (Graham & Marvin, 2001). This is a function of corporations producing larger and more clearly delineated spaces—shopping malls, private places of entertainment, residential developments and office parks—that can only be entered and used by invitation (Low & Smith, 2006).

The result of these changes is that what were once apparently open spaces—for instance parks, or streets adjoining individual stores and businesses—may turn into controlled spaces. As we shall see, there are various reasons why this may be a negative development. One that is strongly asserted within the literature is that the loss of undifferentiated public spaces leads to a diminution of the ability of individuals to meet and interact freely with others. In turn, increased “concentrations of poverty and clustering [have] left many cities divided in ways that commentators believe hinders political empathy” (Atkinson & Blandy, 2005, p. 179). Those whose appearance is different in some manner—due to poverty, gender, age, ethnicity or religious observance—may be singled out for scrutiny and may be denied entry. What may change, then, in the restructuring city is a surrender of one’s rights to move freely and to choose one’s destinations, or as Mitchell puts it more succinctly, one’s ‘rights to the city’ (Mitchell, 2003).

This is an interconnected set of arguments with complex implications. The loss of public space can be seen as something with important social outcomes—part of what Atkinson and Blandy (2005, p. 179) conjecture may be a “downward spiral of urban social relations”. There may be important impacts on citizenship, insofar as the existence of public space can be linked to the operation of the public sphere (Low, 2000; Smith & Low, 2006). On one hand, then, we are invited to see the contemporary city as one that is devolving, retreating from the Progressive experiment, and losing its civil attributes (Nelson, 2005). Given what we have observed since the millennium with regard to a loss of individual and group liberties, examples of this are not hard to find (D’Arcus, 2004). On the other hand, we are also seeing a different kind of city emerging, especially in those parts of the US where urban growth is a relatively recent phenomenon. These are cities in which public space has a diminished importance, for a number of reasons, and where private space has a normalcy that is absent in older metropolitan areas. We are challenged therefore to understand what these new urban forms have in store for us, both as urban residents and as members of civil society, for if these are indeed places of corporate conformity and minimal social interaction, then we are creating a bleak urban future for ourselves.2

An evaluation of current debates

A number of significant changes have occurred in American cities in recent years and these have been linked to the rapid evolution of a globally competitive economic environment (e.g. Keil, 2003). These changes include the production of new downtown areas, the creation of lofts and similar high profile residential developments, and the displacement of low-income residents from neighborhoods. In some cities, this occurs as part of the evolution of new industrial spaces (Hutton, 2004); in others, it is linked to the creation of entertainment complexes, associated

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1 Personal and group freedoms have been under attack since the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 led to the first sweeping anti-terror legislation; see Kirby (1997). However, the breadth and depth of current practice is reminiscent of the vengeful wartime hysteria seen in 1942 and before that, in 1917.

2 The reader should not infer that these cities are restricted to the Southwestern US; as Shatkin (2007) points out, privatization has been imposed on nations and their cities throughout the world by entities such as the World Bank and the IMF.
with arenas and their sports teams (Thorns, 2002). At the same time, a generous supply of credit and the creation of many new forms of housing finance (essentially, balloon mortgages with interest-only payments), pushed a frenzy of new home construction, that in turn encouraged buyers to take on historic amounts of personal debt. Although this began to slow in 2006, in some markets it is estimated that up to a third of all homeowners now hold such mortgages, which is a reflection of the way in which buyers have increasingly come to see housing as a form of investment, and so are purchasing larger and larger homes to maximize investment returns. In order to try to guarantee their investments, many buyers prefer to locate in master-planned communities. These, replete with golf courses and recreation areas, are closer in design to theme parks than traditional tree-lined neighborhoods (Kirby, 2000).

As larger vehicles and larger homes proliferated throughout the 90s, there seems—to some observers at least—to have emerged a new urban form that is only superficially connected to its antecedents:

“From New York’s Long Island to California’s San Fernando Valley, affluent property owners not content with the cultural cleansing of big city streets, not insulated enough inside the picket-topped walls and bougainvillea-lined borders of their gated enclaves, push for the secession of whole wealthy neighborhoods, entire upscale towns and counties from the larger public life of which they are a part. And why not... ‘the melting pot is over’” (Ferrell, 2001, pp. 11–12).

In short, these emerging private spaces are seen as a reflection of, and a further contribution to, the fragmentation of the city. This is routinely viewed as a profoundly retrograde step—it is seen to be socially divisive, to add to social segregation and to contribute to urban sprawl (Le Goix, 2005), to place additional costs on urban government, and to pose novel challenges to the latter (Grant, 2005).

This explicit re-mapping of capitalism on the urban landscape has in turn been linked to various social outcomes. As a manifestation of a globalizing neoliberalism, it can be interpreted as a “sadistic” taking back of public spaces from the poor and from the homeless (MacLeod, 2002; Mitchell & Staeheli, 2006). More broadly, there is also diminished access to streets and sidewalks, squares, and parks, and a concomitant loss of the right to assembly, the right to play and to recreate, and the most encompassing right to ‘be’ in the city as a totality; this is different than being restricted to some fragments such as pools, skateboard parks and similarly supervised locations (Flusty, 2000). Further, there may be an additional loss associated with the creation of private space—such as malls, corporate campuses and apartment complexes—which is addressed more fully in the following section.

The contours to the first dimension of loss have been widely discussed from assorted viewpoints and several disciplines (e.g. Kohn, 2004; Low & Smith, 2006; Mitchell, 2005), and an equally wide range of empirical examples is offered. Key claims include the social benefits of assembly, the importance of political canvassing and face-to-face debate, and the consequent drawbacks of fragmentation that produces a diminished civic responsibility, as residents promote narrow, territorially based claims for their particular segment of the city (Nelson, 2005).³ Perhaps, the most compendious accounts are offered by Gerald Frug (1999) and Robert

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³ In addition, there is a literature that connects the importance of contemporary public space back to purer urban forms, such as the polis of the ancient world (see, for instance, Harvey, 2006; Mumford, 1961; Soleri, 2001). This is dependent on a particular reading of such older cities that is contentious but beyond the scope of this paper.
Putnam (2000). The former argues for changes in the legal frameworks on which cities exist in order to diminish the divide between cities and suburbs, which he sees in terms of a contrast between “public” central cities and “private” suburbs (p. 58). Putnam (2000, p. 205) has famously decried the “collapse” of American community, arguing for instance that residents of small towns are more “altruistic, honest and trusting” than those living elsewhere. A significant target of his analysis is the connection between suburbanization and “civic disengagement” (Putnam, 2000, p. 214), and he has been instrumental in drawing attention once again to concepts of “social capital”, or the intrinsic values of social contacts (Putnam, 2000, pp. 19–20).

Woven through these arguments is a contrast between ‘public’ and ‘private’, but it is in reality a convergence of two very different conceptions of the meaning of ‘public’. To this point, private space has been used in a material sense, based on the ownership of real property. This can be distinguished from public space that is held in some form of commons (Blackmar, 2006; Blomley, 2005, pp. 283–284). Yet as Staeheli (1996, p. 604) has pointed out, this is only one of three such dichotomous pairings. The term may also be commonly used to describe a situation of ‘privacy’ that is distinct from behavior that occurs ‘in public’, while it is also applied to a private sphere, distinguished from the public sphere as it is discussed by Arendt and Habermas. As Staeheli notes, it is common to assume that “public actions are taken in public spaces and that together they constitute the public sphere...[and] that private actions in private spaces constitute the private sphere” (Staeheli, 1996, p. 602). In this common usage, political and social space are seen to facilitate and thus to reinforce one another (see also Brainard, 2003; Kautzer, 2005, pp. 165–169). Yet as Staeheli points out in detail, this is a conflation of different concepts. Based on various examples—such as the deliberate tactical strategy of moving private acts into public spaces—she concludes that we must uncouple such a simplistic connection between public space and the public sphere.

This begins to pose a complex challenge to our understanding of public and private spaces, as it blurs what appears to be a coherent and exhaustive dichotomy. It must, in turn, pose some problems toward any effort to make simple connections between these different meanings of “public”, such as those identified by Staples (2000, p. 157), who states flatly that we are being driven out of public space by surveillance, which means in turn being “driven out of the public sphere”. This is surely too simple, as his use of “we” seems to imply that all traditional or unsurveilled spaces facilitated assembly, and that all who wanted to were able to assemble equally. It also, of course, assumes that assembly—or its prohibition—determines political outcomes. Staeheli (1996, p. 609, her emphasis), insofar as she is considering women who are frequently excluded from public spaces, immediately sees the inconsistencies of these assumptions—“there is no necessary reason why actions that are intended to affect broad economic, social or political relations must be taken in public spaces”. Recent research that is consistent with these insights is emerging with new feminist scholarship in Iran and Turkey; this work is valuable in showing just how difficult it was, and how rough it remains, for women who attempt to occupy traditional public space in these countries (Amir-Ebrahimi, 2006; Erkip, 2003).

Now that we have begun to disconnect these two conceptions of ‘public’, new questions need to be addressed. The first relates to the range of political action that occurs within the public sphere. As Staeheli reminds us, ‘the public’ can be a synonym for progressive politics, and while there is the long list of progressive campaigns that have depended on assembly for their success, this leaves open the issue of other forms of political action (Kohn, 2004; Mitchell, 2003; Staeheli, 1996, p. 616). A range of questions offers itself up for empirical inquiry—starting with the essential query, has every political cause depended on assembly in order to
be successful? And more crucially perhaps, has every movement that has depended on assembly for its success been progressive? Devotees of the Second Amendment and gun ownership, to take one example, rarely involve themselves in public demonstration and much more often depend on litigation to defend the rights they claim (Kirby, 1990). Does this though imply that it is not an effective grass roots movement?4

Let us consider the purest case for assembly, namely the expression of ‘appropriate violence’, to use Arendt’s phrase (see Mitchell, 2003, p. 53). According to Mitchell, there are moments when force is the necessary “rational means for redressing the irrationality of injustice”. Kohn (2004, p. 81) argues for something similar when she states that, “for a robust democracy, we need more than rational deliberation”. This is fair enough. But, let us contemplate what we know about the use of violence in American history. It is significant, I think, that discussions of public space do not often address its systematic use for undemocratic and non-progressive purposes—here, I refer to the lynchings that defined politics in many parts of this country over a period of many decades. It was a method of control used extensively after the Civil War to intimidate the African-American population. We know from the photographic record that it was not undertaken as a form of anonymous terror (in the sense that we would identify it today); rather it was a highly visible and social act of reprisal and subsequent intimidation. The violence itself was thus often undertaken in public space in order to maximize its impact, to provide solidarity for the majority and to provide a spectacle—itself frequently photographed and reproduced—in order to subjugate the minority.5

In an account of the last recorded lynching that took place in Indiana in 1930, Carr provides a clear anecdotal record of the event. Her grandfather received a late night phone call, telling him “don’t walk through the courthouse square tonight on your way to work, you might see something you don’t want to see” (Carr, 2006, p. 3).6 Photos and records—not least the account of the sole survivor—indicate that after dark, three African-Americans circumstantially accused of rape were dragged from the town goal by Klansmen, watched by a crowd of 10 to 15,000 that included numerous police officers. This event—the last of its kind but not, we imagine, unique—points us to some tragic but valuable lessons. First, public violence is not something to be romanticized—as the literature of civil unrest and collective action indicates, it is not monotonically linked to progressive causes (see Tilly, 2005). Second, such violence depends on public space in exactly the same way that progressive causes do, in order to build on spectacle (e.g. Busteed, 2005). Third, this kind of temporary mob rule can occur because the forces of law and order are often in tune with its goals, if not necessarily its methods. And last, it reminds us that any space is a complex entity that can be used by different groups for different purposes, at different times of the day and night, and, fortunately, in different ways as the years pass (Blomley, 2005; Brownlow, 2005).

The fluidity of public and private space

The example of lynching is important for bringing us to a fundamental point. Public space becomes a repository of collective memories and cultural practices; as Low observes, it is both

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4 These are not rhetorical questions, but simple empirical ones and are presented as such for further work.
5 Lynchings did occur prior to reconstruction, but were more often a result of spontaneous violence, such as the New York draft riots: see Bernstein (1990).
6 As a public servant, the grandfather was being offered the option of staying home in order to avoid being compromised by his participation—an offer he did not choose to take. This further reinforces the premeditated and very stylized violence that was inherent in these lynchings.
dialogic and dialectical, something created through struggle. Yet, the hybridity dissected by Staeheli, Blomley, Erkip and others encourages us to be more skeptical of the qualities often associated with what is public. As it is threatened and encroached upon, ‘public space’ appears more socially valuable than ‘private space’ (Voyce, 2006)—but that does not on the whole mean that it is also inherently “politically transformative”, as Low claims (Low, 2000, chap 11). The very dialectics of which she writes point back to the way in which public space is typically shaped and overseen by state forces; first by a planning and design process, and then subsequently by the forces of organized violence, as Miliband and other state theorists describe them. The reality of the millennium is that assembly is now an arguably more dangerous activity than before, precisely because of such organized violence. There were already numerous historical examples of state force being manifested against those who gather in public space, and there is no reason why the modern state would divert from tactics that have always served it well (Gale, 1996). The litany of formal violence used against those who have taken to the streets is seemingly endless, and fatal shootings in Oaxaca in 2006 and beatings of pro-immigration protesters in Los Angeles’ MacArthur Park in 2007 are merely the most recent instances of occupations and demonstrations that have resulted in a violent confrontation with more powerful forces, confrontations that served to literally beat back the protest.

Yet beneath this surface now lies a more complex reality, in which information technologies monitor the individual before s/he can even speak with another. In this era, the lone assassin can no longer attack Archdukes or Presidents as a strategy of last resort, and is now constrained to attack passersby with weapons of terror. In the new regime of Homeland Security, state power is perpetual, panoptical, proactive and designed to be inhibitive of assembly (see Mitchell, 2003, pp. 1–11). Some commentators have proved skeptical of this ‘disciplinary’ regime, arguing that residents will not be ‘hoodwinked’ by surveillance (see Graham & Marvin, 2001 for a review). But these were comments offered prior to the proclamation of a War on Terror that has spread across the planet and provoked a further series of bombings in London, Madrid and elsewhere. Now, almost any form of political assembly can be prohibited on the grounds of ‘security’ or brought to a halt by force; those arrested for one thing (environmental or animal rights protest, say) are charged with something more serious (eco-terrorism). Meanwhile, it has become commonplace to be searched in any public setting, and airline passengers shuffle unshod through ‘security’ like Lang’s dispirited workers in Metropolis.

Yet, this cannot mean that all forms of social and political interaction are brought to a halt. Struggle for political expression is displaced and emerges in different ways, and may involve a retreat from face-to-face settings. The alternatives to public assembly and demonstration can involve some of the same digital technologies available to the state, even though those who are most invested in the progressive impacts of public space tend to be skeptical of virtual alternatives. It has been argued that there is “no Central Park in cyberspace” and of course that is correct—there is no way to reproduce a million man march via the Internet, no way to levitate the Pentagon on line, no way to experience the counter-cultural Burning Man via pay per view. But there is also no facial recognition software on the Internet, at least that we yet know of. And new technologies offer new strategies. Ideas can move virally through the Internet before commercial entities or law enforcement can react. This has allowed numerous international terror groups to maintain peripatetic web sites despite the best efforts of security forces to close them down (Weimann, 2006), but the same can be true of those with less destructive political goals. In 2007, protesters in Estonia summoned a massive dataflooding attack against state and commercial web sites; perhaps ironically in this context, these ‘hacktivists’ were protesting the removal of a Soviet era statue from a prominent public space in Tallinn to a cemetery. Their
efforts would have crashed the country’s main servers had not Internet Providers around the world interacted to resist the floods over a 3-week period.

Today, young adults demand levels of connectedness that their predecessors, using fliers, bullhorns and faxes, could not imagine. Connection does not guarantee a meaningful message, but then assembly does not guarantee a Speaker’s Corner either (Kohn, 2004). The challenge for those who insist on the maintenance of a ‘traditional’ public space is to promote its safety and its freedom from dangerous levels of control—two conditions that are less problematic in the virtual world.7 As this section has indicated, it may be time to reevaluate what can be accomplished in the streets and plazas—not least because other alternatives are coming into being. In the next section, a related proposition is confronted, namely that the implications of the creation of private spaces may be less dramatic than is sometimes claimed.

Reevaluating privately-owned spaces

As capitalism has shifted toward global reach overseen by larger corporations, so too the contemporary property market is creating larger firms that produce the privately planned city, via a seamless network of hotels, malls and ‘residential experiences’ that metastasize across the planet (for an excellent evaluation of the British situation, see Bell, 2005; the Turkish, Erkip, 2005; the Chinese, Wu & Webber, 2004). For the most part, the reaction of critics (such as the New Urbanists) appears to be in inverse proportion to their popularity with those who visit them, invest in them, and consume their services. To the regret of such critics, this shows no sign of diminishing, for as each society has undergone its globalization experience, its citizens have sought the products of branded capitalism (making Wal-Mart the largest corporation on the planet), while they purchase eerily identical homes, cars, foods and entertainment products (Thorns, 2002). Of course, there is a slick industry of persuasion that is united with the twin axes of state and market to strongly encourage conformity; nonetheless, it is hard to believe that Chinese residents would flock to new shopping malls, or those in Chile, say, would move to gated communities, unless they too found some efficacy there (e.g. Salcedo & Torres, 2004).8 This discussion is though not concerned with the aesthetics of the shopping mall and the creation across the urban landscape of what are often dismissed as ‘theme parks’ (Hannigan, 1998). Instead, it is focused on the residential aspects of privatization, and here we find the contemporary designs, the continued construction of urban boundaries and new forms of residential association that have been linked to a vast array of social concerns, including loss of “freedom of access to the wider city, social inclusion and territorial justice (Atkinson & Blandy, 2005, p. 178).9

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7 The complexities of assembly and the promotion of a progressive message are hardly new. Forty years ago, efforts to present an anti-war alternative to delegates attending the Democratic convention in Chicago were manipulated by state forces, who used intimidation, agent provocateurs and, most famously, great brutality, to close down the protest. In short, Mayor Daly won (Miller, 1987).

8 Voyce (2006, p. 274) suggests that consumers may feel that they transcend ‘an imprisonment in the local’ when such innovations appear, and this would certainly converge with our comments on malls in Turkey and the opportunities that these facilities have offered to women in that country to leave the home without having to spend their time using the streets.

9 Bentley, without any visible irony (or even any recognition of its intended humor), turns to a piece of comedic fiction to find the ultimate condemnation of suburban life—he writes “the numbing acceptance of the reduction in life-project resources which all too often arises from having to live in enclaves…is poignantly caught for example in The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole…’I have just realized that I have never seen a dead body or a real female nipple. This is what comes of living in a cul-de-sac”’ (Bentley, 1999, p. 190).
As already stated, the list of malaises in these cities is claimed to be long. For instance, a relatively recent literature argues that rising obesity rates are evidence that urban design is car-centered and therefore individuals are unable to exercise (e.g. Vojnovic, Jackson-Elmoore, Holtrop, & Bruch, 2006). Alternatively, both Ellin and Low (Ellin, 1997; Low, 2003, p. 231) have argued that private spaces reflect, and thus foster, a free-floating urban anxiety: “residents are searching for the sense and security that they associate with their childhoods” (Low, 2003, p. 231). Consequently, a pathological fear of others is forcing people to hole themselves up in what is often identified as ‘fortress America’, where, of course, their isolation serves only to reinforce their social dislocation.

Perhaps, the most resonant criticism of urban form and its consequences comes from those who see a diminution of civic life, expressed as diminished community involvement, that is inherent in the replacement of public space with private sites of consumption. Kohn argues that “town squares have emptied out as shoppers decamp for the megamalls…gated communities keep pesky signature-gathering activists away” (Kohn, 2004). In these “surrogate streets” there exists a “virtual reality apartheid” (Hannigan, 1998, p. 191), in which conformity of dress and behavior is demanded—or else (Vanderbeck & Johnson, 2000; Voce, 2006). For Putnam, this adds up to a situation in which all the forms of social capital that were built up during the Progressive era are being eroded, as public initiatives are dismantled and public spaces, such as parks, abandoned (Putnam, 2000). His research, as noted above, is perhaps the most determined attempt to define, measure and illustrate this tendency. His views on the detrimental role played by private spaces are clear, and he is quite explicit on the negative externalities associated with contemporary urban design. He argues that homogenous neighborhoods, segregation linked to every imaginable social indicator, and longer commutes, all contribute to social fragmentation: this he quantifies quite explicitly as follows: “the residents of large metropolitan areas incur a ‘civic sprawl penalty’ of roughly 20% on most measures of community involvement” (Putnam, 2000, p. 215).

The overwhelming majority of academic opinion-makers has accepted these views without reservation. After all, privately planned communities have been described as “Belsen with flowerbeds” without any obvious protest against such a hyperbolic description (Ferrell, 2001, p. 230). But would this critique be as compelling if it did not converge with the received wisdom? Putnam’s analyses and his measures of civic engagement can be questioned, leaving us with the inference that his relentless argumentation is determined to paste over a weak case (e.g. Monti, Butler, Curley, Tilney, & Weiner, 2003). Again, the celebration of certain forms of face-to-face interaction (and traditional activities that depend on it, such as canvassing) can seem anediluvian (see Arnold, 2003; Brainard, 2003; Pigg & Crank, 2004 for discussions of social capital in the Internet era). Even one of Coleman’s original discussions of social capital,

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10 This ignores the facts that Americans spend over $30 billion annually on diet and exercise equipment, and that gated communities with 15 miles per hour speed limits are perfect places in which residents may walk recreationally. In short, there are multiple causal links that have led to the obesity problem, which is not restricted to US cities.

11 Conversely, consumption of proliferating webcasts from closed spaces—or back regions as Goffman terms them—reflects an insatiable public interest in how private behaviors within the many parts of a fragmented society may, or may not, cohere (Staples, 2000). The same tendency accounts for much reality TV.

12 His work taps into a long-standing dystopic view of suburban evolution that was once elaborated as the tyranny of the white picket fence. More recently, it has been reified within popular culture as the tyranny of the garage door-opener, which allows families to enter the home without ever interacting with their neighbors (see, for instance, the scene in American Beauty, where the protagonist unwittingly tries to drive into the wrong garage).
using an example dating back over 20 years, involved political cells in Korea that never met for security reasons (this reinforces the point about the relative safety of virtual assembly that has already been introduced: see Coleman, 1988). More broadly, Putnam’s concerns have to be placed within the shifting context of American politics, which have suffered from brutal attacks on the electoral rights of the voter, especially via redistricting exercises that have drastically reduced the numbers of electoral areas that are in play in any given contest. Given these changes, many voters are essentially disenfranchised, and any political disengagement can be seen as a rational choice, therefore. Furthermore (and despite Putnam’s claims), measures of social segregation based on analysis of the 2000 Census are lower in the rapidly developing cities—those with the highest incidence of private communities in expanding edge settings—than in the older, high-density cities. Interpreting and evaluating his claims that “sprawl has been especially toxic for bridging social capital” (Putnam, 2000, p. 214) are thus more complex than might first appear. This topic will be discussed again below, in the specific context of Phoenix.13

A more basic question must then be posed: why is a privatized space necessarily a space in which civic responsibility is diminished? Kohn (2004, p. 81) is clear and dismissive—“nothing approaching the ideal speech situation ever happens in the mall”. Yet, there is an irony at the core of our usual celebration of the historical emergence of the public sphere, in that it was initially a private space. Both the salon and the coffee house were open only to a selected few and took place in privately-owned settings, yet have been idealized in discussions of the public sphere as it emerged in the 17th and 18th centuries (for a fuller discussion, see Crang, 2000). If we apply the more contemporary term “privately-owned public spaces” to these developments (see Kayden, 2000 for the origin of this term), then we can once again see the perils of maintaining a rigid distinction between public and private.14 The assumption that private settings must inherently constitute diminished interaction and an inhibition of the public sphere is thus questionable. Work on gender relations, to return to an instance already raised, neatly identifies the restrictions extant within many public spaces, with women banishing men in some situations, and males banishing females in many others (e.g. Iveson, 2003). This may be contrasted with the opportunities for women to move more freely in privately-owned spaces, such as malls (Erkip, 2003). In the Turkish case that she dissects, the emergence of these privately-owned public spaces had simple goals of capital accumulation but they have fostered the secularization of that society and provided an alternative to the male-dominated streets.15

This complexity of privately-owned space and its connection to social life can be readily found in other contexts, such as the Civil Rights movement. When those using civil disobedience to press for integration in the urban South planned their campaigns in 1958—1959, they could have insinuated themselves into public spaces—such as segregated restrooms—but recognized that law enforcement would have a simpler time in arresting them for loitering. Instead,

13 With the goal of further dismantling the conventional wisdom re. sprawl and social capital, we would also need to examine the findings that show that indicators of sprawl point to older cities like Detroit and less to newer entities like Phoenix (which is still infilling) and Los Angeles (which is now one of the denser metropolitan areas in the US).
14 I am indebted to a referee, one of several who provided detailed commentary on this manuscript, for reminding me that Kayden applies his terminology to very specific contemporary buildings in downtown areas. I am simply appropriating his label and not the narrower context of his application.
15 Mitchell quotes Goss, who dismisses such pseudo-public spaces as promoting ‘nostalgia as a substitute for experience’. Erkip’s example indicates rather well that there are many in the city for whom there can be no nostalgia for that which has not been experienced (Mitchell, 2003, p. 138).
some entered privately-owned public spaces—such as coffee shops and diners—where the refusal of service was based on custom and civil law rather than clear criminal precedent. As Jamieson (2003, p. 25) points out, “the problem was not that some young black people wanted to be served at a lunch counter, it was that American law and morality did not prevail in the states of the old South where service was being denied”. Their choice of privately-owned public spaces in which to stage their dangerous protest was thus entirely tactical; the request for service, followed by an extensive but non-violent boycott, was ultimately successful in promoting a successful desegregation in cities such as Greensboro, Raleigh, Durham, Charlotte and Nashville. It did not change all the fundamentals: as was famously remarked at the time, “Negroes could still not afford a hamburger” even if they could now sit at the counter (Viorst, 1979, p. 123). It was these deeper inequalities that prompted the more violent actions that occurred in the streets during the decade that followed, in Watts and elsewhere (Goldberg, 1991; Viorst, 1979). However, and as Gale points out, “violent protest also produced diminishing returns as the ‘moral climate’ of the Civil Rights movement was eroded” (Gale, 1996).

This example underlines the fact that important political challenges to the status quo need not be restricted to the streets, and that there has long existed an important tradition of political action occurring within privately-owned public spaces. The Temperance movement of the late 19th century was a pioneer, bringing protest to bars and saloons, and the non-violence movement of the mid-20th century refined that strategy in important ways. These cases indicate that social action need not occur only in those locations where the unexpected is expected, if we may paraphrase Marshall Berman (1988, p. 316) on what occurs in the ‘universal communion’ of the streets. It may occur too where the unexpected is utterly unexpected, and that may in fact account for some of its power. Like the child who asked for more, those dignified young men and women requested service and while they did not get it straight away, their moral challenge set much in motion.

These instances have a broader importance that in turn takes us in two directions. First, it returns us to the issue of public and private. We have worked hard here to disassemble this as a simple dichotomy and we continue to argue for its complexity. What this section has indicated is that focusing only on the streets is too restrictive; this will be argued again but this time in the context of newer cities and their master-planned communities—which can, of course, also be addressed as privately-owned public spaces. The second point to be made is that the purpose of this long preamble has been to lay the groundwork for a dismantling of the preconceptions that exist with regard to such places. It has long been known that we possess an instinctive anti-urban bias, a dystopic vision that makes urban life inherently bad—what Schorske terms ‘the city as evil’ (Schorske, 1998). Yet, this has mutated in recent times to become an anti-suburban bias. The reasons for this are not hard to find. While the city is troubled, the suburbs are just wrong, especially in their newest incarnations, replete with walls and gates. As Atkinson and Blandy (2005, p. 185) write convincingly, everything about them offends a progressive sensibility—they “conflict with the personal politics and wider ideals often enshrined in planning frameworks as well as attempts at achieving relative social justice and balance in the neighborhood context”. The perfect storm here is the gated community, which offends as a place of fear, of privilege, of racial segregation—it is, if you will, a ‘hated community’. The problem is that it has seen much opprobrium and little ‘serious research’, to use Putnam’s (2000, p. 478) term. As researchers belatedly turn to the data, we find that enclaves are likely to contain rentals as well as owners, that Hispanics are more likely to live there than Anglos, and that those who live in them are less sanguine about gates than those who live in traditional neighborhoods (Kirby et al., 2006). It has been this lack of assessment that motivated
this paper; and it has been to unpack some of these stereotypes that this long introduction was created. The purpose was to indicate that a shift to a city that is privatized in various ways is not to automatically produce a wasteland, a place without social relations. That is the ultimate litmus test, and that is what the next sections begin to address.

The complexities of control within private space

As private space is maintained by capital and structured by civil law, it is necessarily different from traditional spaces (such as parks), which are directly administered by the local state, via its ordinances and ultimately, criminal statute (Frug, 1999). It is clearly subject to different forms of control, which are both more subtle and more binding. Often, they are based on barriers that are both literal (a lack of pedestrian access for example) and monetary (including some costs of entry, such as parking, in the case of malls, or fees and dues in more permanent arrangements such as residential developments). Surveillance and policing are usually undertaken by private security firms, which are more restricted in their ability to use force than traditional police. Moreover, because corporations are usually more concerned with their public image than the local state, there is often hesitancy about this policing: a study of a British mall shows that a need to attract customers resulted in tentative strategies that sometimes even resulted in assaults on the staff, rather than vice versa (Button, 2003; see also Voyce, 2006).

It is also the case that individuals frequently acquiesce in the controls under which they operate. Rothman discusses this in the context of ‘the Strip’ in Las Vegas and explores the ways in which traditional ‘freedoms to’ have been replaced over time by an emphasis on ‘freedom from’ (Rothman, 2003). In practical terms, this means that active citizenship rights—of assembly, for instance—have been given up by some individuals in some circumstances in favor of passive rights, such as the freedom from having to assemble with those whom one does not know or recognize (see also Smith, 2000). Mitchell (2005) takes this important point much further with regard to current Supreme Court rulings. In these cases, control is accepted voluntarily, and this can be linked with Foucault’s (1989) concept of “colonized spaces”. While his derivation of the term was generated in other contexts, his understanding of how space is produced by agents of control can be reapplied to contemporary instances, and can be linked to a study of homeowner associations and the struggles that surround them (Kirby, 2003).

Halperin argues that private space is self-regulated as a result of deliberate state policy development: “modern forms of governmentality actually require citizens to be free so that citizens can assume from the state the burden of some of its former regulatory functions and impose on themselves—of their own accord—rules of conduct and mechanisms of control. The kind of power that Foucault is interested in, then, far from enslaving its objects, constructs them as subjective agents and preserves them in their autonomy, so as to invest them all the more completely” (Halperin, 1995, p. 18). In short, we can argue that privately-owned residential space differs from traditional public space insofar as it is policed by those who inhabit it. Clearly, that does not occur without a binding script, which is supplied by the covenants, codes and restrictions (CC&Rs) that are assembled by real estate lawyers and signed by all the homeowners. As noted above, the more direct aspects of state control are blunted and replaced by the webs of control exerted within the neighborhood itself.

“Liberal power does not simply prohibit; it does not directly terrorize. It normalizes, ‘responsibilizes’ and disciplines. The state no longer needs to frighten or coerce its subjects
into proper behavior; it can safely leave them to make their own choices in the allegedly sacrosanct private sphere of personal freedom which they now inhabit, because within that sphere they freely and spontaneously police both their own conduct and the conduct of others” (Halperin, 1995, p. 19).

The homeowner association (HOA) is a canonical 21st century example of this self-regulation, a colonized and privatized space that is both a liminal and an analytical construction:

“according to Foucault’s analysis, civil society, scientific research, intellectual activity and personal life are not in fact free zones from which power has progressively retreated since the Enlightenment but colonized spaces into which it has steadily expanded, proliferated and diffused itself” (Halperin, 1995, p. 19).

Why does this happen? What drives residents to this apparently submissive posture? The acceptance of stringent rules in private spaces is a result of the coalescence of households who have no organic sense of neighborhood or community on which to depend, and who need an alternative—in this instance, a mechanistic set of rules by which to live. One of the reasons for this is that traditional forms of social segregation in American cities are lower in rapidly growing cities than in older ones (e.g. Sanchez, Lang, & Dhavale, 2005; see also Nelson, 2005). As a market structured in terms of only one axis, namely the ability to pay, the social mix in private communities is decided more by social class rather than by ethnicity. Migrants, often from other cities, are arranged via the housing market, and as strangers they possess no other glue. In this situation, individuals require rules in order to function successfully.

A parallel example that indicates how such rules operate can be found in the electronic marketplace eBay. This has some similarities to the housing market, in that it is experienced individually, although it is organized and operates as a massive corporate entity. Buyers and sellers interact on eBay through a series of transactions but have no advantages of more traditional economic interactions, such as retail stores or even more conventional auctions, where face-to-face behavior is usual. Instead, eBay exists as a massive virtual private space—or to be consistent, a privately-owned virtual public space. Consequently, elaborate rules have been constructed over time and must be acknowledged by those entering the system; these rules govern how bids are placed, when payment must be made and when goods must be delivered. This mechanism is then overlain by a vast shaming system, such as is found in societies such as Japan, where dishonor is widely regarded as an important cohesive force (in contradistinction to many Western nations, where guilt is more usually identified as a motivation). Within eBay, all participants are required to evaluate their interactions with their counterpart (buyers with sellers and vice versa). Buyers who do not pay or are slow payers, sellers who supply poor quality items or are slow suppliers receive negative feedback, which is then recorded for all subsequent participants to see. This clearly inhibits the participants, insofar as those who are shamed frequently will, ultimately, be forced out of the system.

In essentially the same manner, the residential CC&Rs provide a structure that might not exist in another type of context, such as an entirely voluntary neighborhood association. But contrary to assertions elsewhere in the literature, this does not mean that we can automatically infer the paucity of civic life in such spaces. It is asserted that residents in privatized neighborhoods participate “grudgingly” and are myopic, while those living in organic neighborhoods are more likely to be “highly political active” (Purcell, 2001). Yet, even if this were universally true, it cannot be inferred from the differences in neighborhood structure. Both privatized spaces and more traditional neighborhoods depend on the participation of the residents in their
self-policing for the accomplishment of quality of life goals; the difference is that in the HOA, the literal gatekeeper is the HOA board, while in the traditional neighborhood it is the municipal authority. Given what we have already argued about the power of the state and its local counterparts, we must recognize that the power of the developer and the HOA is usually less than city hall, certainly as far as policing and eminent domain are concerned, to take two salient examples (Nelson, 2005).

The proliferation of these housing enclaves provokes basic questions—do the “rules, rules, rules” as Low (2003, p. 140) terms them, mean then that there can be no civic life? Do walls mean that residents are automatically disassociated from affairs beyond their own neighborhood? Do gates necessarily mean that residents are fixated on crime? Commentators such as Purcell and Ferrell clearly see binary opposites between traditional neighborhoods and enclaves, yet as this paper has argued, it is exactly these simple categorizations that carry us into murky waters. More nuanced work on gated communities, for example, by Webster and colleagues, has derived a theory of clubs in order to rationalize the development of enclaves. Their argument is based not on a defensive posture with regard to crime and security, but rather an assertive stance with respect to public goods (Webster, 2002). Similarly, it is a testable proposition that there is the possibility of social action within private space, despite the lack of voluntary forms of association. As Crang (2000) points out, the importance of association lies in its existence, not solely in its form and accomplishments.16

In this next section, the paper summarizes some of the findings from empirical work undertaken in the Southwestern US, in a city whose growth has depended markedly on the development of privately developed and managed spaces. We take on the questions of social capital and the existence of neighborliness in such urban settings, questioning whether privatization means less civic life, in the form of individual and collective action with regard to quality of life issues.

**Civic life in Phoenix**

This paper refers to the results of empirical work undertaken in Phoenix, a metropolitan area whose population has grown dramatically from approximately 50,000 people in 1945 to over 3 million at the millennium (Gober, 2005; Luckingham, 1989). Within the context of this paper, this and other rapidly growing cities throughout the Southwest (such as Las Vegas; see McKenzie, 2005) are of interest for two reasons. First, they had relatively small populations until recently, and had public spaces commensurate with those numbers. Moreover, these are cities that have displayed low-density growth, and have therefore not exhibited the traditional built forms that are familiar in older cities, where an historic downtown contained open spaces, parks and places of civic organization, such as cathedrals or courthouses. Second, the rapid growth that

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16 In the design context, Frug (1999) (and others, dating back beyond Jacobs) romanticize the diversity that can be found in some neighborhoods and argue that this is at the core of a vibrant community life; the corollary is that a master-planned community cannot nourish civic life because it is not an organic setting. While this position is now presented as common sense in much writing, it is in fact a curious distortion of the way that urban design has evolved, and an equally curious break from how it was viewed in the past. When planned communities appeared in the 1920s, for example, neighborhood organizations designed to administer open spaces were seen as rich and innovative forms of social interaction (Parsons, 1998, p. 106). Planned settlements were viewed in the 1940s as laboratories that would be valuable in the regeneration of older cities (Forsyth, 2005, p. 32). Historical accounts, such as Forsyth’s, are valuable in deconstructing the taken-for-granted nature of the links between design and social outcomes.
has taken place has been a product of the most recent decades and has depended on large pro-

erty and construction corporations for its completion. This means that, in large measure, public

planning has deferred to private development, with the result that extremely large free-standing

communities have been created by developers employing a single vision. The municipalities

that make up the Phoenix metropolitan area have, to varying degrees, allowed the builders

a free rein to set design standards, densities, the mix of condominiums and single-family

homes, and of course the presence or absence of open space.

Implicit in this growth machine form of development is an emphasis upon facilities (for

retailing or recreation) and not with opportunities for assembly, and this is reflected in design

criteria. Large mall developments containing stores, restaurants and entertainment complexes,

faux downtown shopping centers, and enclosed housing developments (both owned and rented)

are the norm. Virtually, all the new residential construction (other than small infill develop-

ments) is now designed as common interest developments and managed by HOAs. With regard

to the issues of public and private space under examination here, we would have to see Phoenix

as a model of a privatized metropolitan area that displays few of the attributes of a vibrant pub-
l city.17

How could we evaluate civic life, in line with the discussions already introduced that see

inhibitions placed on conversation and assembly? One strategy is to confront, head on, the con-

cerns that are raised within the literature concerning suburban development; for instance, the

compendious compilation of data by Putnam has already been noted. We sought to test the at-

titudes of those living in the newer components of a low-density metropolitan area that are

without the traditional cues of a vibrant downtown and a long-established civic life—attitudes

that could be linked to the existence of social capital, that can in turn be connected to the pos-
sibility of social relations that transcend the narrowest instances of self-interest. We designed

and implemented detailed questionnaires intended to reveal attitudes held by residents—toward

their urban setting, their neighbors, and their own futures in this rapidly changing urban area.

[A brief overview of the research is provided in the Appendix, below.] The summaries in Table

1 are taken from our exploration of social capital, and indicate two things. First, there is a gen-
eral convergence between our empirical results (the first column) and results garnered in other

local studies (columns two and three). This is important in that it encourages us to draw general

inferences from this relatively small sample. Second, we can proceed to place our results along-
side those obtained from a study of social capital done elsewhere in the country (column four).

Table 1 indicates the responses to a series of questions that can be thought to contribute to an

understanding of bonding capital; the questions measure interaction with neighbors and assess-

ments of the neighborhood. Without exception, we can see that there is a level of communal life

in Phoenix that is comparable with that found in a national sample of cities where urban

development has typically evolved over longer periods, and in more conventional forms with

gard to urban morphology and neighborhood design. Respondents indicate that they interact

with their neighbors; almost half chat with neighbors ‘often’, and only slightly smaller percentage

17 This is not to imply that public space is entirely absent or that it has never been filled; Latino demonstrations against

immigration measures in 2006 were large, vocal and appeared successful in showing that Hispanic minorities were

strongly opposed to punitive measures against illegal immigrants. Part of their impact was though the sheer novelty

of people taking to the streets in places such as Phoenix; and as noted in the text, demonstrations in 2007 ended in

bloodshed in Los Angeles, while the numbers of protestors nationwide were significantly reduced as many undocu-

mented immigrants were reportedly unwilling to take to the streets in case of DHS round-ups and deportations, which

again provides an example of state control of the streets.
Table 1
Community attitudes of PASS respondents compared to other Phoenix city, metropolitan area, and national surveys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes toward neighborhood and community</th>
<th>Phoenix (city) social survey PASS, 2001–2002 (n = 302)</th>
<th>Phoenix-Mesa MSA, Omnibus, 2003(^{a}) (n = 587)</th>
<th>Phoenix/Maricopa social capital benchmark, 2000(^{b}) (n = 501)</th>
<th>National social capital benchmark, 2000(^{c}) (n = 29,233)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sense of community (% yes)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
<td>82.0</td>
<td>72.1</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>78.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>81.3</td>
<td>71.6</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>78.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valley</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss your neighborhood (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel attached to neighborhood compared to past (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More attached</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equally attached</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less attached</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Chat with neighbors (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invite neighbors over (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Neighbors help (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know your neighbors (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very well</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly well</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very well</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust your neighbors (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving neighborhood (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People have big impact</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate impact</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small impact</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{a}\) Denver Urban Area, 2003-2004 social capital benchmark, 2004 \((n = 1,751)\)

\(^{b}\) Phoenix-Mesa MSA social capital benchmark, 2000 \((n = 501)\)

\(^{c}\) National social capital benchmark, 2000 \((n = 29,233)\)
trust them ‘a lot’. A significant majority plans to continue to live in that neighborhood for at least 5 more years (Harlan et al., 2005).

Where we can make direct contrasts, we can see that these do not diverge noticeably from responses accumulated elsewhere. From these data, therefore, we can assert that the differences found in the Phoenix metropolitan area relating to privatized development, a lack of traditional public spaces, a rapid influx of migrants, and a larger proportion of neighborhoods governed by legal codes and maintained within common interest developments have not translated to apparent differences of social interaction between neighbors.

In Table 2, we move to examine bridging behaviors within our sample. This relates to more than social interaction and seeks to identify active participation in community affairs. In this instance, it summarizes whether residents acted on their relations within their neighborhoods in order to take action on perceived neighborhood problems (Larsen et al., 2004). Once more, the goal is to test whether new urban forms diminish the ability of the resident to interact with neighbors and to take action to improve their quality of life. The dependent variable, which measures whether the respondents (or any member of their household) took action to address a neighborhood problem, was binary (yes or no), and a logistic regression model estimated those factors influencing action. Taking action to address neighborhood problems included such options as (1) trying to directly deal with those responsible for the problem, (2) getting together with neighbors to solve problems, (3) contacting an HOA, neighborhood association or a property manager, (4) calling the police, (5) calling a representative of the municipality, (6) lobbying a public or private authority, (7) hiring a lawyer, (8) going to court, and/or (9) creating a new entity to deal with this problem. Different models were tested. In the first instance, individual and neighborhood characteristics are emphasized; in the second, perceptions of the neighborhood are added, while in Model 3, measures of social capital are

Table 1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Took action on neighborhood problem (% yes)</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expect to live in neighborhood in 5 years (% yes)</td>
<td>70.9</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>76.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate your community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Random-digit-dialing survey in 2003 of the Phoenix-Mesa MSA conducted by the Arizona State University Survey Research Laboratory.

b Random-digit-dialing survey in 2000 of Maricopa County for the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. The “chat with neighbors” item response categories are several times a week (often); a few times a month (sometimes); a few times a year (seldom); never.

c Random-digit-dialing survey in 2000 of 41 US communities for the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. Phoenix ranks near the bottom of the 41 communities on percentage answering yes to sense of community, but the range is only from 92% to 70% answering yes.
introduced. In the latter, the model is capable of predicting social action from the recorded levels of social capital in 71% of cases; indeed, the likelihood of action increases by 79% for each increase on the four-point social capital scale (Larsen et al., 2004, p. 74). What is noticeable about these models is that there is a persistent relationship between affluence and action that transcends other factors; put another way, residents in affluent neighborhoods, many of which are private, do not appear to pay the sorts of penalties identified by Putnam with regard to a civic life. Conversely, poorer residents, who are most likely to live in organic neighborhoods, do not appear to translate their relations with their neighbors into social action.

Together, these data indicate that there are both bonding and bridging behaviors within a rapidly growing metropolitan area, even one that displays low-density development and a significant proportion of privately developed neighborhoods. Indeed, had the analysis focused solely on owner-occupied neighborhoods and excluded rental properties, the evidence of bridging activities would have been even higher. A subsequent pilot study undertaken in Glendale, in the western half of the metropolitan area, concentrated solely on matched pairs of HOA and non-HOA neighborhoods; this analysis found little evidence that neighboring behaviors are being influenced by governance. These are findings that are replicated elsewhere in the Western half of the country. Gordon’s study of public life in planned developments in California found that once income and other demographic variables were held constant, those living in private neighborhoods displayed few differences from their counterparts in traditional neighborhoods. He evaluated voter turnout, registration and party affiliation without identifying significant

Table 2
Logistic regression predicting whether respondents took action on neighborhood problems*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B(se)</td>
<td>Exp(B)</td>
<td>B(se)</td>
<td>Exp(B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some postsecondary education</td>
<td>1.282*** (0.359)</td>
<td>3.604</td>
<td>1.100*** (0.374)</td>
<td>3.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA and higher education</td>
<td>1.005*** (0.394)</td>
<td>2.733</td>
<td>0.828* (0.411)</td>
<td>2.290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in home</td>
<td>0.010 (0.014)</td>
<td>1.010</td>
<td>0.012 (0.014)</td>
<td>1.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>-0.446 (0.465)</td>
<td>0.640</td>
<td>-0.278 (0.492)</td>
<td>0.751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood stability</td>
<td>0.407 (0.794)</td>
<td>1.503</td>
<td>0.326 (0.855)</td>
<td>1.386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affluent neighborhoods</td>
<td>0.514* (0.310)</td>
<td>1.672</td>
<td>0.413 (0.326)</td>
<td>1.511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor neighborhoods</td>
<td>0.227 (0.502)</td>
<td>1.255</td>
<td>-0.547 (0.563)</td>
<td>0.579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood functioning</td>
<td>-0.266 (0.186)</td>
<td>0.766</td>
<td>-0.318* (0.191)</td>
<td>0.727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood efficacy</td>
<td>0.156 (0.181)</td>
<td>1.168</td>
<td>0.118 (0.185)</td>
<td>1.126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of big neighborhood problems</td>
<td>0.320*** (0.086)</td>
<td>1.377</td>
<td>0.329*** (0.089)</td>
<td>1.390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social capital</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonding social capital index</td>
<td>-1.491*** (0.462)</td>
<td>0.225</td>
<td>-1.265* (0.687)</td>
<td>0.282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.102</td>
<td>0.165</td>
<td>0.181</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>288</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in chi-squared</td>
<td>30.891***</td>
<td>20.876***</td>
<td>5.591*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.005 (one-tailed tests).

* Took action is coded 1.
variations; nor were there visible differences when considering statewide Propositions that might be surmised to appeal to those in favor of private governance (such as those allowing residents to opt out of municipal public services) or not appeal (as in the case of lowering the voter requirement for the passage of local school bonds). In summarizing his study, Gordon states “in general, these differences although statistically significant, are quite small. Taken together, they suggest that planned developments do not strongly affect either political participation or patterns of voting behavior in statewide general elections. Residents of planned developments vote similarly to other Californians of comparable age, income, education, race and ethnicity” (Gordon, 2004, p. 46).

Conclusions

This paper has evaluated some of the claims made concerning the evolution of the city from its traditional morphology that incorporated extensive public spaces, to a newer incarnation that gives greater attention to proliferating private spaces—or as we may usefully describe them, privately-owned public spaces. This transformation has been viewed as an essentially negative phenomenon within several literatures, on the grounds that this is an undermining of citizen rights to assembly and the likelihood of collective action. In this paper, in contrast, the complexities of both public and private space have been explored. These are numerous, but attention here has been given to the reality that control is at the core of urban public space. The latter is not an empty container in which individuals and groups may insert themselves as they please in order to pursue their own goals. While it may be true that “the open way leads to the public square” as Berman (1988, p. 12) asserts, that tells us little about what awaits us when we get there. Entry and exit are subject to many forms of control, some that are implied and others that are explicit. These forms have changed over time but the forces of surveillance and coercion remain essential and, if anything, are becoming sharper by the year (Coaffee, 2005).

Privately-owned public space is different than public space, but not in ways that are often claimed. We should acknowledge that the prototypical formations of the public sphere—the coffee houses and salons of the pre-industrial era—were in reality private spaces (Crang, 2000). Most contemporary private spaces are heterogenous places that are managed rather than controlled, and that employ technologies that are soft rather than hard. Because owners and managers expect profit from these spaces, they are often reluctant to use force to produce conformity (although conformity is indeed expected: see Vanderbeck & Johnson, 2000; Voyce, 2006).

Overall, the paper indicates that current interpretations of privatized urban spaces, that view them in dystopic and even cataclysmic terms, overreach themselves in their efforts. In large measure, they do so for two reasons—first, because they cling to idealized notions of human and collective interaction, and second, because they conflate two separate phenomena—human interaction on the one hand, and the generation of ideas that contribute to public debate on the other. In the first context, many would seem to align themselves with Sennett’s statement that “the public order should be gritty and disturbing rather than pleasant” (Voyce, 2006, p. 280). Yet, this remains a normative proposition of startling vagueness. Just how much grit ‘should’ there be in the public world and how much blood should run with the grit? Or to take another case, much is written about the plight of the homeless due to revanchism, but it remains the case that a socially just city is one with affordable housing, not more public space for the homeless to occupy after dark.

With regard to the second issue, there is nothing in our urban experience that demands that public space and the public sphere are inherently, ubiquitously and infinitely connected. And
even if it can be demonstrated that this has been true in certain times and places, it may well be
that changes in the built environment, the global ‘War on Terror’ and the proliferation of information
technologies, demand that they be disconnected. Taken further, the present demands a
reconstruction of what constitutes public space, recognizing the existence of what Crang
(2000, p. 313) describes as “different electronic, physical, social and political spaces”. These
do not constitute the familiar form of café society; instead their integration “produces a frac-
tured public sphere, not one of self-present individuals interacting, but the interactions them-
selves forming a public space”.

In some of the examples explored here, especially the private residential sites, another key
distinction is observed, namely that they are managed by those who themselves live in these
spaces. The residents, consequently, are implicated in the controls applied to these private
spaces. There are thus controls, certainly, but they are not wielded directly by representatives
of the state. As the intrusive power of the latter increases, then any buffers that can be inserted
between the individual and the state apparatus are desirable. This may not make modern resi-
dential environments warm and inviting, but then many residents see them as investments as
much as a manifestation of gemeinschaft (Webster, 2002). And our empirical research also in-
dicates that residents are sophisticated enough to make such distinctions. That is to say, they see
the controls inherent within private governance, but also the realities, such as gates that are
rarely shut because of the volume of traffic. Indeed, we have found that it is those who do
not live in gated communities who regard them as having a greater impact on security than
do those who actually see them at work (Kirby et al., 2006).

This paper has drawn on work undertaken in Phoenix to evaluate the social and political
forms that exist within privatized spaces. Perhaps because the work did not begin with an in-
tention of differentiating this low-density environment, we find there more ‘life’ than is typi-
cally expected. We should be clear, of course, that it is easy to lurch in the opposite
direction, and to embrace a theme park utopianism. Certainly, the professionals who build
and manage these spaces can generate such enthusiasms, yet we have aimed to avoid such sub-
jectivity. Our goal was simpler, to see if there is indeed real life behind the gates—and this pa-
er argues that one need only look in order to affirm that it does.

Appendix

As we have reported elsewhere, the data have been used to explore a number of issues, includ-
ing the attitudes of those living in HOAs, and the identification of social capital (Larsen et al.,
2004). The Phoenix Area Social Survey (PASS) involved eight neighborhoods in the City of Phoe-
nix, a purposive sample that represented different neighborhoods in terms of median income, eth-
nicity, age of housing stock, home ownership rates, and locations varying from the urban core out
to the fringe of new development. They extend along a 30-mile arc from the northern to southern
city limits. There are two higher-income and one middle-income neighborhood on the fringes of
development that were largely built in the 1990s in desert settings; two middle-income suburban
neighborhoods that were built up gradually since the 1950s, a mixture of single-family homes,
apartments, and small-scale retail activity; within five miles of the city center are three older
neighborhoods built between the 1920s and the 1950s: two lower-income predominantly Hispanic
neighborhoods and a higher-income gentrified neighborhood. The Hispanic population is un-
evenly distributed, ranging from close to zero in the upper-income fringe neighborhoods to
more than 80% in two low-income neighborhoods in the urban core. One of the Hispanic
neighborhoods is a stable community with high ownership rates of small, older homes where the median length of residence is 12 years, and the other is a community of apartment-dwellers that is a portal for new immigrants where the median length of residence is 1.5 years (probably a high estimate given the respondents were selected from an area probability sample of households within census block groups). To minimize gender bias, a random respondent was chosen from each household by asking for the adult with the most recent birthday to answer the survey. A total of 302 interviews, representing 40% of those who were contacted, answered the survey. The interviews were mostly conducted by telephone except for a few done at people’s homes. Sixteen percent of the interviews were taken in Spanish. The questionnaire covered a variety of topics about living in Phoenix and lasted an average of 45 minutes (see Harlan, 2003 for further information).

References


