

Between Fear and Freedom: Understanding the Relationship Between Securitization and the
Disavowal of Social and Ecological Interdependency

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Abstract

In this thesis, I am interested in the concept of ‘public protection’ and how it appears in policies, practices and discourses that justify and legitimize greater securitization and privatization of the public realm—while encouraging suspicion and fear of others. Specifically, I want to highlight a paradox in measures that promise public protection; they do not make anyone safer. Instead, I find they constitute and reconstitute the neoliberal social order and keep people passive and apart. Rather than addressing the structural realities of neoliberal capitalism, with its life or death consequences, governance seems focused on promoting a feeling of security and comfort premised on not being affected by others. In protecting against unwanted affect, the possibility of encounter, spontaneity and conflict are eliminated. Yet this is de-democratizing; it results in passive, apathetic subjects who are unable and unwilling to recognize their interdependency and act in concert to resist structural challenges that actually pose risks to collective safety and wellbeing. Therefore, I pose two interrelated questions. First, how are subjects and their relationships with one another impacted by measures to protect the public? Then, I ask what practices or modes of resistance could generate subjects more capable of coming together to challenge structurally produced harm and vulnerability? To address these questions, I use a theoretical collage methodology and weave together theoretical work from a range of disciplines focusing on discourses of stranger danger, defensible design, surveillance, antisocial behavior policies, Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs), privately owned public spaces (POPs) and anti-protest legislation. Ultimately, I conclude by arguing for joyful, caring and disobedient forms of protest as a practice of the right to the city. In creating a different world—even temporarily on the streets—we can change ourselves and how we relate to others and the world.

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List of Abbreviations

ASBO – Anti-Social Behavior Order
BID – Business Improvement District
BMA – British Medical Association
CCTV – Closed Circuit Television
CPN – Community Protection Notice
CPTED - Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design
CSEW – Crime Survey for England and Wales
FOI – Freedom of Information
FPN – Fixed Penalty Notice
HC – House of Commons
HL – House of Lords
IPCC – International Panel on Climate Change
IRA – Irish Republican Army
LGA – Local Government Association
MP – Member of Parliament
NHS – National Healthcare Service
OHCHR – Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights
ONS – Office for National Statistics
PCSC Act – Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act
PM – Prime Minister
POP – Privately Owned Public Space
PSPO – Public Space Protection Order
RoSPA – Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents
SBD – Secured by Design
SUV – Sports Utility Vehicle
ULEZ – Ultra Low Emission Zone
UK – United Kingdom
US(A) – United States (of America)



Figure 1: Edvard Munch's *Evening on Karl Johan Street* (1892). A depiction of the anxiety of being with others (Source: Public Domain).

“Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity.”

— Max Horkheimer & Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

“Most of us, no matter what we say, are walking in the dark, whistling in the dark. Nobody knows what is going to happen to him from one moment to the next, or how one will bear it. This is irreducible. And it’s true of everybody. Now, it is true that the nature of society is to create, among its citizens, an illusion of safety; but it is also absolutely true that the safety is always necessarily an illusion.”

— James Baldwin, ‘Interview with Studs Turkel’

Introduction

In April 2022, police in Kent removed five benches and several shrubs from a public green space to make the area safer. According to a since-deleted tweet, the benches and greenery were causing the offense of providing “places to gather” (Harper 2022). This association between people gathering or interacting in public with criminality, danger and risk is hardly unique. It is happening against a broader international obsession with securitizing space for public protection. We see this in the increasingly ubiquitous nature of cement bollards, gates and walls, closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras, security guards and personal security devices—such as doorbell cameras.¹

Concerns about groups gathering in public can also be seen in policies restricting access and controlling behavior in space. Restrictions on protest and conduct have been introduced in recent policies, including the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts (PCSC) Act 2022 and the Public Order Act 2023. At the time of writing, further controls are being debated as part of the Criminal Justice Bill 2024. Naturally, one would assume this is all in response to increasing risk or vulnerability to harm. Yet crime, particularly violent crime, in the United Kingdom (UK) is relatively low and has been declining steadily for decades (Office for National Statistics/ONS 2024b). Further, as I will argue in this thesis, measures that control the public realm, adapted in the name of public safety, do little to prevent harm or reduce vulnerability to it; instead, they reinforce the social order by keeping people apart and suspicious/fearful of one another. Given a lack of empirical risk from public interaction and association, what is the purpose of reducing and controlling people’s capacity to meet and connect publicly?

¹ Privacy issues raised by doorbell cameras have reached courts in recent years with one defendant in Oxfordshire ordered to pay over £100,000 in costs due to unlawful surveillance of their neighbor’s property. The judge also worried that the device’s ability to capture conversations between forty and sixty-eight feet away was excessive (*Fairhurst v Woodard* 2021; Milmo 2021).

In this thesis, I am interested in the idea of ‘public protection’ and how it appears in policies and discourses that justify and legitimize greater securitization and privatization of space while encouraging suspicion and even fear of others. In particular, I want to highlight what I see as a fundamental paradox in measures that promise public protection; they do not make anyone safer. It would be easy to claim that this is all irrational; people are growing more afraid and want protection² despite being safer in contemporary times due to advancements in medicine and technology or due to a lack of global conflicts and reduced interpersonal violence (Slovic 2000).³ Yet I do not hold such a position. To reject fear as irrational is to ignore the life and death consequences and racialized harm of neoliberal capitalism and skyrocketing rates of inequality in the UK (The Equality Trust; Polacko 2021). It is also to ignore the growing risks posed by the deepening climate and ecological emergency (Harmer 2023; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change/IPCC 2022; Paavola 2017). There certainly are issues people need protection from; yet ‘public protection’ policies do not tackle the root causes of harm.

Instead, I understand assertions of ‘public protection’ as a justification for decreasing rights and freedoms to maintain the social order—while obfuscating the harms the social order is based on. As I will explore in this thesis, this occurs through measures that prioritize safety and comfort through ‘protecting’ people from being bothered or affected by others without their consent. This means eliminating the possibility of encounter, spontaneity and conflict. People become free from the burden of having to care. Yet preventing affect and prioritizing comfort does not make anyone safer. It only creates passive subjects unable and unwilling to see themselves as dependent on one another—and needing to work together for their survival and flourishing. My thesis is therefore interested in this contradiction between

² This position is tentatively backed up by early research on rising fear in young people (Rubin 2023).

³ See Pinker 2018 for an overview of this perspective that life for most people is remarkably good, safe and continuing to improve.

the claim of ‘public protection’, as it functions to structure the public realm, and the reality of how such measures impact individuals and their relationships with one another and the world around them. This is because I see subjects and their relationships as central to resisting harm and building a more just and equitable world.

In introducing this project, I will first go into greater depth explaining my puzzle, the four main contradictions the research is responding to and my research questions. Then, I will outline why this research is relevant and necessary. I then move to introduce my theoretical, collage methodology and outline how the argument will develop across the chapters of this work. In doing so, I also present the key contributions I aim to make with this research. These are the concept of ‘public protection’ as an analytical lens; a methodological contribution of a theoretical collage methodology as a way to resist the silo-ization of the disciplinary system and understand the complex, often paradoxical nature of social politics; a contribution to understanding policy that is reactive to politicized, constructed fears and finally a contribution to organizing and social movement theory on how protest spaces can be opportunities for re-democratizing subjects and instilling new ways of seeing and relating to the world.

Space and Situating the Project

A key concept for this work, and vital to discuss in order to situate it, is space. While this term is subject to different interpretations across a range of disciplines from philosophy (Hoefler, Huggett & Read 2024) to mathematics (Gray 1979) to geography (Thrift 2004), I will be broadly building off Henri Lefebvre’s understanding—and those who draw on his work. Specifically, I will be looking at public space and engaging with literature sometimes referred to as the ‘end of public space’ literature.⁴

⁴ This term stems from the subtitle of Michael Sorkin’s *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space* (1992). Key authors often cited in this tradition, other than Sorkin (and contributors to his 1992 work), include Don Mitchell and Mike Davis.

Rather than simply a container for other forms of action or social activity, Lefebvre theorizes space as a social product. In doing so, he synthesizes understandings of space as physical, social and mental and introduces a tripart theory of space whereby space is produced through the interaction between the various elements. These elements are spatial practice, or physical space and how it is organized—including the activities and routines that typically take place within it; representations of space, or space as it is imagined by professionals such as “planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers” and finally representational space. Representational space is space as it is experienced by those who use it as mediated by signs and symbols (1974, 38). These elements can be understood respectively as perceived space, conceived space and lived space (1974, 39-40).

According to Lefebvre, each society produces a particular form of space (1974, 31). The type of space produced by capitalism is bland, lifeless space, or abstract space (Harvey 2001). This space is not necessarily homogenous, but “*has* homogeneity as its goal; its orientation, its ‘lens’” (Lefebvre 1974, 287). This is because such space is abstractable and thus exchangeable and, under capitalism, exchange value comes to dominate use value (Lefebvre 1974, 307). In relation to publicly accessible space, according to Don Mitchell, capitalism’s tendency to homogenize in the pursuit of abstract, exchangeable space can be understood as the ‘end of public space’ with the expression not referring to the literal ‘end’ of public space—public space will never disappear entirely—but capitalism’s tendency to enclose, control and/or regulate publicly accessible space, thus making it abstract, so that it can serve the ends of capital accumulation (2017).

Mitchell also highlights an important tension between capitalism’s pursuit of abstract, controlled and orderly space—representations of space—and actually existing, conflictual representational space. In ‘The End of Public Space? People's Park, Definitions of the Public, and Democracy’ Mitchell captures this tension in describing a battle at the University of

California Berkeley about how a park should be used (1995). For the University, the owners of the space, the space should be “a controlled and orderly retreat where a properly behaved public might experience the spectacle of the city”. However, those who use the park, “promoted a vision of a space marked by free interaction and the absence of coercion by powerful institutions” (1995, 115). Mitchell argues that the tension between such perspectives, also captured in my thesis, produces “what might be called actually-existing public space” (2017, 507).

Building on Lefebvre’s insights then, it is this understanding of space and specifically the tension that arises between capitalism’s tendency to strive for an orderly, planned and controlled vision of space and one that is fundamentally political, accepts disorder and is driven by the inhabitants of space (Purcell 2002) that I am interested in exploring here.

Puzzle

The puzzle for this research emerges from what I see as a series of paradoxes and contradictions underlying the politics of safety and protection. The first, which I have briefly touched on, is that measures claiming to be about protecting the public do not address the structural realities that are generating the most harm. While such a claim is expansive and could be examined across a range of issues from border policies meant to ‘protect’ the people from migrants to fraught debates around the need to ‘protect’ free speech at Universities,⁵ I will be considering this paradox in relation to policies and practices that structure possibilities in the public realm.⁶ This will include discourses of stranger danger, defensible design, surveillance, antisocial behavior policies, Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs), privately

⁵ As summarized in Malcolm, Duffy & Woollen 2023.

⁶ Generally, I will use the term ‘public realm’ to refer to space that is public “in the lived sense, not in the legal sense”. Following Peter Marcuse, I adapt this understanding because it “implies a broader conception of public space than a formal, legal one that looks at ownership as the defining criteria for publicness”. Instead, it looks at “public space in its social sense, space that is lived as open and communicative, seen and felt and treated by most as public, without regard to any particular form of ownership or physical arrangement” (2005, 113).

owned public spaces (POPs) and anti-protest legislation. I have chosen to focus on how public protection measures and discourses impact the public realm as, not only do I see public space as fundamental to politics and political life (Lefebvre 1974; Mitchell 2003; Sennett 1976),⁷ but I am also by worried by what I see as a common sense belief that other people, particularly in public, are potential threats to safety and wellbeing. Particularly, as a young woman who has lived in cities, I find such messages rife and unrelenting.

Contradiction One

Yet there are serious harms that are impacting safety and wellbeing. Inequality in the UK has been rising for decades, meaning the poorest people (and increasingly those with average incomes) cannot meet their basic needs (The Equality Trust; Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2023).⁸ Since 2021, the UK has faced a tremendous cost-of-living crisis with rising rates of inflation and skyrocketing costs. Prices of vital goods and services, from energy and water bills, housing costs (both rent and mortgages) and food⁹ have all been rising. For most, wages have not kept up with inflation. Consequently, millions across the country cannot afford essentials (Earwaker & Johnson-Hunter 2023; ONS 2024a). People are cold, starving and desperate in one of the world's wealthiest countries.¹⁰ Inequality kills. It is important to note that poverty is racialized in the UK, with people of color far likelier to be poor and overrepresented among those suffering (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2023).¹¹

Public services in the country are also falling apart. In particular, the National Healthcare Service (NHS) is in crisis. While this has been exacerbated by the COVID-19

⁷ Also see Kohn 2004; Mitchell 2009; Sennett 1970; Sorkin 1992.

⁸ See Standing 2011 for a discussion of precarity in the UK and how it is impacting more and more people.

⁹ Staple foods in particular have risen dramatically in price. Between September 2021 and September 2022, the cheapest food items available increased in price by roughly 17%; pasta, tea and vegetable oil all rose in price by over 40% (ONS 2022d).

¹⁰ As Alston 2018 highlights, this reality predates the cost-of-living crisis—though it is certainly exacerbated by it.

¹¹ It is important to note that there are variations between different ethnic groups with Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi individuals and families far likelier to be in poverty than those of other ethnic backgrounds.

pandemic, the crisis precedes it and is a result of decades of privatization, bureaucratization and underfunding (Bychawski 2023; Goodair & Reeves 2022). Accessing healthcare is increasingly difficult and people are dying due to delays in care. Millions of patients are waiting months—even years—for appointments and life-saving operations. Wait times for A&E, according to the British Medical Association (BMA), “have rocketed” with 18% of people waiting over twelve hours (2022). Ambulance wait times for the most severe cases, where every minute counts, have been consistently double the target time since the pandemic (Blake 2023; 2024). Thousands have been harmed and hundreds are dying before ambulances can reach them; or, in one case, dying in the eighteen minutes it took for an emergency operator to pick up the call (Goodier & Campbell 2023). Other public services, like the public transport network (Bowman 2015; Hobbs 2021; Wilde, Lynch & Belcher 2018), social care system (Bach-Mortensen, Goodair & Esposti 2024; BMA 2022) and local services—such as waste collection, homelessness services, libraries and leisure centers—(Local Government Association/ LGA 2024), beset by decades of privatization since Margaret Thatcher’s government instilled a neoliberal consensus, are not fit for purpose.

The UK is also facing a mental health crisis (Campbell 2023; The Lancet 2024; Mahase 2023). This is not only a result of the underfunded healthcare service compounded by the impact of the COVID-19 lockdowns, but due to a society facing crippling rates of loneliness and isolation (Campaign to End Loneliness 2023). These issues were already beginning to percolate before the pandemic. In 2019, people had already begun to socialize less frequently. One study found that nearly half of the UK saw friends once a month or less. The same study found a worrying drop in the quality of relationships, with people increasingly saying they did not feel supported by their friends and family (Oxford Economics & the National Centre for Social Research 2019). According to a different survey, over a quarter of British people say they have no best friend and 15% they have no close

friends. Nearly one in ten, 8%, say they have no friends at all (Ibbetson 2019). In interviews conducted by *The Guardian*, socioeconomic pressures exacerbate this trend with people unable to afford to go out and working longer hours to try to get by (Skopeliti 2022).

Despite the government appointing a Minister for Loneliness to tackle the issue (Coville 2018), these issues remain ongoing and are only deepening as the conditions for social relationships and caring connections beyond the household have been eviscerated.

The UK is also literally a mess. Essential environmental and safety regulations have been recast as pesky red-tape, obstacles in the way of business, the market and free innovation. In particular, David Cameron, Prime Minister (PM) from 2010 to 2016, instituted a ‘one-in, one-out’ policy when it came to red-tape (Cameron 2011). He promised a “bonfire of regulations” (Mark 2014) to enhance freedom and personal responsibility while growing the economy. Successive Conservative governments have followed suit, with the ability to cut regulation depicted as a key ‘benefit’ of leaving the European Union (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy 2022). Cutting corners and a callously lax attitude towards regulation has not only factored in tragedies like the Grenfell Tower fire that killed up to 100 people¹² in 2017 (Boughton 2018; Carrington 2023) but has also opened the doors to air pollution. Air pollution poses a serious public health risk. It is not only linked to increased hospitalization for lung conditions like asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (Evangelopoulos *et al.* 2022) but also low birth weights (Smith *et al.* 2017) and reduced life spans (Dajnak *et al.* 2021). Even though the wealthiest produce the most emissions (Khalfan *et al.* 2023), it is the poor who are most likely to live in areas with low air quality and suffer its impact (Chaparro *et al.* 2018).

¹² While the official number of deaths in the fire at Grenfell Tower is seventy-two, there is some controversy about this number among survivors due to continual secrecy from the council, The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, who refused to meet all the survivors as a collective in the aftermath (Gentleman 2017).

Yet attempts to put minimal controls on the transportation sector, an industry responsible for significant pollution (ONS 2019) through the expansion of the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ)¹³ have been met with outrage in the right-wing press and Conservative party (Penna 2023; Wiseman 2024). The main opposition party, the Labour Party, is no more supportive of controls (Wright & Gupta 2023). The consensus that regulation is suspect and harmful, rather than vital for health, safety and wellbeing, is endemic.

Pollution also plagues the UK's waterways, with recent uproar over how privatized water companies have been dumping raw sewage at least 1,091 times a day in the UK's rivers and oceans (Ross *et al.* 2023, 8).¹⁴ Instead of investing to improve the country's antiquated sewer system, water companies have instead given their CEOs and shareholders record profits (Horton 2024b). Yet due to media uproar over the sewage crisis, water companies have agreed to invest in improving infrastructure—by passing on the costs to their customers and raising their bills far above inflation (Lawson 2024). Not only does this mean that Britain's waterways are not safe to swim in, with campaign group Surfers Against Sewage receiving over 1,000 reports of illness linked to swimming each year and estimating that 75% of rivers pose a threat to human health, but marine ecosystems are being destroyed (Surfers Against Sewage 2024). Plants and animals are being killed and biodiversity is declining (Albini *et al.* 2023). Given we are reliant on the environment for survival, it is not possible to disconnect human wellbeing from this ecological harm.

The agricultural industry is also destroying river ecology (Cuff 2023; Holden *et al.* 2015) with manure, fertilizer, industrial waste and pesticides causing even more damage to

¹³ A ULEZ is an area where drivers of the most polluting vehicles must pay £12.50 a day to drive. This zone was expanded to include the entire capital in 2023. Rather than mandating any reduction in personal car use, it aims to disincentivize driving older, more polluting vehicles.

¹⁴ Campaign group Surfers Against Sewage claim that this is likely an underestimate (Ross *et al.* 2023).

river ecology, and consequently local communities, than sewage. This has been highlighted by journalist and environmental activist George Monbiot (2021, 2022). A recent parliamentary report warned that English waterways were “a dangerous ‘chemical cocktail’” of “pollution from agriculture, sewage, roads and single-use plastics” (Environmental Audit Committee 2022).

Finally, the world is facing a climate and ecological crisis. While global in scale and impacting countries in the Global South far more than a country in the Global North like the UK, the crisis is severe and will continue to be so without dramatic and coordinated international change (IPCC 2022). In the UK, the climate crisis has been felt acutely by farmers and those who have struggled to grow traditional crops (Scott 2022; Wheeler & Lobley 2021). For others, it has been experienced primarily through more frequent extreme weather events and storms (Greenpeace). Yet even as the UK is less impacted by climate events than other countries, the climate and ecological crisis highlights how interconnected we all are. Actions taken in one part of the world, such as deforestation or the burning of fossil fuels, can have tremendous impacts on other parts of the world. Climate patterns do not recognize national borders. Once certain tipping points, defined by the IPCC as “A level of change in system properties beyond which a system reorganizes, often abruptly, and does not return to the initial state even if the drivers of the change are abated”¹⁵ are reached, all countries will be severely impacted (2018). Though some agencies predict thousands and even tens of thousands of excess deaths a year in the UK if the climate crisis continues on pace (ONS 2022a; UK Health Security Agency 2023), I do not find it useful to speculate on numbers this way due to the complexity and ultimate unknowability of climate and ecological

¹⁵ Nine key tipping points include Amazon rainforest dieback, Greenland ice sheet disintegration, permafrost loss, West Antarctic Ice Sheet disintegration, West African monsoon shift, Indian monsoon shift, coral reef die-off, Boreal Forest shift and Atlantic meridional overturning circulation breakdown (McSweeney 2020).

systems. Nonetheless, the deepening of the climate crisis will have a colossal human impact across the world.

While these issues extend beyond the public realm, they are all relevant to the topic of public protection. There may be other threats and crises I have left out here, yet I have aimed to outline a series of interrelated harms that I see as pressing and requiring urgent action. These acute threats, as I will outline further in Chapter One, can largely be understood as stemming from late neoliberal capitalism and the ‘crisis of care’ it generates whereby the conditions required for the continuation of life and our “capacities to sustain social bonds” and connections are cannibalized (Fraser, quoted in Leonard & Fraser 2016).¹⁶ Further, as provisions for our broader social welfare and wellbeing are cut, the family is posed as an alternative, meant to care for us when the external world will not. Yet, as I will explore in this thesis, such a position is inadequate. Indeed, care, and the way I see it as a social alternative to individualizing public protection, are vital to this thesis. In particular, I am interested in the idea that broader networks of care and support beyond the nuclear family and the private home are a vital foundation from which a more radical, equitable politics could emerge. Yet, the harms I have outlined are ignored by politicians when discussing the imperative to ‘protect the public’. Instead, individualized, moralizing rhetoric casts the most crucial threat to public safety as bad individuals. It is important to highlight that, despite recognizing these harms, I am not making a rationalist argument that people are irrational and need to be afraid of the ‘correct’ things. Rather, I am aiming to understand how certain issues and relations come to be understood as phenomena we need to be protected from—while other acute threats are ignored. Here, I use the framing of ‘public protection’ as an innovative lens to understand how structural harms are ignored by posing threats to safety as emanating from other people. In doing so, I aim to contribute this as an analytical lens that will be useful for

¹⁶ See Fraser 2022 for an account linking global intersecting crises to capitalism as a way of organizing society.

critical geography and urban studies; it may also be useful for those studying the politics of safety more broadly.

Ultimately, I believe only a dramatic overhaul of not only the healthcare system but of all aspects of how society organizes life so that there is more time, opportunities and spaces to be with others and to care for one another can begin to improve people's health and wellbeing and that of the planet. People particularly need accessible spaces to socialize freely and meet others without needing to spend money in a country where, due to rain and cold, spending time outdoors is not an option for large parts of the year. Central to this will be the reimagining of far broader, more expansive, more sustaining and more social networks of care than those possible within a capitalist system. After all, "Care is our individual and common ability to provide the political, social, material, and emotional conditions that allow the vast majority of people and living creatures on this planet to thrive – along with the planet itself" (Chatzidakis *et al.* 2020, 17). Consequently, I see such possibilities for new ways of organizing care as central to a politics that would provide genuine improvements in safety and livability rather than the illusion of security.

Contradiction Two

The second contradiction I see is in the gap between fear of harm and the statistical reality of coming to harm. Those who are least likely to experience harm, and most insulated from many of the harms I have outlined above, seem to be particularly anxious and frightened. This mismatch, elsewhere referred to as the 'risk/fear paradox', has been confirmed by data from the Crime Survey for England for Wales (CSEW) (Hough 2017). Peter Marcuse also discusses it in relation to fear of terrorism, noting, "it appears that individuals in suburban communities are more likely than their urban counterparts to alter their habits in response to the threat of terrorism, (and) to be suspicious of strangers ... even though the threat is presumably greater in dense urban centers" (2006a, 920). This mismatch

is something I have noticed in my personal life moving in middle class circles. I spent a year of this research living in Brixton, a diverse, multicultural part of London with a history of radical activism and protest that has been beset by decades of gentrification. In Brixton, I lived across from a busy public square, regularly occupied by homeless people and those in poverty, skateboarders and young people hanging out. Continually, I was asked if I felt frightened walking through the square and told that it made others who visited feel unsafe. This always confused me; the young, white middle-class professionals who were making such statements were obviously (at least to me) far safer than those in poverty and those sleeping rough in the area whom they seemed to be wary of. Curious to understand this, in my research I have found that this gap between one's feeling of vulnerability and genuine vulnerability is key to the politics of public protection. It is also intertwined with gentrification and 'revitalization' as a means of making cities feel safe and comfortable for the white middle classes (Smith 1996).



Figure 2: Windrush Square in Brixton, London (Source: Self, taken on May 12th, 2024).

Politicians continually assert that it is vital to tackle the fear of crime, even when this fear is not matched up to actual risk.¹⁷ This also underlies protectionist interventions. Yet why are we focusing on helping those who are already safe to feel safer, rather than seeking to understand why these people feel unsafe and how their fears can be alleviated? Further, building on the first contradiction I highlighted, in helping the safe to feel safer and the comfortable to feel more comfortable, underlying sources of harm are not tackled. Harm is also not alleviated for those most exposed to it. In emphasizing this gap between feeling and reality, I aim to contribute to understanding the problem of basing policy on fear of harm rather than structural realities of harm.

Contradiction Three

Building on the previous point, another contradiction that has spurred this research is how public safety ends up equated to not being bothered or annoyed by others. This will particularly be explored in relation to antisocial behavior and anti-protest legislation. While continual harassment, particularly based on one's identity or class, is distressing, unacceptable and can have negative impacts on one's health and wellbeing, this is not what I am talking about here. Instead, I am looking at the notion that we should be protected from having to see or interact with people who annoy us such as teenagers wearing hoodies congregating in town centers, leafletters, the homeless and protesters creating five-minute delays to our commute or sports game. Such annoyances do not arise to the level of harm in my understanding—yet end up conflated with public safety. This conflation between safety and being affected, or being made to feel, by others is vital to this research.

Contradiction Four and Research Questions

¹⁷ While this will be unpacked in detail in later chapters, as evidence of this claim I point to Jack Straw's 1999 Labour Conference speech announcing increased police powers to tackle antisocial behavior and Home Secretary James Cleverley's speech at the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners General Meeting in 2024 on the need for the Criminal Justice Bill 2024.

Finally, bringing these contradictions together, the last issue I see is how protecting the comfortable from being affected is in the interest of power; it maintains the social order by detracting from actual causes of harm and instead induces an understanding that other people are the primary sources of threat. In doing so, it encourages fear of others and keeps people separated, unable to see themselves as part of an interdependent social whole. Without recognition of interdependency, and in relating to others primarily through fear or suspicion, the very idea of caring for or about others or caring about future generations is understood as a violation. Consequently, people are unwilling and/or unable to come together.¹⁸ Yet it is only by coming together and challenging the social order, with all the harms that it generates, that there is the possibility of reducing harm and beginning the process of creating a more just, equitable world. Therefore, with these paradoxes and contradictions underlying this research, my overarching research question is: How are subjects and their relationships with one another impacted by measures to protect the public?

I find that such measures reinforce a feeling of safety and comfort while supporting the social order and the status quo. They produce passive, apathetic and undemocratic subjects who fail to see themselves as part of an interdependent whole, reliant on one another and the world around them for their survival and flourishing. This, I will argue, prevents people from being able to come together to resist structurally produced harms and vulnerabilities. Therefore, the interests of power are maintained in keeping people passive and apart. These findings lead to a final question: in opposition to safety, comfort and top-down

¹⁸ By this I mean that, although the UK is facing the crises I have outlined above, resentment and anger in the country have largely remained individualized with few mass protests or riots against living conditions. Certainly, disruptive or disordering protests are rare to non-existent. This relative passivity and inactivity, even in the face of brutal conditions, is captured in an opinion piece by Owen Jones comparing British people's failure to take to the streets en masse following energy bill spikes in the autumn of 2022 to the French. Following protests and riots across France, French energy bills were reduced to far more manageable levels (2022). Therefore, when I say the UK is failing to come together, I mean that the country has not been able to formulate any kind of large-scale collective resistance to increasingly dire conditions.

protectionism, what practices or modes of resistance could generate subjects more capable of coming together to challenge structurally produced harm and vulnerability?

Turning to feminist work on the importance of joy and care (Chatzidakis *et al.* 2020; Ehrenreich 2006; Kern 2021a)¹⁹ along with Richard Sennett's work on disorder and conflict (1970; Sendra & Sennett 2020) I put forward a seeming contradiction of my own. To fight for actual improvements in safety by challenging structural harms, we need to become comfortable with being uncomfortable and embrace the riskiness and sense of unease in recognizing we are part of an interdependent whole. Specifically, I highlight the importance of protest and protest spaces as opportunities for claiming the right to the city. By temporarily creating alternative spaces to relate differently to the world and to one another, we can change ourselves. I highlight protests that seek not only to disorder the flow of business as usual and the status quo, but also center public forms of joy and expressions of care rooted in a recognition of interdependency.²⁰ In this way, while the actual protest may not cause the kind of change that reduces harm,²¹ the practice of public joy and care, and the inevitable conflict that arises from working together, can generate and create active subjects able to resist and work together. I see this as a novel reading of the right to the city and aim to contribute this understanding of subjectification and the intersubjective dimension of protest to organizers and those interested in and working within social movements.

Why This Matters

This thesis is being written at a time of increased restrictions on rights and freedoms in the UK in the name of public protection. In addition to the legislation I will be looking at in this thesis—the PCSC Act 2022, The Public Order Act 2023 and the Criminal Justice Bill

¹⁹ Also see Segal 2017.

²⁰ According to the Care Collective, a recognition of interdependency is deeply interwoven with a politics that centers care as a key organizing principle. They state that a caring politics begins from a recognition of “our mutual interdependencies and the intrinsic value of all living creatures” (Chatzidakis *et al.* 2020, 41).

²¹ Though it might!

2024—which all restrict the right to protest and assemble and increase the powers of the police, other legislation is being debated that would further harm people in the name of protection. Two poignant examples are the UK’s attempt to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda while their claims are being considered to ‘protect’ the country from migration—and supposedly to protect the migrants themselves—(Home Office 2022b)²² and new policy to ‘protect the people’ from disruptive strikes that will prevent workers in certain key industries from being able to exercise their right to strike (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy 2023).²³ Yet, as a result of the intersecting crises outlined in the previous section, we are not safer than ever and there are profound injustices that will not be alleviated by these protectionist policies and measures.

Therefore, in criticizing policies that bolster oppressive power and the social order and advocating for increased freedom inherent in seizing the right to the city, I am not advancing a libertarian perspective. Instead, I am aiming to highlight how ‘protection’ and ‘public safety’ seem to be drawn upon to advance issues that are actively antagonistic to people’s wellbeing. I am concerned not only with reducing harm but also with thinking through how to begin actively resisting it. Therefore, this research is not only topical and relevant to current policy debates, providing a novel framework for understanding such legislation, but also useful for activists and those working on social movements to think through strategies for resistance; this is an overarching aim in this work.

Methods

²² Indeed, Rishi Sunak tried to frame the policy as compassionate and helping protect migrants, claiming “for matters of compassion more than anything else, we must actually break this business model (of people coming to the UK across the English Channel on small boats) and end this unfairness of people coming to our country illegally” (quoted in Francis 2024).

²³ The Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill is described as follows: “Millions of hard-working people across the UK *will be protected* from disruptive strikes thanks to new laws introduced today ... The government is introducing this legislation to ensure that striking workers don’t put the public’s lives at risk and prevent people getting to work, accessing healthcare, and safely going about their daily lives” (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy 2023—emphasis added).

This is a theoretical project. I have aimed to bring together a range of work and issues that I see as linked through the central topic of protection/safety in the public realm. Rather than narrowing in on any one of these issues and studying it in detail, I have instead chosen to look for broader connections between what, to some, may initially seem slightly disparate phenomena. In doing so, I am thinking across a range of disciplines from critical theory, feminist theory, critical geography, sociology, criminology, law, political theory, policy studies, discourse analysis, cultural studies and urban planning. I also draw on empirical research to reinforce my claims. As a result, I see the method as an interdisciplinary, theoretical collage.

Collage, from the French meaning ‘to glue’ or ‘to paste’ originally refers to the artistic practice of cutting up disparate pieces of material from different spaces, or taking readymade objects, and bringing them all together to create something new.²⁴ In fine arts, collage was popularized in the twentieth century by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, and represented a challenge to the rigid formalistic norms of what was considered art at the time (Brockelman 2001, 1). It stood against the convention of separating fine arts from typical, everyday objects—as well as the delineation between high and low culture. When used as a method, collage aims to challenge convention, norms and hierarchies of values in knowledge production in the same way (Raaberg 1998).

According to Thomas Brockelman, collaging is the “gathering of materials from different worlds into a single composition demanding a geometrically multiplying double reading of each element” (2001, 10). Not only then can individual components be understood and perceived differently through the juxtaposition inherent in collage, but a new narrative forms through the overall composition. According to Martha Rosler, an artist known for her

²⁴ As defined in the Oxford English Dictionary.

collages that brought violent images of the Vietnam War into the domestic setting of the American home, collage as a method “provokes a melding or uniting of things that conceptually belong together” (quoted in Ashby 2022). This is how I see my method functioning; I bring together disparate elements that I see as belonging together conceptually in relation to my research questions. It is a puzzle-driven project focused on two key research questions pertaining to subjectification and it draws together a diverse range of work, ideas and topics in order to understand seemingly contradictory and paradoxical phenomena.

Collage as Method

There are two main ways of talking about collage as a research method (de Rijke 2024). The first is through the literal use of arts-style collage in one’s research. This can involve research participants making collages (Mannay 2010), researchers collaging their data to better understand it (Gerstenblatt 2013; Højring & Bech-Danielsen 2021; Yuen 2016), or a combination of these methods. Collage is not limited to the visual or material and can also refer to narrative collage and storytelling (Kostera 2006). Collaging can also be incorporated into how research is presented and published (Hall 2010; Vaughan 2005).

In the second understanding, collage is more metaphorical and used to describe mixing methods or approaches in a way that is loose and creative to create a new way of approaching a topic (Freeman 2020; Hall 2010). While my work draws more on this type of research, I diverge from either of these understandings found in the existing literature. This is because I am not collaging methods but collaging across disciplines and issues. The method remains theoretical, aiming to synthesize theories and ideas developed in texts from a range of disciplines with policy documents, discourses and cultural touchpoints into something new that best fits my research interests. I also weave in empirical research to support my claims—something which the fluidity of this method allows me to do. I decided to use this method as

it seemed most appropriate for my initial research area on public protection and safety and most beneficial for what I aimed to achieve with the research.

In relation to what collage looks like in my work, I tend to start chapters in the same way I have started this introduction—with a vignette, or an example of the issue I am aiming to explore in the chapter. I do so not only to provide an engaging opening but because I see the presentation of material cut and clipped this way, free of the context that will come later in the chapter, as an initial way to highlight the absurdity or bizarreness that initially attracted me to the issue that I will then explore further. I then move through policies, cases and discourses related to a particular theme and draw on theory from a range of disciplines. Finally, with a cohesive and logical structure to these elements, I think through them all together to address the central question of the chapter. Each chapter then, while contained, also builds on insights and ideas from the previous chapter. They also are each geared towards understanding a particular component that I see vital to addressing the overarching research questions.

While collage may share affinities with assemblage methods or Foucauldian archeology, such as (at least in relation to my research) the aim of understanding the relationship between power and individual agency in analyzing oppressive structures, it is not the same. Collage is a more fluid and flexible methodology that emphasizes the critical reflexivity of the researcher in determining the most optimal way to weave together, structure and juxtapose disparate elements (de Rijke 2024). Also, collage is more suitable for understanding a broad research area rather than the interworkings of a societal structure or system. Consequently, it is *not* aiming to make causal explanations but instead focused on understanding a particular topic. In relation to my work, this is evident in how I have framed my research questions. Rather than these more typical methods often employed in the social sciences or critical humanities, or political economy type approaches, I have been primarily

influenced by engagement with arts-based work and research (*Century of the Self* 2002; *Power of Nightmares: The Rise of the Politics of Fear* 2004; Vaughan 2005)²⁵ as well as Cordelia Freeman's description of collage as a method (2020).

Justifications

I see two interlinked reasons why collage is the most appropriate method for this research. The first is that collage is ideal for understanding a broad research area (Freeman 2020) and is therefore useful for a puzzle-driven project like this. Second, given the puzzle that the project is driven by arises from a series of contradictions and paradoxes related to the issue of protection and safety, with its emphasis on juxtaposition, collage is an optimal method not only to present material on contradiction and paradox but also to better understand these phenomena and thus illuminate greater insights for the reader.

In writing about collage as a method for research in geography, Freeman highlights how it is useful for understanding broad research areas. I believe that this makes it ideal for a puzzle-driven project. While she is talking about collaging methods rather than disciplines, her insights are applicable here. She writes about how collaging allows her to consider a range of perspectives—such as the historical, legal, fiscal and medical—in relation to her topic and the puzzle she is aiming to understand. Whereas a more typical method (here triangulation) would have likely required her to narrow the scope of her research to consider just one of these aspects, through collage, she was able to maintain her broader research area and a range of perspectives, all of which she saw as vital for her topic—violence on the Chile-Peru border (2020).

I am aiming to do something similar here. In designing the project, I found that a more standard political theory or cultural theory style method would have required a

²⁵ I am also inspired by Rosler's collages and interviews with her on the artistic process of collaging (McKeon 2023; Murg 2018).

narrowing of my topic and thus a rethink of the puzzle. Whereas I could have written an entire thesis about some of the individual issues in each chapter, by bringing these elements together I am aiming to make a more unique intervention by introducing the concept of ‘public protection’ as an analytical lens to draw together and understand affinities between a range of phenomena.

There are of course limits to such an approach. I have chosen breadth in the formation of the puzzle and research questions here to gain insight into the paradoxes and contradictions I saw underlying the idea of public protection. I acknowledge this trade-off between going into depth on a narrower issue and breadth in understanding a broader area. Researchers studying more narrow topics, or guided by different motivations in conducting their research, may not find it as useful a method. However, it is well-suited to my puzzle-driven approach and motivation in aiming to make sense of contradiction and paradox.

Indeed, given collage is most useful in understanding a broad topic or area, this makes it optimal to look at a new topic about which there are no pre-existing debates. To avoid confusion, when I say I am not intervening in a pre-existing debate, this does not mean I am not conscious of or not seeking to stake out positions within pre-existing literatures or debates. Instead, I mean that the research puzzle and questions arose from my motivation to understand a particular puzzle, rather than as a result of wanting to contribute to a particular existent debate. Not intervening within an existing debate certainly does not mean that the research is not relevant; I have sought to outline several reasons why this research is relevant in this chapter and shall continue to do so throughout the rest of the project. I believe that puzzle-driven research is vital to expand understanding beyond disciplinary frameworks and can even serve as a spark to generate subsequent debates and dialogues around new, important issues.

Following on from the first strength of the method is collage's emphasis on presentation and juxtaposition. According to Brockelman's work on collage and postmodern methods, with its emphasis on juxtaposition and presenting materials out of their typical context so that they appear strange and can be understood differently, collage is an ideal form to explore contradiction and paradox (2001, 8). This perspective is further reinforced by Rosler, who states: "Collage makes something of contradictions. It contains the possibility of visual puns, accessible contrasts and irony" (quoted in Murg 2018). Finally, Freeman also reinforces collage's capacity to deepen understanding through juxtaposition arguing that, given collage "celebrates juxtaposition" and forces the reader to see connections between elements they may not have otherwise, it creates "unexpected resonances and connections (which) can stimulate discussion and learning" (2020, 336). As a result of these strengths, I have been able to highlight the absurd contradictions of 'public protection', whereby policies that claim to be about protecting the public make people less safe and more afraid, in this work. Beyond this initial contradiction, the research also engages with several contrasting themes and ideas such as 'fear and freedom' and 'order and disorder'. It also suggests an inherent contradiction between protection and care.

Therefore, since paradoxes and contradictory themes are vital to my research, collage is an ideal method for presenting work on these contradictions and for my understanding as well as that of the reader. I feel that a more formulaic and subsumptive method would not be able to address contradiction and irony in the same way. Thus, the collage style method and its capacity to juxtapose material in ways that result in new ways of approaching the material as well as the relationships between different aspects of the project has been helpful not only for my research process, but also provides a useful way for the reader to reinterpret this material and its relationship to the broader themes of the work, resulting in a more complex, layered understanding.

Overall, I see the emphasis on juxtaposition, collage's capacity to illuminate paradox and its usefulness for approaching broad research topics and facilitating puzzle-driven research as vital for the aims of this project. This is because I am not trying to theorize or philosophize about justice or freedom in an abstract way or seeking to make a causal explanation regarding the topics addressed here. I am not aiming to outline which particular agents or institutions have played a key role in creating the situations I describe or outlining the history through which this state of affairs became possible. Collage would not be useful for doing this. Instead, I am trying to understand a puzzle that, to me, initially did not make sense. It is full of contradictions and inherently paradoxical. Given the bizarre nature of paradox, following Brockelman, Rosler and Freeman, I hold that collage is an optimal means not only for me to understand paradox as the researcher, but for the reader to see the interlinkages between concepts that would not be so apparent through a different method that treats them as separate and more fixed. Indeed, with an issue like public space, and the 'end of public space' more specifically, that has been subject to decades of interesting and innovative research, such a method, which provides me with a means to contribute novel research and the reader with a way to see a well-trafficked topic from a new perspective, is certainly worth pursuing.

Connection with Substance and Broader Aims

Further, just as the research aims to challenge how people are separated from one another and fail to recognize their interdependency, I too am challenging the increasingly siloed nature of knowledge in the contemporary University. While interdisciplinarity is in vogue as a buzzword, it is often applied in a shallow, box-ticking way rather than in a way that celebrates bold challenges to established norms and ways of doing research (Davies 2018). If one breaks from norms too much, they are unlikely to publish or find funding for their research. Anyone who has tried to do interdisciplinary work, particularly in the British

University system, knows how the system is set up to prioritize narrow, disciplinary-bound specializations. While this may be useful in some fields, for the understanding of social reality, or for reflecting on policy—as I do here—it is limiting. The world is complex and interconnected and cannot be understood through overly narrow, confined disciplinary frames. Collage then, just as it challenged convention and rigidity in the art world, can also be used to challenge convention in the production of knowledge.

I follow Rosler in seeing collage as a means to contest overly narrow ways of thinking and being. In describing her work, she states that: “It points to the compartmentalization that people are used to producing in how we live our lives”. She continues to outline how the way we see everything as separate “prevents us from being a whole society and from being whole individuals. We are not a here and a there. We are all one, and this is crucial” (quoted in McKeon 2023). This perspective of collage as a method for challenging separatist thinking is vital then to both the aims and substance of this work. Not only am I aiming to construct a novel methodological approach that refutes categorization in any one discipline, but I am advocating for the importance of embracing interdependency and relationality as well as challenging the inherent injustice I see in differential livability, whether within national borders (like in this project with its focus on the UK) or beyond them. Collage therefore has affinities with the substance and intent of this project.

Overall, there is an inherent messiness to collage. According to Davis & Butler-Kisber, collaging creates “strange” results, forcing unexpected and unknowable realizations (1999, 4). The end cannot be predicted in advance. One is unlikely to know the ultimate title of a collage style work in the first year of the project. One also will not follow a set rubric for how the chapters unfold. While all research changes throughout a project as new and unexpected issues arise, there is a particular spontaneity and unexpectedness in collage. Yet this messiness should not be mistaken for a lack of rigor or precision.

Indeed, John Law argues that standard social science methodology that aims to fit reality into a neat, clean image often relies on simplification or misunderstandings. He, asks, if the world is “complex, diffuse and messy” (2004, 2) “then would something less messy make a mess of describing it?” (2004, 1). Law answers this hypothetical in the affirmative, even arguing that traditional methods “are hopelessly bad at knowing that mess” and that “The very attempt to be clear simply increases the mess” (2003, 3). I am inclined to agree with him. While Law does not endorse any one method over another as being better than traditional methods for understanding mess, he advocates for a “disciplined lack of clarity”, or, as I prefer to think of it, a disciplined disorder that refuses to treat reality as if it could ever be reducible to an abstract, clean approach that is simple and easily digestible. I find this resonates with Sally Engle Merry’s work on the seductive, yet ultimately reductive, nature of quantifiable methods that rely on neat data for understanding complex social issues (2011, 2016). This point is further reinforced by Freeman who puts it, collage “excels through its messiness” (2020, 337). It “allows the researcher to work in a non-linear and intuitive way”; it is open and creative (Butler-Kisber & Poldma 2010, 3). It allows new topics and ideas to be studied that cannot be understood through existing approaches. It is “about encounters. It is about bringing ideas into conversation with one another ... it is multidimensional and interdisciplinary” (Cran 2014, 4).

While I am not a methodologist and cannot speak to the relevance of particular methods to other research topics, given my puzzle-driven project focusing on paradox, this method, with its capacity to unpack contradiction and inconsistencies without oversimplifying reality and deepen understanding of an already well-trafficked general issue is well suited. Like all methods, there are limitations to what can be examined through such a method. Notably, it is not suited for putting forward theories of causality. Nonetheless, I

found it ideal for my research questions focusing on subjectivity and see it as a key contribution of this thesis.

Why the UK

Finally, concerning my method, I am focusing on the UK specifically rather than attempting to write a universal text on the phenomena that I am describing. While some ideas generated here may be useful for looking at other national contexts, I acknowledge that my aims are limited to understanding these issues as they relate to the history, culture and politics of the UK. As a result, I look at policies, documents and data related to the UK. In doing so, I have consciously aimed to emulate the theoretical method sometimes employed by Wendy Brown. Whereas other critical social theorists often suggest a universalism in their work, drawing on examples from a range of national contexts, in much of Brown's writings, it is clear that she is focusing on the United States (US) (2006, 2019, 2020). Particularly in her later work, Brown discusses events, laws, politicians and policies from the US rather than weakening her arguments or coming across as naïve or Anglocentric in assuming the particular insights she has identified are applicable everywhere. I have therefore made this decision both due to concerns for accuracy and appropriateness as well as due to an acute awareness of the imperial undertones of work written in the Global North that claims to describe the global or universal condition (Tuhiwai Smith 1999).

Having established my intent to focus on a single national context, my choice to look at the UK is multifaceted. While it is somewhat motivated by a desire to counterbalance the large bulk of work focusing on the privatization and securitization of the public realm that looks at the United States,²⁷ my primary reasoning is that I see the UK as a global leader—

²⁷ While it is not possible to be comprehensive here see Davis 1990, 1998; Hannigan 1998; Katz 2008; Kohn 2004; Low 2003, 2009; Marcuse 2005, 2006a, 2006b; Mitchell 2003, 2005; Smith 1996; Sorkin 1992 as indicative of this claim.

among liberal democratic countries—in securitizing the public realm and restricting possibilities for interaction, engagement and political life. While this case will be made in greater detail as I move through the thesis, there are two relevant points reinforcing this claim to be made here. The first relates to the UK’s status as an early adapter of surveillance technologies and intensive securitization of its public realm; the second is its uniquely brutal repression and criminalization of protest in recent years.

Long before 9/11 and the American ‘Insecurity State’ (Sorkin 2008), the UK began aggressively securing its public spaces and rolled out surveillance technology in masse across the public realm, becoming a well-established “world leader in CCTV” (Minton & Aked 2016, 3). This was primarily in response to a series of terror attacks during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) that targeted publicly accessible spaces from pubs to London’s transport network and its financial district (BBC 2003; Coaffee 2004). In addition to becoming the first country to roll out masse CCTV technology in public spaces from 1985 onwards (due to concerns that the Conservative National Convention would once again be targeted by the IRA) (Coaffee 2022, 203), the UK constructed a high-security cordon that came to be known as a ‘ring of steel’ in London and Belfast. This ‘ring’ is marked by a narrowing of roads as well as design features that force drivers to slow down so that they can be recorded by CCTV and have their license plates checked. There are also spaces for police to monitor vehicles, and even discreet enclaves for armed police when deemed necessary (Coaffee 2004).

The roll-out of such militarized security infrastructure in civilian spaces has only increased following 9/11 and London’s 7/7 bombings in 2005 to the extent that it has become increasingly normal in twenty-first century Britain, impacting not only the design of public spaces but also public and private buildings from schools to hospitals to housing estates (BBC 2003; Minton 2023; Minton & Aked 2016). According to Jon Coaffee, such ‘fortress

urbanism' in the UK has become "increasingly important to the way towns and cities" are "designed and managed, and how planners and other built environment professionals" collaborate "to enhance levels of safety and security" (2022, 312). The British approach to security has even served as inspiration for other countries (Borger 2013; Lipton 2005).

Yet the UK's status as an early proponent of surveillance technology and security infrastructure is not in the past. The nation has been at the forefront in rolling out new facial recognition technology and, according to campaign group Big Brother Watch, has "rolled out automatic facial recognition at a pace unlike any other democratic nation in the world" (2018, 1). This technology is not only used to monitor high security environments like around political centers, but has been deployed at festivals, sports events, concerts, community events, peaceful protests and even just on street corners to monitor those passing by (Big Brother Watch 2023, 12; Butler 2024). This is despite evidence that the technology has a low accuracy rate²⁸ and concerns about its racial bias (Big Brother Watch 2023). With its embrace of this new technology despite these serious issues, the UK is "an outlier" among liberal democratic states (Stone, quoted in Burgess 2023). Indeed, the technology is banned in many cities and states across the US (Goode & Simonite 2024) and the European Union has banned live facial recognition technology (though they have watered down their commitments in the final draft of the Artificial Intelligence Act to allow for 'post' facial recognition) (Volpicelli 2024). As a result, The UK's particular willingness to monitor and surveil its citizens in the name of keeping people safe, despite concerns about privacy, accuracy and human rights, has led to its status as an "omni-surveillance" society (Sampson, quoted in Boffey 2023a).

There is certainly more that could be said on this topic, such as emphasizing the political economy angle, as this normalization of intensive security in the UK has resulted in

²⁸ Big Brother Watch has found that on average, "a staggering 95% of 'matches' wrongly identified innocent people" (2018, 3).

the security industry comprising one of the fastest growing and most profitable industries in the nation (Humphreys 2024). This profitability only increases the deepening of security infrastructure in British society. However, as discussed here, it is abundantly clear that the UK stands out among liberal democratic countries in its willingness to deploy new technology and harden the built environment in ways that alter the nature of spaces and hinder possibilities for interaction and engagement in the public realm.

Finally, a key element of this thesis is looking at how policies that regulate and control the public realm have been mobilized to prevent dissent and protest. In this regard, while Amnesty International finds that protest is under threat across all of Europe, with the vilification of protesters, repressive laws, excessive use of force and arbitrary searches and arrests becoming increasingly common (2024a), the UK has been particularly brutal in its repression of protest; notably what makes the UK stand out is its willingness to criminalize nonviolent protesters and send them to prison, which is now more likely due to policy changes in the PCSC Act 2022 and the Public Order Act 2023. Numerous activists from the campaign group Just Stop Oil have received custodial sentences, with several in 2024 receiving between three to five years for engagement in disruptive forms of protest (Gayle 2024a, 2024b). This is shocking and unlike anything seen in other liberal democracies. It is only possible due to a consensus between both major parties regarding the criminalization of protest in the country. While I will analyze the UK's repression of protest in more detail in Chapter Six, it is worth highlighting that these policies are considered "unique amongst G7 countries" and more similar to those found in authoritarian regimes (Fitzgerald 2021).

Crucially for my research, what also makes the British policies stand out is their criminalization of acts that cause irritation or annoyance, with these subjective factors then equated to harm (Resimić 2021). Given how annoyance reframed as serious harm requiring legislation to address is a key component of my overarching argument, this is a key

justification for my focus on the UK. Overall, given I will be drawing connections between the securitization of the public realm, the notion that sociality in public is a threat and that (some) protest is a dangerous violation of individual freedom, and the UK's leading role in these fields, it is an ideal country to focus on for my purposes here.

Evidentiary Strategy

The way I chose the examples and evidence I drew on for this project was largely based on prominent, reoccurring themes and issues I found in existing research and a search for examples and cases that were representative of what I saw as the normative way in which the various topics of each chapter are discussed and represented in policy, key speeches and forms of popular media. I had already decided I was interested in looking at measures impacting possibilities for engagement in the public realm—excluding those focusing directly on terrorism as it is a massive topic that I could not do justice to, and slightly distanced from my overall interests and aims. Then, to make the determination on what was standard, I read a large bulk of policy documents, speeches and other forms of political communication and media pieces pertaining to the protection of the public realm—focusing mainly on the 2000s due to my focus on what in Chapter One I call 'late neoliberalism'. I also looked for key themes, particularly searching for terms relevant to this project like fear, freedom, (dis)order, safety and protection, and looked into examples used by other researchers doing related work on the UK, such as Anna Minton.

I have included in the Appendix a chapter-by-chapter breakdown of how the particular evidence for each chapter was selected to allow for more specificity. However, it is worth stating here how the type of evidence I have used relates to the goals of the project and the theoretical impetus that drives this research. It is worth re-stating that this is not a political economy project. Instead, it is one deeply interested in discourse, policy framings, representations and subjectivity. Whereas a more political economy focused project would

have sought to look at different evidence, and been more focused on key actors, institutions and ‘following the money’, I have focused instead on political speeches, policies, documents justifying or explaining policy and on forms of popular media that reflect relevant themes. This was a conscious choice based on my desire to understand how security issues are represented and discussed and how the notion of ‘protecting the public’ emerges. Further, I found the focus on such material most useful for considering subjectification. Such a choice is reflected in my research questions.

This decision also reflects my alignment with a Butlerian understanding of injustice and inequality rooted in differential livability—or how some can flourish while others are cast to social death or else depicted as existential threats who must be extinguished (Butler 2009, 2020; Mbembe 2019). When I state that this project is influenced by my concern with inequalities, this is what I mean—the inequality that exists within the politics of life and death. Some live and flourish, and others live short, painful and difficult lives of struggle.

Therefore, given I wanted to understand the logic and processes by which certain actors come to be understood as deserving of protection while others are cast as undeserving or understood only as threats that the deserving require protection from, I decided to focus my work on more on discursive and theoretical evidence as better situated for addressing these aims.

Chapter Outline

The structure of the thesis proceeds as follows. Chapter One contextualizes the project within late neoliberal capitalism. I draw on Brown’s work on neoliberalism as both a rationality and a ‘market and morals’ project that dismantles the social and the political, focusing on her contention that neoliberalism aims to provide a sense of order through the expansion of the private protected sphere (2015, 2019). Further, I consider how, through the demonization of the social, this comes to be understood as freedom. Then, turning to Jeremy

Waldron (2006), Marcuse (2005, 2006a) and Zygmunt Bauman (2005, 2006) I outline my understanding of safety and security and consider how artificial threats to safety and security are politicized and manipulated to displace the existential instability and insecurity generated by neoliberalism.

Then, in Chapter Two, I seek to understand fear as a technique of governance—particularly the fear of others in public spaces. To do this, I first outline Mitchell’s work on social agoraphobia, or the fear of public spaces (2009), before moving to consider the fear of strangers through the rise of ‘stranger danger’ discourse. I particularly highlight racialized assumptions of threat (Ahmed 2000) and gendered assumptions of risk and vulnerability (Kern 2021a, 2021b) inherent in this discourse. Then, having outlined a framework for understanding the fear of strangers, I move to outline how it is operationalized through ‘defensible design’, which has become a common sense planning principle in the UK. Choosing to focus on surveillance as a component of defensible design, I introduce an example of how the fear of strangers is normalized via public safety announcements that play across the British transport network to tie the strands of the argument together.

Having begun to explore the fear of strangers, in Chapter Three I seek to understand the logics inherent in this fear while also beginning to outline how interventions in the name of protection reinforce the social order by focusing on issues that are not legitimate threats. To make this point, I look at antisocial behavior. After introducing the concept, its history, and its basis in broken windows theory (Millie 2009; Minton 2009), I draw on Judith Butler’s work on differential grievability and violence/nonviolence to understand the moralizing, individualizing framing of antisocial behavior (2009, 2020). Through antisocial behavior, some constitute ‘the public’ and others, a group I refer to as ‘disorderly people’, are framed as existing only as potential threats who must be expunged in the name of public protection. Focusing on the classed aspect of this, I turn to Smith’s work on revanchism (1996) to argue

that the excess criminalization and attention on antisocial behavior function not only to dismantle the very notion of interdependency but is in the interests of oppressive power. While this section is looking at antisocial behavior specifically, the same logics, whereby some are part of the public needing protection and others exist only as threats, is endemic to all the protectionist measures I look at here—in particular anti-protest legislation.

While Chapter Three begins the process of outlining how protectionist policies tend to target behaviors that are just frustrating or annoying, I delve deeper into this point in Chapter Four, drawing on Mitchell's work on 'SUV-citizenship' (2005). Here, Mitchell outlines a new form of citizenship based on 'bubble laws', which grant a right to be left alone in the public realm. Drawing on this, along with Kohn's work on 'bubble laws' (2004), I look at PSPOs. These policies create bubbles of space in which broad swathes of activities are banned. While PSPOs stop short of creating a spatialized right to be left alone, I instead argue that they create a new subject who has the right to not be affected in the public realm; they cannot be annoyed, frustrated or made to feel bad. Continuing to explore this right to not be affected through the expansion of Mitchell's Sports Utility Vehicle (SUV) metaphor, I argue that the imperative to be protected from having to feel reinforces Brown's understanding of the kind of freedom promised by neoliberalism as disengagement from the social whole (2019, 2020). It is a freedom antagonistic to care for others and even the future itself—even one's own wellbeing in it.

After having introduced the subjects who emerge from protectionist policies, I move to explore their subjectification further and consider how they relate to one another in Chapter Five. Here, I am essentially looking to examine the SUV subject's ideal form of public space—privately owned public space. Couching the discussion within the inevitable push and pull of risk and desire in the city, I outline a theoretical perspective for understanding POPs drawing on the work of Mike Davis (1990, 1998), John Hannigan (1998,

2007) and Michael Sorkin (1992). Then, after using this framework to analyze POPs in the UK, I focus on the intersubjective impact of this kind of space. Drawing on Kohn (2004, 2008), I argue that these spaces produce passive subjects who do not interact with one another. As an alternative to this passive subject orientation, I look at the concept of shared space, which forces interaction. While ensuring interaction and engagement is useful for encouraging subjects to become more active and responsible for how their behavior impacts others around them, thus generating a reluctant sense of dependency, shared space is not sufficient on its own to challenge the unequal social power that results in some being exposed to far more harm than others.

Consequently, in Chapter Six, I aim to address the issue of tackling oppressive power. I do so by focusing on the Public Order Act 2023—specifically its redefinition of ‘serious disruption’ to mean anything “more than minor”. Seeing this as an extension of the right to not be affected, I look at Sennett and Pablo Sendra’s work on the importance of disorder and conflict, focusing on their assertion that a key part of disorder is refusing to submit to authority (Sennett 1970; Sendra & Sennett 2020). I then introduce Mitchell’s provocation ‘against safety and against security’ (2009), a position I am aiming to advance in this thesis. I couple Mitchell’s assertion that the right to the city entails embracing risk and joy instead of safety and security with Ehrenreich’s work on the power of collective joy in *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy* (2006) and Segal’s work on hope and freedom (2017).

Yet, this is not an individualistic position advocating personal recklessness; I instead highlight the importance of care and rethinking relationships beyond the nuclear family as integral to rebuilding the destroyed social and beginning to resist and challenge the harm generated by late neoliberal capitalism as a collective. Thinking through all this together then, I introduce three examples of protest movements that challenge oppressive power by disordering public spaces and practicing public joy and care for others and the world around

them. These are Sisters Uncut, the Right to Roam campaign and Reclaim the Streets. After reviewing these movements, I reiterate the importance of the values of disorder, conflict, joy and care for one another as alternatives to safety and comfort. Further, I highlight the importance of protest for creating spaces and opportunities for people to change themselves through (temporarily) changing the city. Protest also creates spaces to collectively pursue the freedom to determine how to live while also challenging the structures that produce harm and cause insecurity. In rejecting individualism and oppression as inevitabilities others become a potential source of security rather than a potential threat.

Conclusion

Safety seems to be something that “we cannot not want” (Spivak 1993, 45-46). Consequently, appeals to safety and security seem to be a guaranteed vote winner for all parties at all levels of government. The popularity of this idea does not seem to be slowing down. After all, how can you be against safety? Surely the function of government is to protect the people?

However, in this thesis, focusing on protectionist measures and outlining the logics that underlie them as well as how subjects and the social fabric are impacted by them, I find that such measures do not reduce harm or improve livability. Instead, they rely on shoring up individuals against the ‘harm’ represented by the outside world and others in it. They encourage apathy and suspicion towards others while reinforcing an ideal of sovereign individuality and the notion that we can disavow our dependence and reliance on others. In disavowing our dependence on others we can feel safe and protected from the unknowability of an unpredictable world filled with unpredictable people. Nonetheless, feeling safe and protected is not the same thing as actually being safe and protected.

Instead, I find that what we need protection from, what is actually making us unsafe—unfettered societally destructive global capitalism—is considered sacred freedom.

Meanwhile, what we are told the state is protecting us from—annoying behaviors in public—is really just an inconvenience or irritation rather than a deep social harm. This is fundamental to the politics of protection under late neoliberal capitalism—it encourages focus on the threats that are most useful to the maintenance of power rather than those that are actually threatening to the people (Sorkin 2008, xiv). Therefore, any actual improvements in safety and livability will require a means to challenge this system and the harm it produces.

Given the shortcomings of protectionism in reducing harm, and my motivation to think through how an alternative form of politics that can challenge the differential allocation of life and death under neoliberal capitalism can emerge, I will draw on the concept of care throughout this thesis. Indeed, a crucial distinction I will highlight is the differentiation between a politics of care and a politics of protection.

Care, “simultaneously consisting of guarding (preventing any harm) and caring for identifiable bodily needs and nurturing” (Perrons 2010, 38), represents an alternative to protection. It is inherently social and rooted in “nurturing of all that is necessary for the welfare and flourishing of life” (Chatzidakis *et al.* 2020, 16). Whereas protectionism frames other people as violations, sources of potential harm or annoyance, a politics of care, while recognizing that human relations are always inherently conflictual and can be painful, simultaneously frames broadening our networks of care beyond the family as a means to support life and flourishing.

Given I am interested in relationships in this thesis, the contrast between how protectionism frames social ties beyond the family as dangerous and threatening will be foiled to a politics of care, which frames a recognition of dependency and broadening relations of care as a project that nourishes and supports life, ultimately improving livability. Further, I see care as foundational to a progressive form of politics that can challenge oppressive power and fight for genuine livability. Therefore, while fear and freedom are the

primary two contradictions around which this thesis circulates, the tension between care and protection is also vital to unpacking and understanding my research questions.

Chapter 1

Security and Freedom in Late Neoliberal Capitalism

“Expanding the ‘personal protected sphere’ in the name of freedom, then, not only secures inegalitarian powers of class, gender, sexuality, and race; it generates an image and ethos of the nation that rejects a public, pluralistic, secular democratic order for a private, homogenous, familial one.”

— Wendy Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*

In 2023—amid a climate and ecological emergency (IPCC 2022)—British PM Rishi Sunak sought to block several policies²⁹ that would decrease emissions and improve road safety. He cited a desire to limit government interference³⁰ and the protection of ‘British values’ (Reid 2023). Drawing ire from environmentalists and walking and cycling groups (British Cycling 2023), Sunak’s anti-environmentalism goes beyond utilizing green issues as a wedge between his party and the main opposition party. While limiting government interference is a standard neoliberal ‘pro-business’ position, the assertion of values to justify policies that objectively increase risk and are antithetical to safety and wellbeing requires further unpacking. Why is ‘Britishness’ equated to unsafe, fast driving and smog? How does this example illustrate a distortion of both freedom and security?

Focusing on Sunak’s vow to stop the rollout of twenty-mile-per-hour zones, road safety charity, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA), released a statement arguing Sunak’s decision defies all evidence as these zones are “essential and effective in reducing deaths” (quoted in Reid 2023). Preventing their spread not only increases road congestion for drivers but also increases the level of risk and danger for all—

²⁹ The policies that Sunak has claimed he will stop are banning fossil fuel cars within five years, the continued spread of ULEZ and their subsequent fees, an increased roll out of twenty-mile-per-hour areas and fifteen-minute cities (Department for Transport 2023; Francis 2023). He also intends to limit councils’ ability to fine drivers (Walker 2023).

³⁰ Sunak also made up several net zero related policies he has claimed to be stopping. These are compulsory car sharing, forcing people to have seven different bins at home, enforced veganism and vegetarianism with raised taxes on meat, the introduction of a steep flying tax to prevent all but the richest from going on holiday and mandatory insulation paid for by individuals (Sunak 2023d). None of these have ever been a serious policy proposal or part of the government’s Net-Zero Strategy. Instead, they seem chosen to paint a picture of a PM who is stopping the government from arbitrarily interfering in people’s lives.

cyclists, pedestrians and drivers alike. Sunak has claimed he is protecting motorists from “anti-car policies” by ensuring they have the freedom to drive wherever and whenever they want, calling the car “one of the most powerful forces for personal freedom” (Department for Transport 2023). This example raises a contradiction. Here, protection and securing a way of life for drivers against change is equated with expanding freedom. It is meant to “protect people”, to secure their way of life while ensuring their freedom, all at the expense of collective safety and wellbeing (Department for Transport 2023). In this chapter, I aim to better understand the paradoxical way security and freedom are mobilized in ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ (Brown 2019). I am not attempting to sketch out a comprehensive history of debates on these issues; instead, I consider them in relation to my research interests. In doing so, this chapter aims to provide a critical conceptual framework for this thesis and introduce my understanding of key terms the research relies on.

How is it that the maintenance of a particular way of life and its comforts, even if it is damaging to collective wellbeing, has become the aim of government? How has neoliberal rationality transmogrified security and freedom so that they each seem to stand for their very opposite? How can neoliberalism retain its grip as common sense when, particularly post-austerity, it offers nothing but existential insecurity for most people? In looking at these questions, this chapter makes two key arguments. The first is that the concept of ‘protection’, and the construction of threats the people need to be secured against, function to displace the existential insecurity generated by neoliberalism. This reinforces the social order—a term I understand as meaning both the continuation of the neoliberal economic system and the hierarchal order it reinforces. The second argument is that, once separated from the social, both security and freedom, rather than being antagonistic to one another, actually work together. In this way, the expansion of security and the personal protected sphere serves to advance a form of individualistic freedom as non-coercion.

To make these arguments, I begin by outlining Wendy Brown's understanding of neoliberalism as both a rationality and a project (2019). I aim to situate her discussion within the seeming contradiction of late neoliberalism, where economization and moralization work together even as they seem opposed to one another. Continuing, I outline her assertion that the destruction of the social takes place through moralization, familization and the expansion of the personal protected sphere. In looking at how the social is posed as a threat to freedom, I turn to Brown's earlier work (1995) to identify two understandings of freedom: a social form of freedom connected to dismantling hierarchy and striving for equality that is depicted as dangerous and licentious, and a 'good' freedom, disconnected from the social and any concern with social power, that I call anti-social freedom. It is this latter understanding of freedom, and its disdain for the very idea of social power, that justifies the expansion of the personal protected sphere to instill order and control. However, all this does is bolster oppressive power and reinforce the social order.

Then, having begun laying the framework for understanding how the security versus freedom debate is undone through neoliberal rationality, I turn to better understand the meaning of security and differentiate it from safety. To do this, I first turn to Jeremy Waldron and his delineation between security and safety (2006). Then, as a complication of Waldron's work, I turn to Peter Marcuse's distinction between (in)security and existential (in)security—a key difference I aim to build upon. Crucial to Marcuse's argument is that neoliberal capitalism generates existential insecurity. To further unpack this, I turn to Zygmunt Bauman's work on 'liquid life' (2005, 2006) focusing on his assertion that the state has dramatically reduced its conception of security, since, as a result of neoliberal economization and the destruction of the social, ensuring safety and stability is no longer possible. Drawing on this argument alongside Marcuse's claims that neoliberalism displaces its existential insecurity by creating alternative issues the public must be 'protected' from, I contend that

this displacement allows neoliberalism to claim it is enhancing safety and security, or protecting people, even as it dismantles the conditions needed for survival and flourishing. In this way, “Neoliberalism is uncaring by design”; it does not enhance livability (Chatzidakis *et al.* 2020, 24).

I then arrive back at Brown and the moral project of neoliberalism’s expansion of the private, personal sphere. The anti-social freedom she depicts functions with—as opposed to against—this understanding of security as little more than the maintenance of the hegemonic order. Therefore, I find Brown’s distinction between a social freedom and an anti-social freedom helps to reveal the falseness of the security/freedom dichotomy. I believe Brown’s argument makes it possible to argue neoliberalism has reframed freedom as a project that requires and takes place *through* increased security, thereby eliminating the need for a trade-off. The values are no longer in conflict when freedom is disconnected from the social, the existential insecurity of neoliberalism is displaced and security is reduced to a feeling of personal safety and the maintenance of the status quo. In this way, expanding the personal protected sphere promises it all. Yet, as I will consider in later chapters and have suggested here with the opening example of moralism and traditional values being used to veto policy vital to increasing safety, we are becoming less safe and less free.

Neoliberalism as Markets and Morals

To begin, I turn to Brown’s work that seeks to understand the 2000-2010s ‘illiberal’ backlash in Euro-America (2015, 2018, 2019, 2020).³¹ This was marked by events that defied mainstream expectation such as the UK’s vote to leave the European Union, Donald Trump’s election to the US presidency and the rise of far-right parties across Europe.³² Brown rejects

³¹ Coupled with (and partially unleashed by and contributing to) these electoral successes was a rising normalization of racist, sexist, antisemitic and xenophobic discourse (Brown 2019, 1-2).

³² A wide range of countries across Europe from Nordic countries like Denmark and Finland to the Netherlands, Austria and Italy have seen the right, and particularly the far-right, rise in prominence in the 2000s. Notable

other terms sometimes used to describe this moment and its aftermath, such as populism (Mouffe 2018; Müller 2016; Revelli 2019), feudalism (Dean 2020; Varoufakis 2023) or fascism (Traverso 2019; Toscano 2023), arguing these “inadequately capture the strange brew of bellicosity, disinhibition, and an anti-democratic blend of license and support for statism in current political and social formations” (2018, 61). Instead, to understand this strange mix, where appeals to moral traditionalism sit seamlessly alongside pro-business politics and disinhibited rage and desire for power, in *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism* Brown revises her earlier work (2006) on the relationship between neoliberalism and neoconservatism.³³

Previously, she conceived of neoliberalism and neoconservatism as distinct rationalities that became interwoven in the American context through their de-democratizing effects and “their respective devaluation of political liberty, equality, substantive citizenship, and the rule of law” (2006, 690). However, in this work, she understands traditional moral logic as imbricated within the broader neoliberal project, rather than separate from it. This understanding is influenced by Melissa Cooper’s *Family Values* (2017). Here, Cooper outlines how, rather than liberal (and neoliberal) individualism being in opposition to the institution of the family—with its ties of solidarity and dependence, the family has always been a key site for free-marketeers and liberal individualists. This is because it functions “as the primary source of economic security and (as) a comprehensive alternative to the welfare state” (2017, 9). Or, in the words of the Care Collective, “the family is often encouraged to step in as society’s preferred infrastructure of care” in an “uncaring society” (Chatzidakis *et al.* 2020, 34). Rather than the state providing a semblance of care for its citizens through investment in social welfare of the provisioning of ‘public things’ (Honig 2017), care is

examples of the rise of the far-right include the growing popularity of France’s Marine Le Pen as leader of the National Front in the 2010s and the re-election (and continual re-election) of Viktor Orbán as Hungary’s PM in 2010.

³³ For more on neoconservatism see Drolet 2011; Fukuyama 2006; Kristol 1995, 2010; and Norton 2005.

privatized as a family matter. Further, care work primarily becomes the responsibility of women, reinforcing patriarchal oppression (Folbre 2001). Therefore, Cooper provides a means to see conservatism and ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ (an expression Brown uses to differentiate between the practice of neoliberalism and key theoretical works associated with the tradition) as connected through their prioritization of the family as the primary site for the maintenance of order and the privatization of care (2019).

Taking Cooper’s insights seriously, Brown is interested in sketching out an account of neoliberalism as both a market and a moral project (2019). She seeks to understand how logics of economization and moralization, rather than working against each other, reinforce one another and deepen the power of the neoliberal social order. In doing so, she is continuing her earlier work of trying to understand how “a project that empties the world of meaning, that cheapens and deracinates life and openly exploits desire, (can) intersect one centered on fixing and enforcing meanings, conserving certain ways of life, and repressing and regulating desire?” (2006, 692). *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism* is thus an attempt to understand how belief in total freedom can coincide with a desire for closed-off nationalism—how the state is conceptualized as both a business, that must be efficient and practical to attract investment and retain growth, and a family that needs to keep its members safe from external dangers (2019).

Consequently, I see the text as seeking to understand the paradox of neoliberalism, particularly in what I will call ‘late neoliberalism’. I use this term for clarificatory purposes to indicate I am primarily looking at the practice of neoliberalism in the 2010s through to present day. Though this thesis will, of course, need to reflect on earlier forms of neoliberalism to understand the trajectory of this current juncture. I am also using this term to highlight what I see as a somewhat distinct stage in the neoliberal project after the 2007/8 financial crash, the bailout of the financial system and subsequent passing of the costs on to

the people through austerity politics. Whereas some proclaimed the end (or near end) of neoliberal capitalism after the financial crash (Stiglitz 2008; Žižek 2009), and still others claimed this following Brexit, Trump's election and the COVID-19 pandemic (Jäger 2021; Stiglitz 2019; Tooze 2021),³⁴ I follow Brown in seeing the current political moment as neoliberalism.³⁵ However, it relies on a different means of justification and legitimization. This is because, particularly after the UK's austerity program, it is abundantly clear neoliberal policies do not work for most people—wealth is not going to trickle down and people are becoming poorer, more miserable and sicker and know it is not their fault. There is a widespread sense 'politics is broken'. Yet neoliberalism refuses to die. As I will outline, Brown's position is that the absorption of neoconservative moralization within neoliberalism seems to rescue neoliberalism from the worst effects of its economic project (2019). In her work, Brown does not use neoliberalism as a catch-all to explain all social, political and economic phenomena; I do not wish to do this either. Nonetheless, I see it important to theorize changes within the hegemonic system, rather than seeking to invent a new term prematurely.

Morals and the Social

First, Brown recognizes the slippery, contested nature of defining neoliberalism. She places her understanding between a neo-Marxist or politico-economic account of neoliberalism as the remaking of the world in economic terms by global elites to remove all barriers to the free flow of capital (Harvey 2005; Peck & Tickell 2002; Slobodian 2018) and a Foucauldian interpretation of neoliberalism as a political rationality (Dardot & Laval 2014;

³⁴ Also see Meadway 2021.

³⁵ Also see Mezzadri 2022 for a discussion on how the COVID-19 pandemic and other intersecting crises, rather than representing a shift away from neoliberalism, instead represent a deepening of its logics.

Davies 2015; Foucault 1979),³⁶ that extends well beyond the economic and applies market principles to previously non-economic realms, ultimately remaking the subject into a purely entrepreneurial figure (2019, 18-20).³⁷ Synthesizing these two perspectives, Brown builds on her earlier understanding of neoliberalism as governing through the constitution of a particular form of common sense (2015). She argues these normative perspectives both overemphasize the market project of neoliberalism—with political economists and neo-Marxists looking at marketization in relation to institutions and policies and Foucauldians focusing on it in relation to subject production and society. They thus remain ignorant of its moral project. She contends the moral project of neoliberalism can best explain its anti-democratic, illiberal turn. While Brown's market and morals account then makes a two-pronged argument that neoliberal moralization has dismantled the social and neoliberal marketization has undone the political, I will focus more on her account of moralization and the social as this is more relevant for my research and for understanding the questions raised here.

Brown identifies the social as the bulwark of political equality, which she then contends is the basis of democracy as, with substantial differences in social power, there can be no meaningful democracy. Therefore, the social is a material and dematerialized realm where inequalities are made, remade, and contested. Going beyond neo-Marxist accounts then, the social is not just shorthand for the existence of the social (welfare) state that provides public goods to ameliorate inequalities and ensure equal access, outcome, and economic redistribution. She also includes society in her definition of the social, with a

³⁶ In understanding political rationality, Brown makes it clear that “a political rationality is not equivalent to an ideology stemming from or masking an economic reality, nor is it merely a spillover effect of the economic on the political or the social”. Instead, relying on Michel Foucault, she understands political rationality as “a specific form of normative political reason organizing the political sphere, governance practices, and citizenship” (2006, 693). Taking a more Gramscian reading, I prefer to think of political rationality as a form of hegemonic common sense that organizes reality and structures understanding.

³⁷ Also see Brown 2015.

description similar to a normative account of the public sphere as an abstract realm where individuals become a people, connected through their similarities and differences (Young 1990, 2000). Finally, she argues the social is where social justice happens; it is “where we are more than private individuals or families, more than economic producers, consumers, or investors, and more than mere members of the nation” (2019, 27-28). While this third component of the social is the weakest conceptually, I find thinking about the materiality of social justice and its reliance on taking and remaking public space (Harvey 2008; Mitchell 2003, 35) helps to ground this concept and link it more clearly with the preceding two. Therefore, when Brown discusses the social, we have several different understandings merging into one: the social state, society as a practice and principle and social justice as an action. While this account conflates different phenomena under the broad category of ‘the social’ and, may not be sufficiently attentive to the particularity of each, these phenomena certainly are interconnected. Consequently, I still find it useful to think about the social in this way to understand how neoliberal moralism wreaks havoc on these three phenomena simultaneously. Rather than political equality, however, my concern in understanding this argument is concerning how the destruction of the social destroys a sense of interdependency.

From this broad understanding of the social, Brown moves to argue neoliberalism set out to destroy the social “conceptually, normatively, and practically” (2019, 28). In terms of politics, this occurs through the dismantling and privatization of all remnants of the twentieth-century social state. This not only includes the destruction of welfare provisions but increasing the level of privatization in healthcare, education, community spaces, green spaces and caring industries. Crucially, this is marked by a dramatic decline in basic services and spaces for people to gather publicly provided by the state. Legally, essential health, safety, environmental, consumer and labor regulations are rebranded as ‘red-tape’ or hurdles to the free expansion of businesses and profits—and therefore slashed. Epistemically, the very

existence of society is denied as a fantasy. Notably, this happened in Thatcher's assertion: "There is no such thing as society", there are just "individual men and women and there are families" (1987). The notion of a collective people who care for one another and have responsibilities to one another is derided in favor of the promotion of personal responsibility. Finally, laying the roots of her theorization on morality, Brown also contends neoliberalism brings ethical attacks on social justice in the name of traditional values and a cultural 'demassification',³⁸ where the 'individuals and families' Thatcher counter-posed to the fantasy of society become the basic political unit of the state (2019, 36-37).³⁹ Indeed, living outside of the traditional nuclear family makes engaging with the state far more costly and complex.

This multi-pronged attack makes sense when considering Brown's understanding of neoliberalism as a project remaking the world in terms of free markets and moral traditionalism. The combined result of this attack and the replacement of society with families and individuals who are solely responsible for their successes and failures is that the social power that generates and creates hierarchy, inequalities and injustice is denied as well as the reality of "subjectivity at the sites of class, gender, or race" (2019, 40). Therefore, social power, or the concept some have increased privileges and powers due to their social role or economic position, is entirely denied. Following, calls for social justice and social change can be viewed as unnecessary interventions at best and, at worst, attacks on the particular form of freedom granted by neoliberalism. This all functions to obscure the notion of the people as an interdependent whole. Further, it shields the social order from criticism and allows its continuation.

³⁸ Demassification is a term associated with ordoliberalism, a school of neoliberal thought that emerged from the Freiburg school. Often these German thinkers are ignored in favor of a focus on the Chicago School of thought (Davies 2015).

³⁹ Also see Lewis 2022 for a more focused discussion of the centrality of the family to the constitution and reconstitution of an oppressive social order.

As a note of terminology, when I use ‘social order’ or ‘neoliberal order’ or ‘hegemonic order’ in this work, I mean the same thing as I understand the neoliberal economic order as part of the social order—which, as sketched out by Brown above, creates and maintains hegemonies of value. When I use the phrase ‘oppressive power’, I mean the power mobilized by and in support of this order.

Good and Bad Freedom

To understand how neoliberalism frames social justice as an attack on freedom I want to go back to Brown’s earlier work in *States of Injury* where she lays the groundwork for this discussion by differentiating between two types of freedom: good freedom and bad freedom (1995). On the former, Brown describes the paradoxical way American society depicts violent, repressive acts such as “thuggish mercenaries in Central America, the expenditure of billions on Cold War defense, the deregulation of toxic enterprise, (and) the destruction of unions with ‘right to work’ protection” (1995, 9) as necessary to protect freedom at home and promote freedom abroad. Yet these examples, which embody the priority of free markets and the consolidation of power over peoples and land, bring up essential questions. Whose freedom matters here? Whose does not? What is really being promoted in these examples?

Conversely, liberal, radical and social expressions of freedom, such as the sexual liberation of the 1970s and early feminism, become bad freedom. These expressions of freedom, exemplified in this text by women’s and LGBTQ+ rights movements (but not limited to these groups), were (and still often are) deemed selfish and irresponsible—the decadence of pursuing such freedoms depicted as damaging the social order—potentially even heightening national insecurity in their destabilizing of the social order. In the case of LGBTQ+ rights struggles, even those sympathetic to the cause linked the sexual liberation of gay men to the AIDS pandemic, suggesting certain kinds of freedom are not just harmful to

the social order, but also deadly (1995, 9-10).⁴⁰ In this messy contextual field of meaning, understandings of freedom seem wrought with anxieties about women, people of color, poor people / the working class, and LGBTQ+ people unsettling the hegemonic social order by challenging their oppression. Those with more social power perceive this as a threat. In addition, encapsulated by freedom understood as dismantling barriers to free trade and eliminating the ‘red-tape’ of protectionist legislation, there are anxieties about the unsettling of the capitalist order through reductions in profitability.

In Brown’s interpretation then, freedom is reduced to the continuation of the status quo and maintenance of underlying power structures—the social order; this freedom, equated with order, stability and prosperity, is the only freedom deemed real and worth protecting or promoting. It requires traditional values of “discipline, sacrifice and sobriety” to maintain (1995, 9). While she does not flesh out the moral project of neoliberalism here, the roots of it can be seen in her description of bad freedom as the examples she gives seem to oppose traditional ideals of the responsabilized subject and the ideal family. I will continue to build on this idea of good and bad freedom while further unpacking how traditional moralism is imbricated in the distinction through returning to Brown’s later work.

I find this delineation between two understandings of freedom, a dominant or ‘good’ one that is a function of neoliberal rationality where freedom is free enterprise and the continuation of the social order, and the possibility of a social freedom—rooted in the unsettling of domination, power, and hierarchy—useful. In *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism* Brown moves to further define good or neoliberal freedom simply as an absence of coercion;

⁴⁰ See controversial gay activist and playwright Larry Kramer and his blaming of promiscuity among gay men for the spread of AIDS as illustrative of this point (1983, 1997). Also see France 2016 for a depiction of Kramer. Further, see the villainization of Canadian flight attendant Gaëtan Dugas in Randy Shilts’ popular novel on the AIDS pandemic, *And the Band Played On* (1987). Shilts notably changes an account referring to Dugas as ‘patient O’ to ‘patient 0’, which has the result of (incorrectly) suggesting that his promiscuity, combined with his frequent travel across the continent, was central to the initial spread of HIV in North America (McKay 2014; Worobey *et al.* 2016).

not freedom to or freedom from, not having the time or ability to do what you want and be who you want, not license and not even choice. Freedom is instead reduced to an understanding that “power is limited to coercion and that freedom is equivalent to the absence of law and its dictates” (2019, 41). Crucially, in setting out this understanding based on architect of neoliberalism, Friedrich Hayek’s work, and how it has been put into practice, Brown notes how Hayek understands coercion as being in the interests of anyone else but oneself (2019, 96-97).⁴¹ Coercion then takes on a particularly individualistic inflection. Being told or to act in a way that would benefit others or the world around you becomes a coercive assault on one’s freedom. This not only explains how essential safety regulations and protections for the environment—despite benefitting everyone—can be recast as dangerous assaults on freedom but also how social justice can be depicted as damaging to the social fabric. Calls to include minority groups in spaces where they are underrepresented, affirmative action programs and certainly anything more radical like reparations or redistribution are viewed not only as a needless state intervention but as an expression of coercive, bad freedom.

Individual, good freedom is posed as being in a zero-sum game relationship with protection and assistance for others and neoliberalism promotes this individualistic freedom that pushes against having to care about others or give up anything for them. Why should my driving be limited just because, compounded, it may improve the health and safety of others? According to Brown, this form of freedom comes into being through the privatization of public and social goods and in the responsabilization of subjects under successive neoliberal governments (2018, 64). This dominant understanding of freedom then is one “without

⁴¹ It is important to note that Hayek’s views on this matter have changed throughout his work. However here, Brown is mainly basing her account on Hayek’s later understanding of freedom and non-coercion as captured in *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960) rather than his earlier, more normative, liberal understanding of freedom (Irving 2019).

concern for social context or consequences, without restraint, civility, or care for society as a whole or individuals within it” (2019, 42). Since this is an understanding of freedom divorced from the social, I think of it as ‘anti-social freedom’. To better understand this anti-social, uncaring⁴² freedom then, I want to consider how it is further advanced through the expansion of what Brown calls the private protected sphere.

Expanding the Personal Protected Sphere

With the social then posed as antagonistic to freedom I want to delve deeper into the central claim of Brown’s argument that moral traditionalism is an essential component of neoliberal rationality (rather than merely resonating, converging or else otherwise awkwardly combining with it). Brown contends that, whereas normative accounts see the affinity between neoliberal politics and traditional politics as conflictual, viewing the disruptive and unstable politics of neoliberalism as contradictory to the unchanging stability and familiarity of traditional values (Harvey 2005), the two work together. Moralism justifies the destruction of the social and familiarization absorbs formally public provision, making care and social reproduction the duty of the family and individuals.

As outlined in the differentiation between good and bad freedom and the understanding of good, anti-social freedom as rooted in non-coercion, the promotion of anti-social freedom requires protecting free markets and traditional morality, both of which Hayek understands as natural and organic to human civilization (Hayek 1988), from external forms of interference. Appeals to the social are problematic because they are essentially individuals or groups of rationalists seeking to substitute their beliefs and thoughts for rules and ways of life determined by successive generations of people. This would be coercive, destabilizing

⁴² While I draw attention to the above quote’s reference to this form of freedom as being ‘without ... care for society as a whole of individuals within it’, the uncaring dimension of this freedom is explored in more detail in Chapter 4. Here, I focus more on its anti-social dimension.

and against freedom. Sunak’s description of protest groups in the UK as seeking to advance a form of ‘mob rule’ exemplifies this perspective (McKiernan & Faulkner 2024; Walker 2024). Here, the people’s actions are not an expression of democratic dissent but an attempt to overthrow the social order and institute chaos. Collective action is also demonized. So too is care beyond the confines of the self and the family. Broader networks of care and solidarity are not only materially difficult under neoliberalism, but, through neoliberal rationality, cast as hostile to freedom—and even societal order.

Yet, from this understanding, the state cannot monitor and enforce adherence to particular moral codes and norms as, paradoxically, to do so would also be coercive. Instead, all the state can and should do is “secure only the prerequisites of moral life—freedom, property, universal rules of justice, and political deference to tradition” (2019, 103). Therefore, the role of the state is limited to maintaining the freedom of traditional values and stopping any social intervention or ‘mob rule’. This is why the state can intervene to prevent limits being placed on car driving or seek to criminalize protests but cannot intervene to provide free social care or a comprehensive welfare system. The former interventions are vital to freedom, here clearly equated with the social order and status quo, whereas the latter are unjust entitlements. To achieve this, in Brown’s reading of Hayek, the state has three primary techniques: “limit legislative power to generating universal rules ... discredit all social justice talk as nonsense and totalitarian; and expand what Hayek calls the personal protected sphere to extend the purview of traditional morality beyond the confines of church and family” (2019, 104).

While I have discussed the first two components of this formulation and situated them within Brown’s wider argument, I want to focus on expanding the personal protected sphere as this has the greatest impact on the relationship between understandings of security, freedom and protection. Building on classical liberalism, this concept is rooted in the idea

that the best way to limit the power of the coercive state is to have a sphere it cannot intervene in—a private sphere. This private sphere goes well beyond private property; issues that take place here are the business of families and individuals, not the government. While feminist thought challenges this separation through the refrain ‘the personal is political’—a second-wave feminist slogan that seeks to deny that personal experience is somehow disconnected from broader structures of power—under neoliberalism this domain, walled off from state interference, is continually expanded. It not only seeks to prevent state interference but also social and democratic interference in the name of justice, equality or inclusivity (2019, 105). Expanding this sphere is meant to advance the stabilizing form of freedom that the personal protected sphere reinforces and provide a sense of order and control.

Yet, whereas in theoretical neoliberalism, like Hayek’s, the expansion of the personal protected sphere provides order and stability (Irving 2019), in actually existing late neoliberalism, this freedom does not provide a sense of order at all. Instead, Brown writes how morality has become politicized, mainly focusing on how this takes place through the courts and the co-option of civil liberties and rights language⁴³ as a means to expand the personal protected sphere of dominant groups at the expense of minority groups and societal cohesion (2019, 109-111). Far from stabilizing, this is polarizing and fracturing. As my analysis is on material space and not legal space, I also find it relevant to think about this politicization happening through calls to ‘clean up’, ‘secure’ and ‘take back’ space by excluding or driving out particular groups. These calls and the privatization and securitization they incite are clear evidence of a bourgeois morality utilized to bolster the power and privilege of dominant groups. Nonetheless, as Brown notes, traditional neoliberal thinkers would be appalled by such a state of affairs where private rights are no longer the basis for

⁴³ As evidence of this see the example of free-speech debates in the UK used to push a right-wing agenda (Malcom, Duffy & Woollen 2023) and the rise of the so-called ‘gender-critical feminist’ movement that aims to position attacks on trans rights as feminist and protecting women (Michelis 2022; McLean 2021).

extending a sense of harmony stemming from organic traditionalism and thus securing voluntary conformity, but instead have become blunt instruments of power (2019, 114).

Safety or Security?

Having outlined two forms of freedom, focusing on anti-social freedom and how it is promoted through the extension of the private protected sphere, I now move to consider the other side of the freedom versus security binary. However, first I must differentiate between safety and security. While safety and security are often coupled together, they are not the same thing. Though the two are frequently linked by the straightforward logic ‘safety is guaranteed through security’, or the reasoning that security keeps people safe, there is also a sense ‘safe and secure’ is both a structural reality and a feeling—with there often being a gap between feeling and reality. To make sense of this, I will first summarize the normative understanding of both terms as outlined by Waldron (2006).

Despite the prominence of the liberty/freedom versus security debate, or the notion an increase in security requires a decrease in freedom and vice versa, and a long history of academic work seeking to understand the meaning of freedom and/or liberty,⁴⁴ substantially less literature exists to define and understand security. This motivates Waldron to write an article defining security and considering several ways it can be understood. He also explores the limitations of security as a concept.

First, Waldron identifies three main categories of security: national security, collective security and human security (2006, 459). He rejects both national security and collective security as the form of security considered in the trade-off debate, as national security is

⁴⁴ For a sample of this lengthy history see Locke 1689 for a classical liberal perspective, Mill 1859 for a utilitarian perspective, Fromm 1942 for a discussion of freedom to versus freedom from, Bakunin 1950 for an anarchist account of freedom, Berlin 1969 for a normative perspective and the key distinction between positive and negative liberty, Bookchin 1982 for an introduction to anarchist ecological thought on freedom and Davis 2012a for a radical account of freedom as struggle. Also see Miller 2006 for a collection of key essays on liberty and freedom.

“about *the integrity and power of the state itself* as an institutional apparatus” (2006, 460).

Collective security then operates at an intra-state level, whereas the meaning of security in the trade-off pertains to “individuals and populations” (2006, 459). Therefore, he focuses on security as human security, where this form of security pertains to people rather than the security of governments, states or institutions. While I am unsure the division between these forms of security can be drawn so bluntly as security logics and discourses often conflate human security with state security (particularly concerning fears and anxieties about terrorism) and will complicate this in looking at Marcuse’s conception of existential (in)security, Waldron’s argument provides a useful introduction to the key differences between security as a general concept and safety.

To Waldron, safety pertains primarily to the body. He states: “a person is safe to the extent that she is alive and unharmed” (2006, 461). This is a simple, straightforward definition. It emphasizes safety as a bodily reality. However, Waldron sees security as a much broader, richer concept that incorporates safety, but also goes beyond it, including the feeling of being safe as well as being stable and in control of one’s life and future. Defining security in the negative, he finds material loss (property and economic value), fear (for one’s safety), a lack of certainty of safety, not having access to essential rights and freedoms, being subject to interruption or disruption to one’s way of life (disorder) and not being able to maintain one’s way of life generate a state of insecurity (2006, 462). There is some overlap between these aspects of insecurity; yet overall security becomes a value that provides physical safety, mental ease, the ability to live a relatively free and open life and to continue doing so without interruption or threats of dramatic change. It is not mere survival but also flourishing and the knowledge one will continue to flourish. He states: “an adequately deep conception of security should aim to protect people’s individual and familial modes of living themselves,

and not just the life, health, and possessions that are necessary for it” (2006, 466). Security then is a broad value that goes well beyond safety and encompasses feelings and futurity.

However, Waldron is concerned with how security, or measures that claim to be about security for some, are premised on insecurity—or even a deficit in safety—for others (2006, 474). While a strange conflation of insecurity with potential terrorist violence limits his focus, as if other phenomena are not far more threatening to security, he is right in highlighting how security measures often do not operate only to potentially reduce freedom or liberty (as the trade-off argument would assume) but also can make one group secure at the expense of reducing the security, safety and even freedom of others. Indeed, it is this irony that “state action, motivated by a desire to enhance public safety, may also threaten the safety of certain members of the public” (2006, 486), as well as their rights and freedoms, that I wish to emphasize throughout this thesis in looking at protectionist policies that reinforce the social order through oppression, restrictions and keeping people apart. Therefore, I see the distributive problem of security as an initial means to begin complicating the liberty/security debate. It brings to light how calls for security and protection can harm those with less social power. However, to further complicate this account, I want to consider the difference between (in)security and existential (in)security.

Existential Insecurity

The initial framing of Marcuse’s research is drastically different from Waldron’s. Whereas Waldron sees terrorism as the primary source of potential insecurity, Marcuse instead looks at how fears and anxieties about the potential safety risks of terrorism are overblown and manipulated for political purposes (2005, 2006a). While I will consider this argument in depth in a later section, here I want to consider the key definitions his argument relies on.

When it comes to the meaning of safety, Marcuse has a similar, yet more comprehensive, understanding in comparison to Waldron. He defines it as “real protection against dangers” (2006a, 925). However, going beyond the literal safety of the body from attack or assault, he understands safety as something structurally produced. He lists “having unemployment insurance against the danger of loss of a job, social security adequate for a comfortable old age, (and) comprehensive health insurance” as measures that make one safe (2006a, 925). Consequently, safety is not just to be safe from an attack or danger but being protected from the unexpected. This is an expansive understanding of safety that, it is my belief, relies on the existence of the social. When I argue neoliberalism or protectionist policies are not making anyone safer and are making them less safe in this work, this is the understanding of safety I am relying on. Though I am deeply concerned with the body and how certain bodies are more exposed to harm than others.

However, a key difference in Marcuse’s understanding is his delineation between (in)security and what he calls existential (in)security. In making this distinction, his understanding of security is more limited to Waldron’s. He defines it as “the perception of protection from perceived dangers” (2006a, 924). It is therefore primarily about how safe one feels. To be secure is to know that one can rely on a social safety net or social structures should one face any difficulties or harm. In reverse then, insecurity is a feeling of potential vulnerability to the dangers one perceives they may be exposed to. However, both these understandings are separate from the concept of existential (in)security. Existential insecurity is defined as “the human, psychological sense of pervasive danger, a deep and fundamental threatening anxiety, without a sharp focus on a specific danger” (2006a, 924). This is a far more severe state than just being insecure and is marked by “worry about conditions which are threatening to the basic underpinnings of one’s life: one’s health, income, (and/or) physical safety” (2006a, 925). It is a far more encompassing threat than insecurity as it

threatens one's very existence either literally, or as one knows it. Existential insecurity is a lack of certainty one can continue to maintain their existence while remaining safe and well. According to Marcuse then, existential insecurity is a basic condition produced by capitalism. I aim to build on these definitions. However, to understand this claim better, I turn to the concept of liquid life.

Liquid Insecurity

Bauman has a different understanding of how neoliberal modernity reframes the debate about freedom, safety and security. While Bauman buys into an overly dichotomous freedom and security framing, I will outline his argument, focusing on his depiction of how neoliberal modernity creates existential insecurity, before returning to Marcuse to finalize my conceptual framework.

Bauman's texts *Liquid Life* and *Liquid Fear* focus on subjects and identity in a deeply unstable world (2005, 2006). He describes this world of constant change, with space annihilated by time (Harvey 2006), where one feels as if they are sprinting on a treadmill just to survive as 'liquid', defining liquid life as "a precarious life, lived under conditions of constant uncertainty" (2005, 2). Survival in liquid life requires constantly abandoning, deleting and forgetting the past in order to keep up. Here, the sense that 'all that is solid melts into air' is new and exciting—everything should melt. Nothing should stay the same—not jobs, cities, hair, fashion or even buildings. This is, of course, all in the interests of capital as constantly shifting fashions, in clothes, hair, houses, and buildings facilitate the accumulation of capital. Another key aspect to highlight here is that the constant need to 'forget' and 'delete' means one cannot form strong affective attachments to particular styles, trends or moments as these will quickly need to be abandoned. Thus emotional shallowness is a key part of keeping up to speed with liquidity. There is no continuity and sense of stability or stasis.

Based on this description of no stability or predictability, Bauman seems to take it for granted that liquid life is marked by what could be called existential insecurity. While Bauman notes that subjects who are sufficiently insulated from failure by capital and status experience liquid life as freeing, for the vast majority it is dizzying and leads to a sense of generalized anxiety (2005, 35-36).⁴⁵ Yet for most, it is profoundly destabilizing. Crucially, liquid life is advanced through neoliberalism and its market and morals project. This is due to the state's unwillingness to provide any security (using Marcuse's definition) other than the expansion of the personal protected sphere. Instead, subjects are made responsible for their successes and failures and cannot rely on social power and structural inequalities to account for their struggles.

In Bauman's understanding of insecurity, there are three levels of 'dangers'. First, there are dangers that threaten the body and one's possessions. Next, there are dangers that threaten the carrying on of routines and 'business as usual' (2005, 3). Finally, the third class of dangers are those "that threaten one's place in the world – a position in the social hierarchy, identity (class, gender, ethnic, religious)" or those that threaten the social order (2005, 4). With these three levels of body/possessions, business as usual and hierarchy Bauman claims it is the second and third dangers that the liquid or neoliberal state is least able to protect against (2005, 4). In his understanding, in a liquid world, order and hierarchy are always shifting. Yet the state can always protect people's bodies and possessions—or at least claim to do so—through increasing 'law and order' policies.

While I am sympathetic to this description and acknowledge a societal obsession with dangers that impact the body and one's possessions, I do not see hierarchy as under threat within liquid society. Here, following Sara Ahmed's account of 'white men' as an institution

⁴⁵ Also see Standing 2011 for a discussion of generalized existential insecurity and precarity.

of power that organizes the social world, I argue that the notion that hierarchal structures are loosening or that white men are losing their social power is more fantasy than structural reality (2014). In Brown's account, it is a sense of lost entitlement that animates white male rage rather than a genuine loss of status or power (2019, 2020). After all, despite some high-profile cases of white men prosecuted for their violence against women and other subordinates,⁴⁶ this group still predominantly rule the world. The notion of increased power for women or minorities is merely in the heads of far-right pundits. Particularly, poorer women, people of color and trans or gender non-conforming people are still severely oppressed. Nonetheless, while I disagree with Bauman's account that liquid society is marked by a shifting social order, I see his work as helpful in understanding how neoliberalism generates existential insecurity. Further, I echo his view that the neoliberal state is unable and unwilling to provide a sense of security for subjects and that this can lead to an overfocus on one's personal, bodily safety. This is something that feels like it is in our control when so much is out of it. Yet rather than this being because it is the only level of danger where the state can guarantee security, I find the idea of 'protection' instead emerges to displace the harms and existential insecurity produced by neoliberalism onto other sources that the state can then claim it is protecting the people from.

Securitization and Politics

Having outlined general understandings of safety and security, I now turn to understand the process by which certain issues, like those I will explore, are politicized and taken up as vital security issues, whereas others that cause just as much, if not more, harm, are not. This process is referred to as 'securitization'. Securitization theory, associated with

⁴⁶ While several powerful, high-profile men like film producer Harvey Weinstein and financier Jeffrey Epstein have been charged, prosecuted, found guilty and sent to prison for their violence against women as part of the #MeToo movement, countless other men face no repercussions for their actions and violence against women remains endemic (Allen *et al.* 2020). Women have not risen to occupy the top roles in society, and, at the time of writing, an appeals judge has even overturned one of Weinstein's convictions for rape.

Ole Wæver and the Copenhagen School, does not take it for granted that security measures and policies simply respond to pre-existing, obvious or natural threats. Instead, it looks at the processes by which phenomena come to be understood as particularly dangerous and/or threatening, and thus a security issue (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde 1997; Eroukhmanoff 2018; Wæver 1993). Why do some issues come to be accepted as matters requiring excessive force, regulation, restriction, public funding and even a denial of vital rights and freedoms—whereas other issues that cause harm are ignored or viewed as less relevant or important, not worth addressing as a matter of urgency? These are vital questions work on securitization aims to address—as indeed my work does as well.

There are different strands of thinking about securitization (Bigo 2002; C.A.S.E. COLLECTIVE 2006) and criticisms of the Copenhagen school for its overfocus on elite state actors (Booth 2007; Doty 2007) and speech acts as determining what is a security issue and what is not (Balzacq 2005; Hansen 2000; Stepka 2023).⁴⁷ While these critiques are important to acknowledge, and indeed I certainly share these concerns, particularly regarding the patriarchal limitations of the Copenhagen school's top-down, language-centric understanding (Hansen 2000), given this research is not aiming to contribute to literature on securitization, it would be too off-topic to thoroughly unpack these debates. Instead, taking these criticisms seriously, my understanding of securitization is most in line with Matt McDonald's.

McDonald understands securitization as “the processes through which particular definitions or discourses of security come to constitute the lens through which specific issues are conceptualized and addressed by different political communities”. According to him, in looking at these processes, while linguistic frameworks may be important, and indeed policy

⁴⁷ In response to such criticism the Copenhagen school expanded their original theorization and began to place more emphasis on whether or not audiences accepted the securitized framing set out by the speech act of an elite actor. Crucially, audience consent became required for a ‘securitizing move’ to become full-fledged securitization (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde 1997).

language and political speech are important in my research, a more comprehensive approach “entails a focus on how political communities themselves are constituted ... (and) how particular articulations of security come to capture the way that community deals with those issues” (2008, 565). McDonald’s understanding is relational in that he argues determinations of security issues are not made by elite actors in a vacuum and are instead intimately connected to how particular subjects are constituted. While there is a role for speech acts, the emphasis is on communities and their actions (or inactions). I will be building on this understanding from McDonald due to its alignment with my focus on subjects in this work.

Reinforcing the Social Order

Marcuse gestures towards securitization as a political process in his work differentiating between (in)security and existential (in)security. Here, Marcuse is not just operating at the level of semantics. Instead, the function of this distinction is to highlight how existential insecurity can be manipulated to serve the interests of power. In ‘Security or Safety in Cities? The Threat of Terrorism after 9/11’, Marcuse outlines how terrorism is securitized and thus framed as a threat to existential security rather than as one public safety or general risk among others (2006a). His main argument for how this happens seems to be through an increase in messaging about the threats of terrorism, from announcements about ‘red level’ terror threats to public safety announcements to look around for ‘anything that does not look right’ or the implementation of fear-inducing security measures and widespread acceptance of terrorism’s imminent possibility. Through this reinforcement in the public consciousness that terrorism is a constant risk and could happen anywhere, and the deployment of measures meant to alleviate this risk, Marcuse contends fears and insecurities about one’s vulnerability to terrorist violence are heightened (2006a). Other potential safety and security risks, including those that are more commonly experienced, like the compounded health impact of breathing polluted air, are ignored. Instead, attention and

financial efforts are disproportionately mobilized towards preventing terrorism. Yet these measures do not make anyone substantially safer.

In related work, he makes a similar argument that, following the 9/11 terror attacks, the threat of terrorism has been cast as a threat to existential insecurity to justify “an agenda that has nothing to do with physical safety ... but is directed instead at winning elections, restricting debate and dissent, and maintaining tight political control over the range of democratic processes” (2005, 101). While Marcuse is careful to acknowledge that some responses to the threat of terrorism are legitimate, meaning they provide an improvement in safety without undue restrictions to freedoms, he highlights illegitimate responses that instead reinforce the interests of those in power and bolster the social order (2005, 2006a). While the process of restricting debate, dissent and the practice of democracy began before 2001, and terrorism is not the only threat that has been exaggerated to reinforce the interests of power, Marcuse sees it as important to consider how the securitization of terrorism functions to control behavior in the public realm and restrict democratic possibility.

To Marcuse, securitization, particularly the securitization of terrorist possibility here, is political. It reinforces the control of the neoliberal capitalist system. This is because terrorism becomes an object to displace the anxieties and instabilities produced by neoliberal capitalism. People feel frightened and worried a terrorist will harm them, rather than feeling insecure due to the total economization of life and the destruction of the social. Whereas these anxieties certainly coexist, the terrifying risk to existential security promoted by the state begins to eclipse the more quotidian insecurity that is a result of living in an unjust system. In this way, those in power can continue to promote what could be called a neoconservative agenda of militarism abroad and securitization at home, while cutting vital safety regulations and social services, and still claim to be protecting the people. This is because the harms of neoliberal capitalism are obscured, or at the very least, made less

pressing (2006a, 925-927). In this way, the neoliberal social order is maintained despite the intense harm it produces. Following Bauman, the neoliberal state is not interested in providing genuine security; instead, it promotes security and protection against imagined threats to reinforce the social order. Security, as understood through neoliberal rationality, is thus reduced to the continuation of the social order. Or, as Marcuse puts it, “security’ is used even more broadly as a means of social control” (2005, 111).

In outlining this, I want to make a similar argument to Marcuse. However, my subject of concern is not terrorism. Instead, in this thesis, I will be looking at fears of existential insecurity that emerge from the notion of being part of a collective society, an interdependent social whole. To do this, I will focus on measures impacting the public realm that aim to ‘protect the public’ from the threat of other people. We are told other people threaten not just our lives, but our sense of pride in our communities, our wellbeing and our right to enjoy ourselves; they threaten our way of life with their pesky demands for rights and justice and with their attempts to socialize and enjoy public spaces in annoying or disruptive ways. In this way, existential insecurity becomes an issue of other people, rather than a result of structures. It is individualized and moralized. The problem is bad individuals who are threatening our way of life and wellbeing.

Securing Freedom

Having made one of the key arguments I set out to answer in this chapter, how the concept of protection, and the substitution of alternative targets the people need protection from, functions to shore up oppressive power and reinforce the neoliberal social order, I move to consider how security and freedom reinforce one another. To finalize this argument, I return to Brown.

When the personal protected sphere is examined beyond the courts, according to Brown, its expansion takes place both materially—in terms of mass privatization of public

and commonly owned spaces and buildings from squares to sports fields to community centers—as well as figuratively through the passing of policy that allows discrimination in the name of personally held beliefs and seeks to advance certain ways of life even as they are damaging to the collective social whole. These measures, which promote anti-social freedom, are indicative of the securitization of the public realm and the social possibilities that take place there (2019, 117). Under neoliberal capitalism, it becomes a space of danger, threat and risk. According to Brown, securitization here functions to facilitate the expansion of the personal protected sphere through the deepening of security infrastructure such as “public and private security forces, border patrols, police, and the military” (2019, 117). As I am focused more on the interpersonal level, rather than the national level, while some of these forces such as the police are relevant for both, I see important security infrastructure in this context as also including that in cities and towns including anti-terror cement bollards, flashing anti-sleep security lights, CCTV surveillance and hostile architecture.

Further, securitization is also evident in policy meant to ‘protect’ and secure the people from the existential threat of others and ensure their good freedom. With freedom then reduced to the expansion of the personal protected sphere, security does not limit freedom. Instead, according to Brown, the “walls, gates, security systems, and no trespassing signs *become freedom’s signifiers* as they demarcate the private from the public, the protected from the open, the familiar from the strange, the owned from the common” (2018, 68—emphasis added). Here then, security signifies freedom rather than a lack of it. Whereas Brown focuses on security infrastructure, I believe policies that aim to secure through restrictions and the regulation of behavior achieve the same end. A regulated, controlled space is, under this understanding of freedom, a free space. Security and protection are signs of freedom.

It is clear then that freedom and security contain a multiplicity of definitions and are not simply in a zero-sum game relationship. Challenges to this relationship also come in work

in the anarchist tradition, which refutes the liberal origin myth that societal progress and human survival must inherently require a level of sacrifice and a separation between necessity and want (Bookchin 1982),⁴⁸ as well as in work by neo-Marxists who argue that the relationship is a constructed trade-off than an inevitable reality (Hickel 2020; Marcuse 1955). Nonetheless, I believe Brown's argument demonstrates that neoliberalism has reframed (anti-social) freedom as a value that requires and takes place *through* increased security, thereby eliminating the need for a trade-off at all. The values are no longer in conflict when freedom is disconnected from the social and when security is reduced to a feeling of personal safety and the maintenance of the social order. Indeed, in this chapter I have understood both freedom and security as tools to reinforce the social order. In this way, expanding the personal protected sphere promises it all. Yet, as I will consider in later chapters and have suggested here with the opening example of moralism and traditional values used to veto policy vital to increasing safety, this stunted idea of security not only indicates of a lack of genuine, social freedom—it also making us less safe.

Conclusion

This chapter aims to provide a critical conceptual framework for this thesis. While it is beyond the scope of this research to fully address the vast literature on neoliberalism, freedom, security and safety I instead considered these topics in relation for my research topic and the two interconnected arguments I aimed to make here: how the existential insecurity generated by neoliberal capitalism can be manipulated and displaced to reinforce the social order and how, once individualized and reinterpreted through neoliberal rationality, security and freedom, far from being opposing values, function together through the expansion of the personal protected sphere. The entire rest of the thesis will build on this

⁴⁸ Bookchin is particularly critical of how this myth has been absorbed into the supposedly radical scholarly tradition since both Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx's work relies on a trade-off between security and freedom. Both of their work also claims that the suppression of freedom is required for progress (1982, 272).

framework—though it is not my aim to imply that every single societal issue can be traced back to neoliberalism. Instead, I have focused on neoliberalism’s particularly intensive assault on the social as depicted by Wendy Brown. It is this destruction of the social, and what this means for relationships and social ties that I am interested in and will build upon.

In addition to outlining the main theoretical constructs this thesis builds on, this chapter also introduces a key paradox: the security we are striving for is making us less safe (and less free). This is a fundamental argument to my research. The politics of protection, and the protectionist measures I will examine in later chapters, are not making anyone safe. Instead, I will outline how they reinforce the destruction of the social and hinder the possibility of a more caring politics rooted in the extension of networks of care beyond the private family and the household.

This point is taken up in the next chapter where I examine the politics of fear and specifically the fear of strangers, or those who are marked by forms of difference. Yet, just as ‘security’ here seems paradoxical, in that security measures and infrastructure often do not seem to be keeping anyone safe, I find that ‘stranger danger’ similarly fails. Yet, I also build on this paradox in considering, if these measures and responses do not make anyone safer, then what exactly do they do? What is their function?

Chapter 2

Fear of Strangers and Fear of Public Space

“Love casts out fear; but conversely fear casts out love. And not only love. Fear also casts out intelligence, casts out goodness, casts out all thought of beauty and truth. For in the end fear casts out even a man’s humanity. And fear, my good friends, fear is the very basis and foundation of modern life.”

— Aldous Huxley, *Ape and Essence*

“Instead of delivering dreams, politicians now promise to protect us from nightmares.”

— Adam Curtis, *The Power of Nightmares: The Rise of the Politics of Fear*

Adam Curtis begins his documentary on the burgeoning ‘culture of fear’ following the 9/11 terrorist attacks by claiming policy has shifted in the latter half of the 20th century. As liberalism and the liberal welfare state have failed to secure a better world for people, instead of politicians promising to improve people’s lives and wellbeing, they instead tell us that there are scary, unpredictable forces somewhere ‘out there’ and they alone can protect us. Hence instead of delivering dreams of the good life, governance is restricted to protecting and securing us from nightmares. However, these nightmares are constructed by those in power and serve as forms of control that further consolidate the social order. Fear, and the creation of phenomena to fear, thus become techniques of governance.

While the nightmares Curtis is focused on are the rise of neoconservatism and Islamic terrorism, this reduction of politics to promises of protection from phantasmic bogeymen and the construction of fears as tools of social control are deeply relevant to this thesis and my interest in how being in public, specifically being around other people in public, has become ‘scary’. Indeed, in this chapter I will be making a key claim for this research; I see the protectionist measures I am concerned with as constructing a ‘nightmare’ of encountering others in the public realm. Consequently, here I aim to better understand this nightmare: the fear of other people in public.

Therefore, building on the framework established in the previous chapter, where I outlined how late neoliberalism relies on the displacement of its existential insecurity to justify and legitimize its project, here I focus on an issue I see existential insecurity as displaced on to—public space and the strangers who exist in it. In seeking to better understand this fear, I have two interconnected arguments. First, I look at the discourse of ‘stranger danger’ and how it reinforces the neoliberal project. I find that it poses the nuclear family, the heterosexual couple and the private realm as spaces of safety and security against the danger of being in public with others. Then, I look at how stranger danger is operationalized in the built environment through ‘defensible design’, focusing on the concept of surveillance. Here, I argue that the operationalization of stranger danger functions both to create distrust and deepen it. Specifically, I contend that we are encouraged to distrust those who seem different and ‘strange’ (Ahmed 2000).

To make this argument, I begin by outlining a range of work looking at fear and the built environment that I aim to build upon. In doing so, I note that there is a strong correlation established between fear, anxieties about societal change and exposure to difference. However, as I am most interested in the fear of public space and fear of strangers, I turn to Don Mitchell’s work on ‘social agoraphobia’ (2009). In relation to social agoraphobia, I consider how it both emerges from, and reinforces, neoliberal rationality’s depiction of the social, and consequently anything public, as dangerous and poor quality.

I then move to argue that the fear of strangers is a key component of social agoraphobia. This reflects my research interest in subjects and their interactions in the public realm. To unpack how fear of strangers is constructed in a way that reinforces neoliberal’s moral project, I first seek to understand how the concept of the stranger is produced (Ahmed 2000). Then, I turn to understand ‘stranger danger’s emergence as a moral panic that reinforces traditional values (Kern 2021a, 2021b; Renfro 2020). I particularly focus on how,

through cultural messaging encouraging fear and distrust of strangers, the white, heterosexual nuclear family is contrasted as a source of stability, safety and security. In this way, I argue that the fear of strangers supports the demonization of the social and its replacement with traditional, family-centered values (Brown 2019; Cooper 2017). It also reinforces hegemonic hierarchies and encourages personal responsibility. Ultimately then in the first half of this chapter, I sketch out a key theoretical framework for understanding how the fear of strangers is constructed and politicized to support neoliberal's moral ideals and reinforce traditional hierarchies of power.

The second half of this chapter is concerned with the practical deployment of stranger danger. I look at how social agoraphobia and fear of strangers are operationalized in the built environment. This leads me to briefly outline the emergence of 'defensible space' (Lees & Warwick 2022; Newman 1972, 1996) and examine how it has become a common sense planning principle. As a common sense principle, defensible spaces are designed so that strangers are kept out and can be identified and surveilled. Focusing on the concept of surveillance, particularly how defensible design and neoliberal rhetoric of personal responsibility encourage good citizens to surveil and monitor others. Then, I look at a particular campaign that promotes citizen surveillance as a means of maintaining security on and around the UK's public transportation network. Analyzing this campaign, I contend that it not only reinforces the notion that public spaces are frightening because they are filled with unknown people; it also reinforces traditional, racialized hierarchies of power and belonging. Hence the second half of the chapter supports the claims made in the first.

This chapter ultimately has two key aims: the first is outlining how discourse that arises around the fear of strangers functions to reinforce the social order by posing the nuclear family and the heterosexual as sites of security. The second is outlining how the operationalization of the fear of strangers through a defensive orientation toward space

augments societal division and suspicion towards marginalized groups and those who appear ‘strange’. In this way, it lays the groundwork for understanding a key part of protectionist measures—how they justify the harm of some.

‘Fear Studies’

So much has been written about fear in relation to politics at the turn of the twenty-first century that Mike Davis suggested that ‘fear studies’ “emerged as the hottest new niche in academia” (2002, 4). In particular, following the 9/11 terror attacks in 2001, there came an increase in work looking at how global anxieties were transposed onto the city as a space of risk, danger and paranoia (Graham 2008; Skoll 2010; Sorkin 2008).⁴⁹

From ‘the panic city’ (Virilio 2005), to ‘the scary city’ (Kern 2010) to the ‘phobopolis’ (Lopes de Souza 2014), the city figures as a space suffused with anxiety. While cities have long been associated with anxieties about disease, moral contagion and national decline (Kern 2020),⁵⁰ this new wave of fear studies tends to focus on the fears and anxieties inherent in and produced by neoliberal urbanization and gentrification (Alexandri 2015; Atkinson & Helms 2007; Davis 1998).⁵¹ As I aim to understand fear as a technique of governance impacting the public realm, my work can be situated broadly within this vein.

According to Leonie Sandercock, fear is so central to the management of space in the city that “the history of planning could be rewritten as the obsession with managing fear in the city” (2000, 205). She specifically suggests it is the diversity of cities that generates a

⁴⁹ Also see Low 2008; Marcuse 2005, 2006a, 2006b.

⁵⁰ The idea of contagion as reflecting broader societal fears and anxieties is particularly evident in gothic literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See work on Sherlock Holmes as fighting the contagion of foreign others invading the empire (Harris 2003; Otis 1998), work on the sexual anxieties inherent in Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle* (Davis 2018) and work on the anxieties about foreigners infiltrating the British empire and the New Woman generating moral decline in *Dracula* (Çakır 2023).

⁵¹ Also see Lees 2003; Smith 1996 for related work. See Atkinson 2016, 2020; Blakely & Snyder 1997; Blandy 2007; Low 2003 for work broadly within this vein focused on the need to fortify the private sphere against the danger of the publicness of the city. See Atkinson 2020; Coleman 2002 for work looking specifically at increasing security infrastructure to achieve this.

sense of fear, writing that they are spaces full of “fear of disorder, fear of disease, fear of women, of the working class, of gays, (and) of immigrants” (2000, 205). This notion, that class and ethnic mixing leads to anxiety (Putnam 2007), is captured in a range of works from those looking at spatial segregation and ‘white flight’ (Atkinson 2006; Crowder 2000; Kye 2018),⁵² to those outlining how contemporary gentrification practices are ‘revanchist’ and vengeful responses to the white middle classes’ perception of loss (Smith 1996, 2001). Other work looks more specifically at how increased ethnic, racial and socioeconomic mixing in urban spaces is related to a growing fear of crime or a sense of insecurity (Semyonov, Gorodzeisky & Glikman 2012; Van der Meer & Tolsma 2014). Finally, while work on fear and urbanization tends to be gender-neutral, Leslie Kern highlights gendered fear in the city and the complex interplay between feminized fear, desire and autonomy (2010, 2012, 2021a). She traces how, since the industrial revolution and the rise of urbanization, women’s bodies have become key sites to displace panic about changing societal norms (2020).

Having outlined a field of work looking at how gender, race, class and anxiety about status intersect and influence how space is perceived and used, I aim to build on this in this chapter. While I will not be able to explore all the various nuances posed by the articles mentioned here, I see it as vital to acknowledge this breadth of related work that has influenced my understanding of the issues I will consider. I too aim to explore how exposure to difference and societal change reinforces the fear of others, which then manifests in ways that structure interaction and possibility in the public realm.

Social Agoraphobia

⁵² Also see Boddy 1992; Rudlin 2015.

To do this, I first introduce the fear of public space and relate it to the fear of strangers. I pose that the ‘common sense’ cultural understanding that public spaces are dangerous or risky functions to increase support for the traditional, familial values that are crucial for neoliberalism’s moral project (Brown 2019; Cooper 2017). To make this case I first look to Mitchell’s work on social agoraphobia, or the fear of public space, focusing on how it relies on demonizing ‘the public’.

In ‘Against Safety, Against Security: Reinvigorating Urban Life’ Mitchell is concerned with a rising wave of ‘anti-urbanism’ evident in the increasing obsession with designing cities to be ‘safe and secure’ (2009). He argues that, when discourses of safety and practices of security become the defining features in the design of urban space and underlie urban policies, fear of publicness becomes the primary feature structuring urban life. To understand how this anti-urbanism is rooted in fear, Mitchell introduces the concept of social agoraphobia, defining it as the fear of public space. Whereas agoraphobia is an individual anxiety disorder marked by a “fear of entering open or crowded places, of leaving one's own home, or of being in places from which escape is difficult”⁵³ or the fear of being *in* public—social agoraphobia is a fear *of* public space. It is a collective condition rather than an individual one.

The difference between these two terms is crucial to Mitchell’s argument that social agoraphobia has become a key feature in structuring our relationship with public space and a fundamental component of contemporary capitalism. This is because, if everyone were agoraphobic and afraid of leaving the house, it would be disastrous for capital accumulation and the state. While there has been an increase in indoor, private forms of leisure and the rise

⁵³ As defined in the Oxford English Dictionary.

of online shopping and delivery services make it easier to never leave the house,⁵⁴ particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic (Duffy 2022), capital accumulation still requires that people leave their home, go to work, spend money and utilize goods and services.⁵⁵ They must feel relatively able to move freely through the public realm. The state also requires citizens who are not too frightened to engage and participate in it.

Social agoraphobia, on the other hand, is not a threat to capitalism or the state; in fact, I will argue that it is integral to neoliberal capitalism and its assault on the social. According to Mitchell, social agoraphobia is induced in subjects across multiple fronts. From media sensationalism of any violence that occurs in public spaces (particularly that which takes place between people unknown to one another) and relative silence and inattention given to substantially more common forms of violence and assault that take place in private settings between those known to one another—to private companies that praise the sense of comfort and ease inherent in the personal consumption of security such as high-tech condos (Kern 2010), SUV's (Bauman 2006, 144; Mendieta 2005) or gated communities (Atkinson & Flint 2004; Low 2003, 2008), it is drilled into our collective consciousness that anything public is unsafe, risky, bloated and inefficient. As Mitchell puts it,

we learn that 'public' is the same as out of control: public spaces are the realm of criminal violence, homeless people, drugs, anarchy, terrorists; public hospitals are where one goes to find long lines and waiting lists; public schools 'fail our children' ... and public goods are, by definition, simply inefficient.

⁵⁴ Even prior to COVID-19 a survey found that Europeans spent between 90 and 92% of their time indoors, earning this generation the nickname the 'Indoor Generation' (VELUX 2018). As Duffy 2022 highlights, these figures are likely to have risen following the pandemic.

⁵⁵ In the UK the necessity of people leaving the house for capitalism was made clear following the tanking of the economy during COVID-19 (ONS 2022b) and the subsequent push to get people circulating freely again, eating out (with the 'Eat out to help out' campaign) and going to work in-person as much as possible.

Yet while everything public—from public spaces, public goods and even people existing in public—is associated with poor quality and/or risk, “everything private is efficient, clean, and to be wondered at” (2009, 232). Private things are comfortable, safe and secure—customizable to our every need and desire. Even the liberal theory taught in schools and Universities teaches that “private property is the foundation of all freedom” (Mitchell 2009, 232-233).⁵⁶ This idea that everything public is negative corresponds with Wendy Brown’s argument in the previous chapter that neoliberalism aims to demonize the social as it deconstructs it (2019). After all, public spaces are vital for democratic, social politics (Mitchell 2005, 33-36; Kohn 2004).

Therefore, the proliferation of this hegemonic understanding ensures that public spaces are perceived negatively. After all, unlike private spaces where things are neat, clean and knowable, public spaces are inevitably spaces of chance, encounter and the unexpected. So, while agoraphobia keeps people shut inside, social agoraphobia, according to Mitchell, leads to a preference for private forms of leisure and recreation—like shopping malls (Crawford 1992), which are more profitable for capital accumulation (2009).⁵⁷ However, if one must use public spaces, they can be made less risky through increased security measures that instill the ability to exclude certain people, monitor and regulate activities that take place there and surveil those who seem suspicious. Such measures make public spaces more akin to private ones.

I see social agoraphobia as emerging from neoliberal rationality’s construction of the social, and consequently anything public, as suspicious. I will move to argue that the key feature of public spaces that causes them to be feared is that they are filled with strangers/unknown people. After all, it is not the public square itself that is perceived as a

⁵⁶ Also see Locke 1689; Macpherson 1962; Waldron 1988.

⁵⁷ Also see d’Eramo 2007; Sorkin 1992; Hannigan 1998.

threat, but the person who might sit or lie down in it. It is not the bushes that are scary but the person who could be hiding behind them.

Fear of Strangers

The possibility of encountering unknown people always exists in public spaces. Urban spaces in particular are understood to contain masses of strangers. According to Richard Sennett, “the city is that human settlement in which strangers are most likely to meet” (Sennett 1976, 264) and Iris Marion Young imagines ‘city life’ as a form of social relations marked by “the being together of strangers” (1990, 237). However, even in less urban spaces, there is always the chance of encountering a stranger when in the public realm. Therefore, I do not believe that the fear of public space can be untangled from a fear of strangers and want to narrow in more pointedly on this fear.

According to Sandercock, cities are inevitably spaces of conflicting fears and desires due to the intermingling of strangers from diverse backgrounds. She writes that diversity, “in its many guises - gender, class, age, disability, ethnicity, (and) sexual preference”, comes to be a challenge in cities (2000, 203). This is because, drawing on psychoanalytic literature, she argues that there is an innate hostility or discomfort inherent in encountering people different than oneself. They represent chaos and threaten the stability of our identity. Following, she states that if cities are understood as spaces where strangers coexist, “they must also be seen as sites where aversion (fear and loathing) to strangers plays itself out at the level of local politics, urban policy, and everyday life; where indifference and hostility to difference are expressed in the desires to have only certain kinds of people as neighbours” (2000, 203).

While I do not believe that encountering diversity and difference inherently leads to a sense of anxiety and fear as Sandercock claims, it is certainly true that cities are spaces where vastly different people are forced together in close proximity. This will inevitably lead to conflict between these people as to how to live together. After all, attitudes toward the best

use of public space vary between different groups (Summers & Howell 2019; Malone 2002). Yet, while spaces where different groups live closely will inevitably involve conflict and disagreement, I see the fear of strangers as something that is socially and politically constructed, rather than natural.

Who is the Stranger?

To understand how the fear of strangers is constructed I first look to Sara Ahmed's *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (2000). In this text, Ahmed challenges "the assumption that the stranger is simply anybody we do not recognise". Instead, she proposes "that some bodies are already recognised as stranger than other bodies" (2000, 4). In making this claim, she argues that the stranger does not naturally exist—it is a category that is produced through an encounter with difference. A stranger is thus not someone whom we do not know or do not recognize, but someone whom we recognize as being different or 'strange'. This person is then recognized as a stranger. In Ahmed's words "to name somebody as a stranger is already to recognise them, to know them again" (2000, 150). The stranger is therefore someone who is recognized as being unusual, existing outside the norm for the particular location and context.

This is because, in a city or a crowded public space, it is not possible to know and recognize everyone who passes through. Yet some people stand out as strange. So, in determining who is a stranger, who is to be feared, who represents a possible risk, we instead rely on a base of knowledge about who and what behaviors are strange—who fits in and who does not. According to Ahmed, "there are techniques that allow us to differentiate between those who are strangers and those who belong in a given space" (2000, 21). These techniques involve determining who, based on their appearance and behavior, belongs and who does not. While this determination is contextual and will rely on hierarchies of social power and privilege that determine who is welcome in some spaces and who is not, who is welcome in

most spaces and who is excluded from most spaces, Ahmed quotes Elijah Anderson in listing some likely candidates to be recognized as strangers in any context. These are “wandering homeless people, aggressive beggars, muggers, anonymous black youths, and drug addicts” (1990 238; quoted in Ahmed 2000, 22)—essentially those who always exist outside of ‘polite’ society.

Yet behavior is nearly, if not just as important as appearance in determining belonging. Ahmed highlights how those who are loitering or hanging out in a space without a ‘legitimate’ purpose are recognized as strangers. She notes “you can recognise the stranger through their loitering gait” (2000, 31). Their supposed lack of purpose is perceived as concealing their true purpose, which is criminal. This corresponds to Mitchell’s argument that, in the social agoraphobic city, “we have no right to just hang out” (2009, 245). Just hanging out is strange behavior. As Ahmed sees it, hanging out is to refuse to enter into “*the exchanges of capital that transforms spaces into places*” (2000, 31). Seeking rest or play then, rather than adhering to the norms established by the neoliberal capitalist order where it is expected that one participates in the process of capital exchange that keeps everything flowing is automatically suspect.

Building on this, when it comes to context-specific determinations of strangeness, some basic assumptions can be made. In a predominantly white, middle-class neighborhood someone black or perceived to be lower class will appear strange. In an upscale area, where everyone is wearing office attire and quickly passing through space to commute to work, teenagers wearing hoodies and sitting idly on benches will appear strange. Strangeness seems to be produced through a clash between expectations of situationally specific societal norms, both related to identity and behavior, and those who do not match up to them. The stranger therefore is not someone who we do not know, but someone who we notice as outside our expectations of normal. They are noticed because they do not belong.

Overall, Ahmed highlights that what is strange relies on a pre-existing field of knowledge about what appropriate and inappropriate behavior looks like and which bodies belong in a given context and which do not. In highlighting the lack of specific information inherent in the construction of the stranger, she claims that “the good citizen is not given any information about how to tell what or who is suspicious in the first place ... the very failure to provide us with techniques for telling the difference is itself a technique of knowledge” (2000, 29). This is because the dominant order constructs a mode of common sense that we, or at least ‘good citizens’ are supposed to know. We are supposed to know what behavior is suspicious in a public park. We are supposed to know what kinds of people look suspicious in or near a train station. Good, responsible citizens know what is acceptable and what is not.

Ahmed’s work is vital for my analysis here. As I look at the how the fear of strangers emerges through stranger danger discourse, it is important to remember that not everyone is perceived as a stranger. Indeed, those who are already marginalized and who have less social power, are far likelier to be perceived as strange and consequently, as not belonging. Yet stranger danger as a discourse constructs a field of understanding where the one who does not belong, rather than being unusual, becomes a serious risk or existential threat.

Stranger Danger

Here, I want to look at how the stranger becomes a source of potential harm through stranger danger discourse, which arose in the twentieth century. Stranger danger is a widely known expression that tends to be taught to and focused on children. The basic idea is that there are bad people in the world who want to harm others. Strangers are dangerous. These people could be lurking behind every corner and children need to exercise caution and vigilance to remain safe (Renfro 2020). Therefore, stranger danger means teaching children not to interact with strangers (and certainly not to go anywhere with strangers). Inherent in the concept is that unknown people are potential threats—though of course some, are more

threatening than others.⁵⁸ Yet the concept of stranger danger should not be interpreted as only pertaining to children and their parents. Instead, I see it as part of a broader fear of strangers that characterizes the neoliberal experience of public space. This broader fear of strangers functions to restrict networks of care to the nuclear family and discourage broader forms of care and solidarity beyond the home. Though I will review the origin of this discursive framing in the growing fear that strangers pose a threat to children, this is just to highlight how the construction was politicized at its very inception to reinforce the traditional nuclear family at a time when it was perceived by those with power to be under threat. Following, as I outline how it continues to reinforce the social order, I will move to a broader conception of stranger danger that is targeted at women, before exploring the normalization of this fear through defensibility as a common sense principle for design in the public realm.

In the UK, stranger danger discourse arose in the 1970s following high-profile cases of children killed by strangers—in particular the Moors murders committed between 1963 and 1965 and the Cannock Chase murders between 1965 and 1967.⁵⁹ In a time with limited media options, cases of missing and murdered children received a great deal of attention and became incredibly sensationalized media stories (Humphries 2009). While rare instances, the media attention given to these cases generated a sense of anxiety that giving children too much freedom would lead to harm. In response, the first stranger danger public information campaign began in 1971 with a short film called *Never Go with Strangers* and was followed

⁵⁸ This is captured in the 1971 *Never Go with Strangers* public safety film (Central Office for Information). While the film continually states that anyone unknown should be viewed with suspicion, when a young girl is approached by a middle-aged man in a car asking her to get in, she runs and speaks to an older woman leaving a laundromat. The video then says that you should speak to another adult when approached by a stranger in public. However, the woman at the laundromat is also technically unknown to the girl. Yet in this situation, it is clear that this woman is a safe stranger in comparison to the dangerous stranger in the car.

⁵⁹ Often the concept is traced back to high-profile child abductions and murders in the US—namely Etan Patz's disappearance in 1979 and Adam Walsh's death in 1981 (and the subsequent moral panic after these events) (Renfro 2020). However, despite the US-centric framing that puts the origin of stranger danger in response to these events, in my research, I found the concept emerged earlier in the UK with *Never Go with Strangers* (Central Office for Information 1971). Further, as my research is focused on the UK, it is more relevant to discuss the concept's origination here.

two years later with a ‘Charley says’ video on the danger of strangers (Central Office for Information 1971, 1973). Therefore, while distrust towards strangers may go back further, the roots of the stranger danger framing can be traced to this time (Shaw 2018).

Stranger danger is somewhat illogical. While children should learn to identify risks and behavior that indicates possible harm, like an unknown person asking a child to enter a car, strangers do not pose the greatest risk to children. Children are substantially more at risk of harm from family members or those that they know (ONS 2016) and are not any more at risk when out in the world than they are at home. Nonetheless, research demonstrates that children and their parents often choose to remain indoors due to an unrealistic belief in how dangerous the outside world is (Hayes, quoted in Hill 2004). Over the decades since this concept originated, there has been a dramatic change in how children play and interact with the world (Greater London Authority 2004; Playday 2013). Children and young people nowadays spend more time inside and less time playing outdoors than their parents’ generations did (Generation X and Baby Boomers); they also walk and cycle less and spend more time in cars (Moss 2012). While there is literature on the idea that children in the twenty-first century are suffering from a nature deficit due to indoor leisure and new technology (Louv 2005), the fact that children became less active and started spending more time indoors decades before iPads were around suggests that the problem cannot simply be reduced to technology. In a study conducted by a campaign celebrating children’s right to play, two in five parents cited a fear of strangers and pedophiles as a key reason for keeping their children indoors (Playday 2013).⁶⁰ Therefore, it is apparent that this idea strangers are dangerous has infiltrated the public consciousness and changed how children and their parents interact with and perceive the world.

⁶⁰ It is important to note that while fear of strangers is central to motivating this shift, an increase in car ownership and a subsequent fear of children being hurt by cars is also mentioned as a key factor by parents in motivating them to keep their children inside (Playday 2013).

Family Values

It is not a coincidence that stranger danger, a concept that encourages suspicion of others and staying inside, became politically significant just as neoliberalism was taking root politically. In *Stranger Danger: Family Values, Childhood, and the American Carceral State* (2020), Paul Renfro traces the emergence and deepening of stranger danger rhetoric in the US under President Ronald Reagan. He argues that, through encouraging fear and distrust of strangers and connecting stranger danger to cultural permissiveness (particularly gender and sexual politics), neoliberal politicians counterpose the white, heterosexual nuclear family as a source of stability, safety and security. In this way, fear of strangers supports the demonization of the social and its replacement with traditional values, as well as the demonization of broader, expansive social ties and forms of organization beyond the traditional nuclear family.

After all, the traditional family is vital to neoliberalism. In *Family Values*, Melissa Cooper argues neoliberalism came at a time when there was acute anxiety about the breakdown of the nuclear family. In particular, she outlines how the collapse of the Fordist wage led to a sense of anxiety that preexisting hierarchies of value would disintegrate. This is because the Fordist single-male breadwinner family model “not only functioned as a mechanism for the normalization of gender and sexual relationships ... it also stood at the heart of the mid-century organization of labor, race, and class, defining African American men by their exclusion from the male breadwinner wage and African American women by their relegation to agricultural and domestic labor in the service of white households” (2017, 8). The family is, therefore, neoliberal “capitalism’s base unit” (Lewis 2022, 19). Yet as the Fordist family model began to crumble due to social and economic change in the 1970s, anxieties arose among neoliberal thinkers who sought to find a new way to reinforce the family as the most optimal societal structure.

In making this argument, Cooper focuses on University of Chicago economist, Gary Becker, who believed “the family is the foundation of all civil society” and worried that it was under threat from the collapse of the family wage, and progressive changes in social policy (Becker & Becker 1995, 93; quoted in Cooper 2017, 9). Cooper contends that, like Becker, neoliberal “actors were in no doubt that the grand macroeconomic issues of the time, from inflation to budget deficits to ballooning welfare budgets, reflected an ominous shift in the sexual and racial foundations of the Fordist family” (2017, 24). This is because the white nuclear family is key to keeping women and people of color subordinate and concentrating power for white men.⁶¹ Further, as Brown highlights, when structures of care and welfare are dismantled it is the family who is meant to step in to fill this gap (2019). The family functions as “an instrument for distributing wealth and income” outside of the state (Cooper 2017, 17). Sophie Lewis reinforces this argument, contending that reinforcing traditional familial structures is “a method for cheaply arranging the reproduction of the nation’s labor-power and securing debt repayments” (2022, 21). Therefore, rather than conceiving of the Reagan administration’s turn to the family as a superstructural distraction from its economic policy, Cooper, along with Brown, allows a recognition that the preservation of the family as vital to neoliberal politics. The idea of the family thus becomes imbricated with neoliberalism’s ‘careless’ politics.

This is supported in Renfro’s work. He outlines how stranger danger crystallized as a form of common sense at this same moment when neoliberals worried that the sanctity of the family, and the broader hierarchal system it represents, was under attack “as hierarchies of gender, sexuality, race, class, and indeed generation looked destined to collapse” (2020, 64). Yet, Cooper and Lewis refute the assertion that the family has ever genuinely been under

⁶¹ The family has also historically been a way to marginalize queer people who were unable to get married until the twenty-first century. In the UK, LGBTQ+ people have only been able to legally marry since 2014 (*Marriage [Same Sex Couples] Act 2013*).

threat and instead contend that fears over the decline of the family are exaggerated for political purposes when the social order is threatened by the possibility of progressive change and the unsettling of hierarchies.⁶² Nonetheless, in reinforcing his point, Renfro highlights a report commissioned by the Advisory Board on Missing Children, appointed by Reagan, which stated that the first step to stopping child exploitation “is to bolster family values and to stop the continued disintegration of the family” (U.S Attorney General’s Advisory Board on Missing Children 1986, i). This disintegration was blamed on “divorce, separation of parents, and single parenting in a mobile society” (1986, 6). Encapsulated in this report is a neoliberal approach to child endangerment; even as the board admits that child abductions are most common intrafamily, it suggests that “government action should be limited” and that the family is the “most hopeful solution” for stopping child harm (1986, 15). This is not just a solution at odds with legitimate risk factors for keeping children safe; it also serves a political purpose in delegitimizing increased spending and government interference while posing the traditional family as the ultimate source of safety and care—even when the reality is that many families provide neither. Yet by making these the remit of the family, the state’s refusal to intervene is legitimized.

This leads Renfro to argue that “the Reagan administration depicted the heteropatriarchal (white) dual-parent family as an antidote to stranger danger” and the riskiness of the public realm (2020, 45). Just as Mitchell’s work on social agoraphobia notes that privatization and private forms of leisure are posed as the solution to the fear of public space, here it is the private family and their private home that is the solution to a dangerous world of strangers. However, the family is not only meant to keep children safe but is also meant to stabilize the social hierarchies that underlie the status quo. While Renfro’s work is focused on the US, I contend that fears of strangers in the UK also resonates with British

⁶² Lewis relies on Cooper’s work in making this argument (2022, 21-22).

neoliberalism and the Conservative party's positioning of itself as the 'party of the family' (Cameron 2014; Davis 2012b; Sunak 2023b)⁶³. British political rhetoric also centers the family as a source of stability.

Feminized Fear

To look at how stranger danger has moved beyond targeting children and structures interaction in the public realm more broadly I turn to Kern. It is important to note that fear of public space and strangers is not equally distributed. This is because, as previously outlined, this fear serves a political function of bolstering hierarchies of gender, sexuality, race and class. As Kern highlights, women are particularly afraid of public space and strangers (2021a, 323).⁶⁴ Women are also subject to frequent messages that they are at risk of harm from strangers when in public. In seeking to understand women's fear, rather than blaming women or essentializing fear as feminine, Kern outlines how women are socialized to be afraid of public spaces. In reviewing Kern's argument, I seek to deepen my understanding of the fear of strangers as enforcing traditional values and influencing behavior in public space for an already marginalized group.

Kern highlights how women are repeatedly told that they are vulnerable to harm in public from strangers and that they need to police their movements and pay attention to what they are wearing and where they are going to avoid victimizing themselves. Specifically, she

⁶³ Thatcher promoted a narrow vision of the family as "the building block of society" (1988). Notably, she banned the 'promotion' of homosexuality in schools through Section 28 which led to purges of books and other educational materials. Yet family politics have shifted since the 1980s. Even in the Conservative party, there is an increasing (stated) openness towards family models other than the nuclear heterosexual family (Cameron 2014). Nonetheless, family is still posed as an alternative to the social state. This is captured by a speech in which Rishi Sunak set out his priorities for 2023. He stated: "I believe deeply that family – not just government – can help us answer the profound questions we face as a country. When it comes to health, family cares for us when we are sick and old; family teaches us values in education; when it comes to community – family guides us in right and wrong. That's why family runs right through our vision of a better future" (2023b). Consequently, this is why I believe Renfro's text and his central assertion that stranger danger discourse functions to reinforce the nuclear family is relevant in looking at the UK; the family is a vital part of British neoliberal capitalism.

⁶⁴ Also see Stanko 1993.

states “we’re given very explicit instructions to fear strangers and public spaces at night” (2021a). This message implies a sense of personal responsibility on women to not become a victim by behaving in particular ways (here, by not being alone at night). It is communicated via traditional and popular forms of media from sensationalized newscasts on missing women, true crime podcasts⁶⁵ and popular television programs (like *Law and Order Special Victims Unit*) that center violence towards women. It has been so culturally embedded that a woman going home on her own will be asked by friends and acquaintances to ‘text me when you get home’. Men are not given the same cultural messages. All these phenomena coalesce to give women a sense that they are at risk of harm in public spaces from strangers. Women are not asked ‘text me when you get home’ after hanging out with a male partner or male friend. This cultural message has even created a growing market for products and services meant to keep women safe from rape alarms to a range of location-sharing applications that automatically alert an emergency contact if a woman fails to check in throughout her walk home, seems to stray from a set route or pauses for too long (MacKenzie 2021; Topping 2022).

The impact of this cultural messaging is that women are substantially more afraid of all kinds of public spaces, and of strangers in them, than men—particularly when it is dark (ONS 2021).⁶⁶ Further, by iterating that women should take responsibility for keeping themselves safe, causes of male violence, routine harassment of women and patriarchy are

⁶⁵ One of the most popular true crime podcasts, ‘My Favorite Murder’, has the tagline ‘Stay sexy and don’t get murdered’. This implies that women need to take certain actions to avoid being murdered. It not only constitutes victim-blaming but reinforces personal responsibility. The hosts of this podcast claim that, in recounting murders (usually of women), they are providing their mainly female-identifying fanbase with tips on how they can take responsibility for their safety. While there is an aspect of seeking to gain a sense of control in a world where violence against women is endemic and often uncontrollable, I find this messaging problematic for the reasons stated above. See DenHoed 2019 for an in-depth discussion of the cultural messaging inherent in the ‘My Favorite Murder’ podcast and the important reality that, consuming true crime media increases one’s fear of being harmed and one’s support for the police—rather than providing one with useful tips to stay safe.

⁶⁶ However, as Carolyn Whitzman points out “The crime women most fear is rape. The crime men most fear is robbery. Robbery is a bad thing to have happen to you. Rape is worse” (1995, 91). This different context is vital in considering gendered differences in fear of public space and strangers.

not addressed. Nonetheless, in highlighting that women are substantially more at risk in private, domestic spaces and are much more likely to be harmed by a man that they know than a stranger (Allen *et al.* 2020; ONS 2023b; Waterhouse, Reynolds & Egan 2016), Kern is not aiming to depict women's fear as irrational. Rather than seeking to explain or justify women's fear, she notes that she is "more interested in situating it within broader structures, systems, and institutions" (2021a, 328). In doing so, she concludes that the reason why women's fear has become so embedded socially, culturally and even politically is that "it serves some kind of social function" (2021a, 328). What social function does keeping women afraid of public spaces serve? According to Kern, keeping women afraid reinforces the idea that a woman's place is in the private realm. Here, literally and metaphorically, she can be protected by traditional institutions of the nuclear family and a heterosexual partnership. In addition, the nuclear family home is not just the space of care but also becomes a space of ultimate safety. Women will be safe if they stay in line and turn to men in the private realm for protection.

Indeed, according to Kern, inducing women to be afraid of public spaces and strangers "reinforces the idea that women should seek safety and protection in the nuclear family home - when nothing could be further from the truth" (2020). After all, as Lewis highlights, "the family is where most of the rape happens on this earth, and most of the murder. No one is likelier to rob, bully, blackmail, manipulate, or hit you, or inflict unwanted touch, than family" (2022, 24). Yet in ignoring this reality, Kern highlights how, in contrast to constant cultural messaging that women need to take precautions in public spaces, "domestic violence, sexual assault by acquaintances, incest, child abuse, and other 'private,' yet much more prevalent, crimes receive far less attention" (2021a, 327). In directing attention outwards and away from the home, the violence that takes place within the family is hidden and women are instead told to rely on "patriarchal institutions like the nuclear family and ...

(the) heterosexual partnership for the appearance of security” (2021a, 328). However, this appearance of security does not equate to genuine safety for women. Instead, in bolstering the nuclear family all that is secured is the hegemonic social structure. Further, violence against women is hidden away in the private protected sphere.

While Kern’s language tends to be racially neutral in describing how women are portrayed as helpless victims, susceptible to harm from strangers, she does briefly acknowledge that there is a racialization in discourses around women’s safety (2021a, 355-366). Yet I want to emphasize this point more strongly. White women are far likelier to be perceived as weak, delicate potential victims of harm than women of color (Crenshaw 1991). Further, following Ahmed’s earlier work on how certain bodies, particularly those with less social power, come to be perceived as strange and consequently threatening, it is important to note that there is a long history of black men being viewed as threats to the purity of white women (Hodes 1997; Phipps 2021). This is often highlighted by cases of white women calling the police on black people, particularly black men, doing innocuous activities (Asare 2020; Jerkins 2018). The protection of white women then is often premised on casting black men as dangerous strangers. Therefore, there is also an inherent racialization to feminized fear that further reinforces hegemonic hierarchies of status and value.

Overall, I have outlined here how fear in public space and fear of strangers function to reinforce neoliberalism’s moral project and traditional hierarchies of power. The culture is filled with messages drawing on these fears by exaggerating incidents of harm committed by people unknown to one another. This detracts from more common, everyday violence. Often this violence is itself a result of hierarchies of value that accord greater worth to some than others (Butler 2009, 2020). According to Kern then, this “fear-mongering” serves to keep women in line and “limits their access to the public realm” (2020). It reinforces patriarchal structures that claim a women’s place should be in the home and not in the public sphere,

while simultaneously suggesting that they are responsible for their own safety. Casting women as unduly weak and needing protection also delegitimizes the idea that women are equal. Finally, white women's fear can be mobilized to further racist stereotypes about black aggression and criminality that result in genuine harm for people of color.

Function of Fear

According to Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky, societies create the risks that they need; any society is exposed to a near-infinite number of potential threats and risks that they could focus on. Yet every society ends up selecting different dangers to emphasize and fret over (1982).⁶⁷ Thinking through this politically, it is interesting to consider their claim that the dangers that capture the public consciousness at a given time do so because they reflect the moral principles of that society and reinforce their dominant institutions and ways of interpreting the world. In this section, I have aimed to understand why the fear of strangers has risen as a key nightmare structuring attitudes toward public space. I see it as arising from neoliberal anxieties about the breakdown of the nuclear family and the hierarchies of value that it cements.

To assuage these fears, stranger danger is constructed in such a way that it poses the nuclear family, the private home and private forms of recreation and leisure as central to stability, safety and security. As Mitchell outlines, these fears result in desire for sanitized, securitized public spaces that are “commodified, carefully designed, (and) utterly predictable (2009, 239). Such spaces are more profitable for capital accumulation. Yet as I have outlined, these fears also reinforce traditional values of the family. They keep women inside and in the private realm and keep children at home where they can be monitored by their parents. They

⁶⁷ Also see Sorokin 2008 for a similar argument (xiv).

also pose those with less social power, people of color and anyone who appears unusual in a given context as threats who should be carefully watched.

In highlighting this, I do not mean to imply a sense of hostility to any and all families. Instead, I am aiming to outline how the construct of stranger danger, and its broad acceptance, supports the reduction of networks of care solely to the traditional familial household and the couple. It is not friends, acquaintances or their community ties that women or children are told to turn to for support or to stay safe—it is the family; for women, it is presumably the men within that family that are supposed to protect them. Not only is such a perspective patronizing, but it also fails to grasp alternative ways to reduce one's exposure to harm and improve one's wellbeing. In this thesis, I am interested in exploring the idea that broader networks of care beyond the family are vital for genuine safety and flourishing. If the family is thought of as a unit of care, it is an insufficient one to cover all our innate needs for care. Yet stranger danger, with its reinforcement that the family is the most optimal organizational form for safety, and that others should not be trusted, is hostile to this possibility of broader networks of care. In this section then I have sought to set out a theoretical framework for understanding the discourse of stranger danger. Rather than keeping people safe, I see it as reinforcing the social order and limiting the possibilities for a genuinely caring politics which must value organizational forms beyond the nuclear family.

Designing out Fear

Building on the framework above, I now move on to consider how the fear of strangers is operationalized in the public realm. Spatial arrangements as tools of control, exclusion and accumulation have been a part of the built environment for centuries, from ancient Athens (Sorkin 2008, xi-xii) to Baron Haussmann's redesign of Paris (Harvey 2008). However, according to Michael Sorkin, in the mid to late twentieth century came "a radical shift in ideas about what the city could be and what it could do" (2008, xiii). Sorkin

introduces the work of Oscar Newman as indicative of this shift. Crucial to Newman's work on defensible space, first presented in *Defensible Space: Crime Prevention Through Urban Design*,⁶⁸ is the idea that post-war modern architecture and urban renewal programs had created dirty cities ravaged by crime (1972). While some of Newman's ideas about how to build spaces that can defend themselves against crime predate him (Lees & Warwick 2022, 5), his work marks a shift in thinking about space and design whereby "the presumption of danger becomes the defining criterion for planning: a high level of risk is always assumed" (Sorkin 2008, xiii). It is thus reflective of the operationalization of social agoraphobia. Following Pablo Sendra,⁶⁹ I also see defensible design as centrally about the fear of strangers in public space (Sendra & Sennett 2020, 76). Therefore, I will briefly outline the key tenets of defensible space and argue that, in the UK, it has become a common sense planning principle, before focusing more pointedly on surveillance.

Newman's infamous work on defensible space was written in a time of great societal upheaval and change as cities were becoming more heterogeneous in terms of class and race. This diversity generated anxieties about societal decline. As Kern highlights, key moments of societal change tend to be marked by fear of loss of status in the powerful (2020, 2021a). According to Anna Minton, "the starting point for his research was that urban America was witnessing a breakdown in society and that crime was spiralling beyond police control" (2009, 71). Newman felt that the rising crime wave could be traced back to modernist architecture and tower blocks. Rather than looking at the structural roots of crime, he theorized that space could be designed to eliminate it (1972, 1996). He dreamed of "a residential environment whose physical characteristics— building layout and site plan—

⁶⁸ However, the first British edition had a different title: *Defensible Space: People and Design in the Violent City* (1973). The city appears far more threatening in this framing.

⁶⁹ While this is a dual-authored book, certain chapters indicate that they have been written by either Sennett or Sendra. When possible, I will indicate who wrote the section I am referring to. The section I am citing here was written by Sendra—which I have aimed to make clear. Nonetheless, I include the full citation so that the source can be easily found in the bibliography.

function to allow inhabitants themselves to become key agents in ensuring their security” (Newman 1976, 4). According to Sendra, key to Newman’s design was designing housing estates to protect residents from strangers (Sendra & Sennett 2020, 92). Yet chiming with neoliberal responsabilization, residents are also expected to protect themselves by keeping an eye out for strangers. Newman has been heavily criticized by his peers and later critics for his unproven claims of environmental and architectural determinism (Knoblauch 2020), concerns about his methods (Hillier 1973; Mawby 1977), data analysis (Bottoms 1974; Ley 1974) and the pseudoscience that his claims rely on (Knoblauch 2014).

Nonetheless, Loretta Lees, Elanor Warwick (2022) and Minton (2009, 2023) have traced how Newman’s ideas have taken root in the UK. Alice Coleman, who managed to convince the then PM Minister Margaret Thatcher to give her a fifty-million-pound budget to retrofit council estates based on defensible space principles, was particularly influential in bringing defensible ideas to the UK (Lees & Warwick 2022; Minton 2023). Further, as Minton outlines, defensible space has become the basis of the UK’s most important security initiative, Secured by Design (SBD) (2009). SBD connects police, planners, the private sector and insurance companies and aims “to encourage the building industry to design out crime at the planning stage” and lists “increasing natural surveillance, creating defensible space and limiting excessive through movement” as its key principles (SBD 2024). Finally, Newman’s ideas launched Crime Prevention through Urban Design (CPTED), which has been adopted into the UK government’s planning policy (Armitage 2016). Hence defensibility, and the principles it relies on, are now endemic as common sense components of design and planning. While this is not a chapter about Newman and his influence, it is crucial to highlight that, despite the clear influence of Newman on SBD, his exact theorization of defensible space “failed to coalesce into a single formal policy”. Instead, Lees and Warwick contend that the legacy of his work is “a cluster of associated disputed elements” (2022, 2).

For my purposes here, I want to focus on a particular element of defensible design most relevant to my research: surveillance. Rather than the idea of designing spaces to maximize surveillance, however, I am interested in surveillance as a practice of responsible citizenship.

Surveillance and the Stranger

Surveillance is a crucial component of defensible design. The basic idea is that people will behave better if they are being watched and that watching others gives citizens control over their safety and security. To better understand the relationship between strangers and surveillance I want to examine Newman and Jane Jacobs' contrasting ideas on strangers—as potential sources of crime versus safeguards against it, respectively. Then, I move to an example of how surveillance is encouraged in the UK. According to Minton, the difference between Jacobs' and Newman's views on strangers is at the heart of defensible space (2009, 73). However, I think there is an affinity in their views and follow Sennett who argues that “the dark side of Jane [Jacob]'s thinking was Oscar Newman's”. As he contends, both Jacobs and Newman envision a form of coercive surveillance and control (Sendra & Sennett 2020, 125). By thinking through them together I outline a way to understand my example of the promotion of surveillance in the UK.

A key idea in Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, is that busy public spaces full of strangers are not only important for the sense of playfulness and buzz that they generate; busy areas full of strangers are also fundamental for keeping everyone safe (1961). She refers to the presence of strangers watching one another as ‘eyes on the street’. Her claim is that, when streets and sidewalks are full of strangers mingling and going about their business, the sense of being visible to many eyes will naturally encourage those passing through to self-police their behavior (1961, 29-54). This concept appeals to basic sense; someone is less likely to commit a crime in front of numerous witnesses. Jacobs therefore emphasizes the importance of having crowded, lively streets full of strangers who can ensure

that, through their presence alone, behavior stays appropriate and civil. Strangers, here meaning unknown people, keep people safe with their inevitable surveillance of the surrounding area.

Newman's ideas about surveillance are inspired by Jacobs' (Poyner 1983). However, strangers are far more sinister in his work (and consequently figure as sinister in SBD and CPTED schemes inspired by Newman). Instead of benign or useful 'eyes on the street', natural surveillance as a component of defensible space is about designing spaces so that those who do not belong, strangers, or 'intruders' can be easily identified and challenged by those who do belong (1972, 1976, 1996).

Newman criticizes design choices that make it difficult for residents to tell the difference between their neighbors and strangers passing through. He claims that "all Defensible Space programs have a common purpose: They restructure the physical layout of communities to allow residents to control the areas around their homes" (1996, 9). Being able to have total visibility and "to tell resident from intruder" is at the heart of the control Newman envisions (1996, 12). Examples of design features that increase natural surveillance are "designing streets and public spaces to increase pedestrian and bicycle traffic, ensuring potential problem areas, such as pathways, bus stops and ATMS, are well lit, and positioning windows in new buildings to directly overlook pavements and carparks" (Hepburn 2019). All these strategies ensure that there are no hidden spaces where criminals can hide away or where undesirable people can engage in antisocial behavior.

Yet Newman did not believe that enhancing surveillance through design was enough. He also believed that residents need to feel a sense of ownership or proprietorship over a space so that they feel responsible for surveilling it (1976, 79). He contended that this sense of proprietorship can be enhanced through clear delineations between public and private space and by increasing private and semi-private space in formally public spaces. Crucial

here is the idea that good citizens feel a sense of responsibility for their territory and aim to keep it safe through surveillance. Just as women are induced to be responsible for their safety by behaving in a certain way, here, good citizens are induced to be responsible for their safety by monitoring the world around them. Surveillance, and searching for strangers (using Ahmed's understanding of the stranger here as one who appears strange), are therefore integral to responsible citizenship.

The form of social control through surveillance envisioned by Newman and Jacobs is akin to Michel Foucault's theory of the panopticon in *Discipline and Punish* (1975). Just as in Foucault's text, where the threat of constant visibility ensures that prisoners always behave, designing space to maximize 'eyes on the street' and encouraging surveillance functions to create total and constant visibility to ensure discipline and civility. This leads Minton to argue that defensible strategies are anti-stranger. She writes that "the consequence of creating 'defensible' spaces is that any unexpected visitor who wanders in seems dangerous and threatening" (2009, 72) and that Newman "made the case for strangers as dangerous intruders" (2009, 143). I follow Minton in contending that, encouraging surveillance to maintain safety or as a component of responsible citizenship functions to create suspicion and distrust. However, I do not believe that this comes from design alone. As a defensible orientation towards public space has become the norm,⁷⁰ surveillance of others is pushed as a means of maintaining security. Therefore, I want to close by introducing an example of how surveillance is encouraged in the UK that I see as tying together the various threads explored in this chapter from stranger danger, defensibility and the social order.

'See something? Say Something'

⁷⁰ Indeed, rather than actual design features, I see the notion that spaces should be built to prioritize safety and security, or have a defensible orientation, as the key impact of defensible space as a theory and practice.

In this section, I aim to outline a form of surveillance that is supposed to enhance safety and security on the UK's public transportation network. In doing so, I argue that surveillance, like determining who is a stranger, relies on a base of collective knowledge about who does not belong and thus reinforces societal bias and discrimination. Further, it is not only a response to the fear of strangers but also contributes to a sense of fear and anxiety about other people in public spaces and deepens distrust between people.

Anyone who has traveled on the British underground system or taken a train in the country since 2016 will have likely heard the security announcement: 'If you see something that doesn't look right, speak to staff or text British Transport Police at 61016. We'll sort it. See it. Say it. Sorted.'. This tedious announcement, dubbed "the most irritating" in history by *The Sunday Times* (Hellen & Dugan 2021) seems to play every few minutes as one makes their way across the country. It plays in over 5,000 stations, on over 13,000 trains and over 11,000 versions of this announcement appear as posters and on digital advertisement screens across the country (AML Group). Some images of these signs, and the messages they contain about how to identify strangers, are pictured below in Figures 3 and 4. These frequent messages and posters encourage those traveling and walking near transport hubs to monitor the behavior and appearance of those around them to identify 'anything that doesn't look right'.



Figure 3: Are they somewhere they shouldn't be? (Source: Self, taken at Colliers Wood Tube Station on May 2nd, 2024).

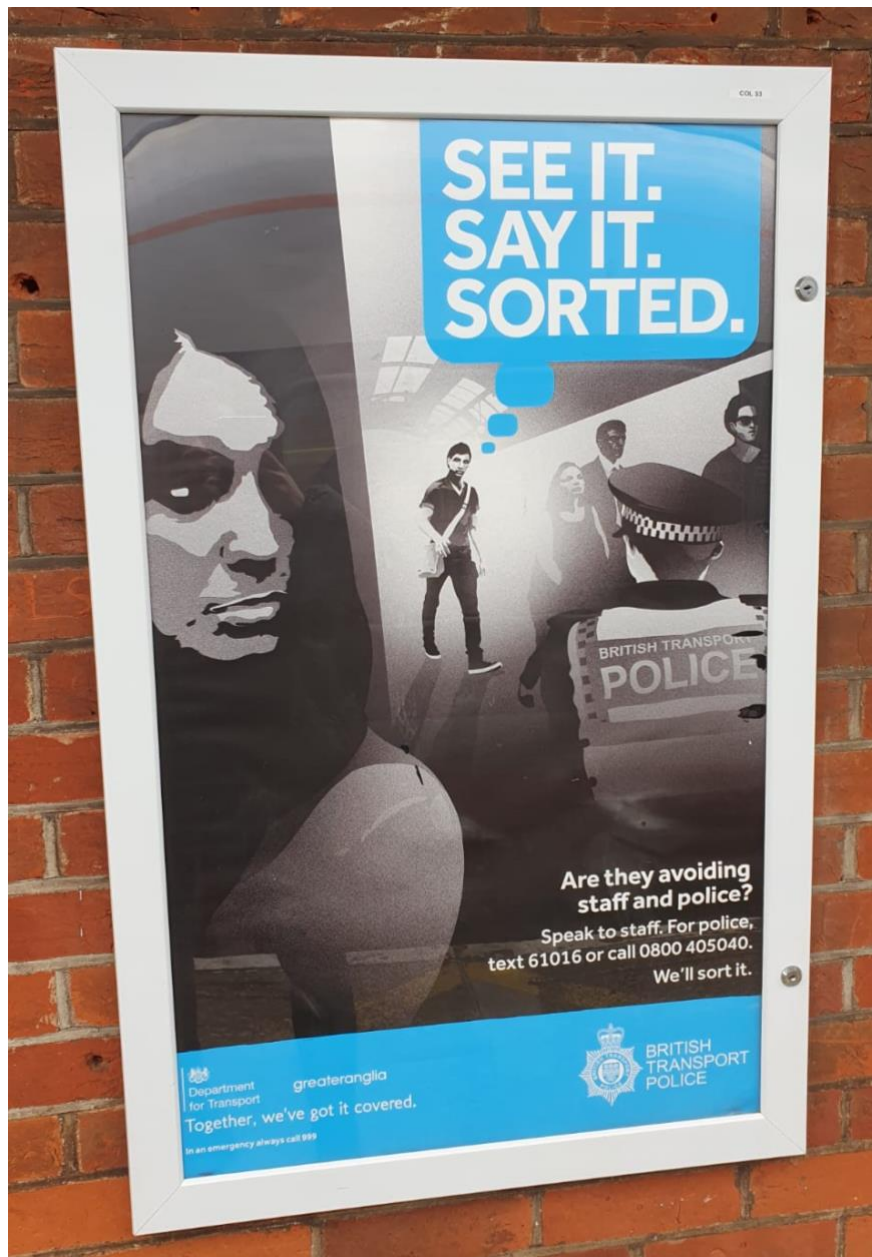


Figure 4: Are they avoiding staff and police? (Source: Self, taken at Colchester train station on April 20th, 2024).

Put into effect in 2016, this campaign is a response to a left bag incident at a tube station in 2016⁷¹ and global anxiety about Islamic terrorism—though it never explicitly

⁷¹ For more information on the incident see Ross 2017.

mentions terrorism—just ‘something that doesn’t look right’.⁷² The campaign “aims to help build a more vigilant network on railways across the country”. Further, with language emphasizing personal responsibility, it is also supposed to “raise awareness of the vital role the public can play in keeping themselves and others safe” (Department for Transport 2016). British Transport Police refer to members of the public in language strangely reminiscent of Jacobs’ as “pairs of eyes and ears ready to report any potential threat to the British Transport Police” (Maynard, quoted in Department for Transport 2016). Yet, more akin to Newman’s ideals, ‘eyes and ears’ are looking for ‘intruders’, those who are strange or suspect. Despite hopes that the message would be cut as part of a ‘bonfire of banalities’ (Sleigh 2022), it was deemed too essential to safety and security and therefore remains in place at the time of writing. Yet, as Peter Marcuse points out, such messages have little genuine impact on improving safety (2006a, 921-922). If this is the case, what do they do?

This announcement clearly promotes surveillance. It poses passengers as ‘eyes and ears’ monitoring the behavior of others and encourages them to report anything that seems suspicious at a moment’s notice. Even though Britain is widely acclaimed as the country with the second highest density of CCTV cameras in the world (Hurfurt *et al.* 2023),⁷³ meaning that it is highly likely that one is already subject to mechanical surveillance when on or near a transportation service, the enduring nature of this announcement makes it clear that ‘eyes on the street’ are still considered valuable; people monitoring others is considered a vital component of security. I argue that the result of this campaign and of encouraging people to surveil those around them is the production of anxiety. According to Marcuse, in discussing a similar public safety announcement, such campaigns manipulate people’s sense of their own

⁷² It is of course important to acknowledge that there is a history in London of terror attacks on public transport from the 2005 7/7 bombings, which took place on three tube carriages and a bus—as well as extensive bombing of tube carriages and train stations by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) between 1939 and 1993. So, while I follow Marcuse in seeing this campaign as ineffective, it is not responding to an entirely non-existent risk.

⁷³ China is the country with the most CCTV. Yet London has more CCTV cameras than Beijing (Hurfurt *et al.* 2023, 67).

risk and lead to a sense that others are more dangerous than they actually are. They thus “increase anxiety at the same time as they do little or nothing to reduce danger” (2006a, 922). After all, “symbols of security”, in this case a security announcement, “can remind us of our insecurities” (Crawford *et al.* 2005, 53). Put more simply, one would not naturally think they are at risk on a train until they hear an announcement telling them that they could be—and that someone around them could be planning a violent or dangerous act. The presence of security messaging induces fear. Therefore, I argue that the result of messaging encouraging surveillance is that the fear of strangers in the public realm is deepened.

Further, while the posters that go with the campaign (as pictured in Figures 3 and 4) contain obvious examples of what it means if something ‘doesn’t look right’, from entering a door marked ‘no entry’ or ‘leaving a bag unattended’ (AML Group), the message is unclear on the face of it. What does it mean for something to not look right? As a regular commuter across the UK, I have witnessed bizarre behavior on public transport and in stations from a man shaving with a large straight razor to someone practicing their pole dancing. There was even a social media trend of dancing on public transport started by a woman dancing and lip-synching energetically on the London underground (Kettle 2023). This is all abnormal behavior that ‘doesn’t look right’; it is not normal. Of course, such events are not report-worthy and, as good citizens, we are supposed to know this and not recognize it as strange. Expanding on Ahmed’s definition then, to be recognized as strange is not the same as being perceived as unusual. The stranger is, after all, perceived as dangerous whereas unusual behavior is amusing at best, annoying at worst. Marcuse puts this clearly in stating how encouraging surveillance leads to “racial and ethnic profiling” even if they “may not be official policy” (2005, 112). Indeed, I see surveillance culture as particularly racialized. In the case of transportation, given the way that fears and anxieties around security are shaped through common sense and cultural memory/fear of Islamic terrorism, the knowledge that all

good citizens have is that people (particularly men) with brown skin are to be treated with suspicion. Those who appear homeless are also treated with suspicion as potential thieves.

Encouraging surveillance then is about recognizing and reinforcing our difference and distance from the strangers among us—those who we are suspicious of, do not trust and do not consider part of our collective society. The promotion of ‘eyes on the street’ or ‘eyes on the train’ is a means to informally police who belongs in society and who does not. It draws upon a field of knowledge about who is a legitimate actor and who has legitimate reasons to be in space. It figures ‘the stranger’, not as someone unknown, but someone who is known as being a risky, intruding presence. They do not belong; they are not part of the collective whole. This does not make us safer. According to Minton, fear and distrust are linked, with research showing that levels of trust correlate with fear in society (2009, 131). If we are afraid of those around us, we cannot trust them. This leads her to argue that policy and design approaches that aim to alleviate fears of public spaces through securitization or ‘defensibility’ are simply tackling the symptoms of a more complex problem, a lack of societal trust—particularly across difference. I too am worried that the normalization of the fear of strangers has led to a breakdown in the social fabric. Further, as in the example of this specific campaign, it allows the state to claim it is taking public safety seriously, even while continuing to cut vital services that would enhance wellbeing and reduce harm.

This is all inevitable in a culture saturated with messages about checking and surveilling others, and a media cycle obsessed with promoting stranger danger messages. Securitized spaces and increasingly privatized spaces keep people apart and promote spaces for consumption and moving through, further keeping people isolated and insulated from one another. As new technologies evolve that also eliminate casual social contact from self-serve checkout counters to cashier-less grocery stores, it is more difficult to imagine how we can begin to rebuild a sense of trust. Yet surveilling others and viewing them as sources of

potential danger will only increase the fragmentation of the social fabric. I am concerned that this fragmentation can justify the differential level of harm that some come to be exposed to. Therefore, I aim to build on these insights in the following chapter by theorizing the logic of defensibility.

Conclusion

While Thatcher may have said, “There is no such thing as society” (1987), she did not simply speak into existence the breakdown of the social and rising waves of distrust. Instead, as I argue here, the proliferation of common sense ideas that public spaces are dangerous and strangers should be treated with suspicion functions to reinforce traditional hierarchies of power and bolster the notion that the nuclear family and the private home are vital sources of stability and security. Therefore, I have built on the conceptual framework outlined in the previous chapter to understand how the destruction of the social and reduction in social ties takes place through the demonization of public spaces and the strangers that occupy them. In relation to the rest of the thesis, this chapter serves two key interconnected functions.

The first is that it outlines how the proliferation of discourses demonizing the stranger, as well as strategies seeking to design out interaction, reinforce the private family home as the primary space of safety and care. Not only then is care privatized, but the possibility of forming relations of care or solidarity beyond the confines of the household becomes dangerous. Given I am interested in exploring broader relations of care, which extend beyond the private household and into the public realm, seeing this as vital to challenge the differential allocation of livability, this demonization and ultimate reduction of social bonds is vital to understanding how protectionist policies function against the interests of genuine safety and livability.

Second, I have introduced the concept of fear as a form of social control. The tension between ideas of fear and freedom is central to this thesis and makes up the first half of its

title. Therefore, having begun looking at freedom in the previous chapter, this chapter works to outline how I see the politics of fear functioning in relation to my research topic. In promoting a normalization of suspicion and fear towards strangers in the public realm both discourses of stranger danger and defensible design strategies deepen societal distrust and fracture the social fabric—particularly along lines of difference. Specifically, in looking at surveillance as a practice of good citizenship, I have outlined how a defensive orientation to encountering others seems to entail making judgments about who belongs in society and who does not.

This idea, that the social fabric has been fractured along lines of difference, with certain bodies perceived primarily as threats needing to be watched and monitored, while those with more social power position themselves in a ‘defensive’ way, needing to somehow protect themselves against those whose very existence becomes associated with threat and danger, will be explored further in the next chapter. Indeed, having introduced the idea of a defensive orientation to the public realm here, the next chapter aims to better understand the logic of defensibility as it structures possibility in the public realm. My analysis will also narrow in, looking at who exactly ‘the public’ or the ‘good citizen’ is defending themselves against. Finally, I will also challenge whether defensibility is always a reactive orientation. Is it a position responding to a genuine risk or threat, or, like I have begun to theorize here through examining the politics of fear, is it a position adapted for more sinister purposes, such as the maintenance of the social order?

Chapter 3

Offensive Defense: Antisocial Behavior and The Construction of ‘Disorderly People’

“The best defense is a good offense.”⁷⁴

“If any white man in the world says, ‘Give me liberty or give me death,’ the entire white world applauds. When a black man says exactly the same thing, he is judged a criminal and treated like one.”

— James Baldwin, Interview on the Dick Cavett Show (1968)⁷⁵

Spending time with others in a public space is a social behavior—at least from the understanding that ‘social’ means people interacting. Yet according to the CSEW,⁷⁶ ‘teenagers hanging around’ is one of the most common forms of *antisocial* behavior (ONS 2015). This is also reflected in a study of perceptions of youth crime that found the “biggest” antisocial behavior problem in the country was “teenagers hanging around” (Moon, Small & Cambridge 2010, 12). Finally, a study by market research company Ipsos expanded this definition to include any group hanging around as indicative of antisocial behavior—regardless of age. They state that the impact of encountering groups socializing, or hanging out, is fear, loss of confidence and avoidance (2023).⁷⁷

Here, in a twist on words straight from George Orwell’s ‘Ministry of Truth’, the social behavior of some, ‘groups hanging out’, is a violation. It is antisocial. This immediately seems to be a contradiction. Hanging out with friends or acquaintances is a social behavior. Yet rather than antisocial being used to describe an unwillingness to engage or interact with others, a descriptive interpretation, it has become a catch-all term to cover a broad range of behaviors and activities that some find frustrating or annoying—from hanging around to putting up posters, drinking in public, abandoning a car and littering. It relies on the

⁷⁴ Popular idiom.

⁷⁵ As edited for *I am not Your Negro* (2017) trailer.

⁷⁶ As of 2009, Scottish data is collected separately through the Scottish Crime and Victimisation Survey (SCVS); Northern Ireland has collected its data through The Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey since 1994.

⁷⁷ Also see Mitchell 2009 on social agoraphobia and the discussion in Chapter Two on how the fear of strangers can influence a desire for avoidance and a retreat into the private, familial home.

construction of ‘disorderly people’ as a group who are causing harm to the collective whole. This is the sense in which behavior is understood as antisocial—it is harmful to society.

I am not looking to address whether antisocial behavior is a problem—or what, if anything, should be done about it. Instead, I am aiming to understand *why* it has become a problem and what a focus on antisocial behavior as a serious problem does to the social fabric. Without glossing over the fact that some behavior in public can be annoying, harmful and even antisocial, this chapter begins at the juncture of this bizarre conundrum where the sociality and existence of some is deemed to be an interference in the lives, safety and security of others.

The broader aim here is to outline the defensive logic inherent in protectionist measures through an analysis of how this logic pits the survival and flourishing of some against that of others. I will focus on how antisocial behavior discourse, mainly in policy documents and key speeches, constructs a category of disorderly people from whom the rest of the people need to be protected. In outlining this process, I claim that the defensive framing underlying antisocial behavior is actually an offensive attack on the social fabric. Further, I argue that this not only displaces social and societal ills stemming from neoliberalism’s decimation of the social onto disorderly people, but also justifies their harm and oppression as necessary to protect those with more social power.

To make this argument, I first focus on antisocial behavior’s roots in ‘broken windows theory’, a criminological concept from the US that views all crime as operating on a spectrum and urges excess policing of low-level disorder as the most optimal way to prevent serious crime (Kelling & Wilson 1982). Then, tracing how New Labour adapted this theory and brought it to the UK (Minton 2009), I begin to define antisocial behavior by looking at key policy documents and speeches. It is here that I outline how disorderly people are

scapegoated as the source of existential insecurity rather than structural factors stemming from neoliberalism.

Then, to examine the war logics at play in how antisocial behavior discourse pits the sociality, enjoyment and existence of groups against each other, I turn to Judith Butler's work on why some lives matter more than others (2004, 2009, 2020). After outlining Butler's work on the differential value of life, I consider their work on nonviolence and self-defense to understand why the survival and flourishing of more privileged bodies and lives seem to be posed in opposition to the existence of other bodies and lives. Drawing on this Butlerian framework, I then analyze the peculiar British obsession with antisocial behavior as a form of what Neil Smith calls revanchism, or revenge by the white middle classes (1996). I make this case by reviewing how antisocial behavior is repeatedly framed as 'taking back' or 'reclaiming' public spaces and city/town centers. Then, I consider why groups hanging out, particularly working-class young people, are specifically seen as problematic. Drawing on work on the criminalization and fear of young people (Goldson & Muncie 2015; Minton 2009; Moon, Small & Cambridge 2010), I contend that, despite lacking alternative options for spaces to socialize and enjoy themselves, young working-class people are posed as dangerous and responsible for societal discord.

Finally, I move my analysis to the defensive framing of antisocial behavior and look to Butler's (2020) and Elsa Dorlin's work (2020) on legitimate self-defense. According to these theorists, self-defense is only an option for the privileged. When those lacking grievability or social power are just existing and trying to stay alive they are viewed as a nuisance or a threat. This is how the privileged can justify their attacks on the marginalized as defensive, despite no provocation.

Overall, my argument has three components. The first is that structural socioeconomic harms are individualized and moralized in the construction of 'disorderly people', a group

who become scapegoats for broader insecurities. The second is that the defensive logic inherent in antisocial behavior discourse masks the reality that it is an offensive strategy deployed by those with more social power to maintain their dominance and privilege. Finally, the way this chapter fits into my thesis is to demonstrate that the defensive logics inherent in the protectionist measures I am looking at, which claim they are protecting the people from the threat of others, are not about enhancing collective safety or wellbeing but instead a means of consolidating power and maintaining the dominance of the neoliberal social order. My focus on antisocial behavior to make this broader point is, because, according to the government since the 2000s, it is the main reason people do not feel safe in the UK (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities & Home Office 2024; Blunkett, quoted in Wintour 2003).

Antisocial Behavior

The notion that some behavior causes frustration, distress and even harm to others is nothing new. Conflict is an inevitable part of living in a society (Berlant 2022, 76; Mouffe 2005, 2013). However, antisocial behavior as a category of offense,⁷⁸ and policies seeking to eradicate it, are relatively new; they arrived in the UK in the 1990s (*Crime and Disorder Act* 1998; Minton 2009). Before defining this term and reviewing what behaviors it includes, I want to understand the criminological theory it is rooted in and trace how it entered British politics via the US.

Broken Windows

According to Anna Minton in *Ground Control* (2009), the focus on antisocial behavior and policing low-level disorder to eradicate fear and reduce crime was influenced

⁷⁸ I use the term 'offense' here as antisocial behavior can be a civil offense or a criminal offense.

by a criminological theory known as broken windows theory (2009, 145).⁷⁹ Broken windows theory, introduced by social scientists George Kelling and James Wilson (and further popularized when put into practice in New York during the 1990s under Mayor Rudy Giuliani and police commissioner William Bratton) claims that eliminating low-level crime, like broken windows, littering and vandalism, will prevent more serious crimes, like rape or murder (1982). It gets its name from the underlying assumption that, if windows are allowed to remain broken for a long time in an area, this is a symptom of disorder. This disorder signals that the area is lacking in control; if windows, as the symbolic boundary between private and public space, are not respected and taken care of, other boundaries, such as between the self and others/their property, also are not respected in this space.

This linear understanding views all crime as a symptom of disorder (Harcourt 2001, 149). As disorder becomes more severe, so does crime. Alternatively, well-kept, orderly space can prevent crime. Porous boundaries—whether literal holes in a barrier like broken windows or figurative, like litter—communicate a lack of control or care in the area and attract crime. For the success of broken windows policing, minor infractions must be stopped immediately and punished harshly to prevent further criminal escalation. Therefore, it is marked by zero-tolerance policing (Bowling 1999; Smith 2001; Millie 2009) with a focus on small, minor infractions. There is very little (if any) methodologically rigorous evidence for the validity of this theory (Harcourt 2001; O’Brien, Farrell & Welsh 2019); policing based on it has not been successful in reducing crime (Harcourt & Ludwig 2006), and it has been heavily criticized by later scholars (Camp & Heatherton 2016; Minton 2009; Sampson & Raudenbush 1999).⁸⁰ Yet none of this stopped it from being incorporated into policing practices across the world

⁷⁹ Also see Millie 2008, 2009, 2014 who reinforces the connection between antisocial behavior in the UK and broken windows theory.

⁸⁰ Also see Ansfield 2020; Harcourt 2001; Harcourt & Ludwig 2006; Herzog 2016; Mitchell, Attoh & Staeheli 2016.

(Dinez & Stafford 2021; Marat 2019; Vilalta, Lopez, Fondevila & Siordia 2019). As I argue in this chapter, its adoption and spread comes not from belief in its capacity to reduce crime, but from its alignment with revanchist (Smith 1996) urban strategies that serve the interests of oppressive power.

Yet broken windows theory is not just about vandalism of private property and disrespect for the cleanliness of public spaces. Kelling and Wilson also compare maintaining order with clearing out undesirable bodies, like the homeless. They make the chillingly inhumane claim “the unchecked panhandler, is, in effect, the first broken window” and contend that people may fear crime, but they are also worried about “being bothered by disorderly people” such as “panhandlers, drunks, addicts, rowdy teenagers, prostitutes, loiterers, (and) the mentally disturbed” (1982). Not only is there an equivalence made here between fear of crime and merely being bothered (which is central to antisocial behavior), but undesirable and potentially annoying bodies are reduced to a symptom of disorder that must be eliminated.

Indeed, since a broken windows perspective views crime as operating along a spectrum, behavior that some may view as annoying, like loitering or rowdy teenage antics, is no longer minor or harmless. Instead, it is potentially dangerous because it is symptomatic of disorder, and disorder attracts more serious crime. According to Bernard Harcourt, this means “the disorderly are considered the agents of crime and neighborhood decline” (2001, 185). Therefore, the annoyance one may feel toward a group of teenagers or someone drinking or doing drugs in public is elevated to a sign that, as one is in an area marked by disorder, one is at risk of becoming a victim of crime. Consequently, the belief that crime operates along a spectrum makes minor infractions more serious because they inevitably result in more serious harm.

Key to emphasize here is the construction of the category of disorderly people. Who are they? What is disorder? While broken windows theory seems to take it for granted that the line between order and disorder is clear and that we all know who disorderly people are, these categories are not natural or “organic to society” (Harcourt 2001, 135). Rather, Harcourt argues that “the practices of punishment that we choose” and discourse inherent in broken windows policing produce these categories (2001, 141). After all, there is a lot of chaotic, disorderly and societally harmful behavior that is not policed or punished. Therefore, a disorderly person is not someone who naturally exists, but disorderly people is a category created by this approach to policing and the discourse constructed to explain and justify it. Consequently, in analyzing antisocial behavior, I aim to understand the construction of this category. I do not arrive at an understanding of the meaning of order and disorder; however, I will do so in a later chapter.

*I Predict a Riot*⁸¹

Returning to Minton, she traces how Jack Straw, then shadow UK Home Secretary under the soon-to-be-elected New Labour Party, visited New York in 1995 when Giuliani and Bratton were beginning to put broken windows theory into practice. They explicitly set out to reinstate order and control with the goal of “reclaiming the public spaces of New York” (New York City Police Department 1994) by focusing on “the homeless, beggars, prostitutes, squeegee cleaners, squatters, graffiti artists, reckless bicyclists and unruly youths” as disorderly bodies, and consequently “enemies of public order whose activities would not be tolerated” (Minton 2009, 48). Targeting these groups as priorities for policing, rather than focusing on more serious, harmful matters, was a relatively novel concept at this time and one that is reflected in antisocial behavior policies as well.

⁸¹ Here, I refer to the popular song by the Kaiser Chiefs that came out in 2004 (in the New Labour era) and ‘predicts’ a class riot through incredibly classist lyrics.

Minton continues that, inspired by what he saw and heard in New York, Straw returned to the UK using Giuliani and Bratton's language nearly verbatim (2009, 48). He promised if elected, New Labour would be tough on crime and implement policies to "reclaim the streets for the law-abiding public citizen" and clear out "squeegee merchants" and "winos" (quoted in Mills 1995). I want to highlight how, despite the name broken windows seeming to suggest a focus on property and buildings, this theory is instead marked by a focus on disorderly people and the need to reclaim space from them.

Once elected in 1997, the party made good on these promises and antisocial behavior became a policy focal point with the introduction of civil Anti-Social Behavior Orders (ASBOs)⁸² in 1998, the 'White Paper on Respect and Responsibility' (Home Office 2003) and eventually the Anti-Social Behavior Act 2003 (Millie 2009). In publishing the white paper in 2003, the then Home Secretary David Blunkett announced that, although crime rates had been falling steadily, fear of crime was rising. He theorized that this was a result of antisocial behavior. Of course, this makes sense if one supports the linear view of crime; such a view implies that it is rational to fear low-level disorder because it attracts serious crimes.

If there was any uncertainty as to who is blamed for causing this fear, Blunkett's continuation that "Yobbishness changes the nature and culture of our society. It creates instability and insecurity that leads to other law-abiding people changing their attitudes, losing trust" eliminates it (quoted in Wintour 2003). Here, the category of disorderly people, further stigmatized as 'yobs', a derogatory colloquialism for badly behaved young people, is depicted not as a symptom but as *the cause* of wider social issues. Rather than reflecting on structural causes of 'changing attitudes' or declining societal trust, it is disorderly people who are made responsible. In the same speech, Blunkett continues to reflect, stating his belief that

⁸² While an ASBO is a civil order that prohibits an individual from doing a particular act, breaking an ASBO is a criminal offense.

the UK is more insecure than ever and that “anti-social behaviour is actually at the foundation and root of insecurity” (quoted in Wintour 2003). This is a bold claim, yet indicative of how antisocial behavior and the category of disorderly people become a scapegoat to displace broader existential insecurity onto. I will flesh out this claim and its implications throughout this chapter, ultimately contending that social power is constituted and reconstituted through this framing that justifies deepening assaults on the social (and even socialization) under the guise of defense and protection from the existential insecurity supposedly produced by ‘yobs’, working-class young people.

Yet I acknowledge that the topic of this chapter may be controversial. It is important to remember that the focus on antisocial behavior, despite its origination in a controversial criminological theory, emerges from a recognition that bad behavior, including low-level offenses, can cause harm (Burney 2005, xi). Therefore, recognizing this, I am not aiming to imply that there is not some behavior that takes place in the UK that is upsetting and inappropriate. I also do not want to be understood as claiming that behavior that begins as annoying or frustrating cannot sometimes end up causing serious harm—physical or psychological.⁸³ I am also not saying that people’s feelings of frustration or fears are irrelevant. However, as I will outline in this chapter, I see a social violence in categorizing some people as disorderly and then framing their very existence as a threat that needs to be stamped out. This is what I am attempting to understand and rallying against. As I flesh out the centrality of interdependency to my overarching argument in later chapters, my position

⁸³ There is an entire field in psychology looking at the harm caused by annoying noise. See Guski, Felscher-Suhr & Schuemer 1999; Stallen 1999 and Västfjäll 2002 as indicative. Also see the case of a man who killed himself after living with intolerable levels of antisocial noise (Booth 2023). Sexual harassment directed towards women is also a big problem in public space and can have a profound impact. Racism and other discriminatory behavior based on one’s identity are also forms of antisocial behavior that are very harmful. Nonetheless, while people of color and young people are more likely to experience antisocial behavior, they are also most likely to say it does not bother them. Men, older people, those in the highest income bracket and those from a white ethnic background, according to one study, were most likely to say antisocial behavior is a big issue for them and most likely to see it as a crime (Ipsos 2023). Therefore, it seems those most concerned about antisocial behavior are not those facing the most of it in their day-to-day life and are those with more social power.

on the need for a collectivist ethos rooted in care and marked by a recognition of how our actions impacts others and the world around us will be explored further.

What is Antisocial?

While rooted in eliminating disorder and bolstering security, as an actual concept, antisocial behavior is notoriously difficult to define. Some have suggested that the subjectiveness of the term is intentional as its looseness means it can be applied to a range of behaviors (Brown 2004; Burney 2005; Millie 2008).⁸⁴ Here, to better understand antisocial behavior, I will focus on how it is depicted in policy and key speeches rather than looking at individual cases of people charged with ASBOs or other antisocial offenses. This is because I am more concerned with how these policies and speeches construct the category of disorderly people in opposition to good, orderly—or, to use the government’s framing, ‘law-abiding’ people.

In the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 and the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, antisocial behavior is defined as “behaviour by a person which causes, or is likely to cause, harassment, alarm or distress to persons not of the same household as the person”. From this, I take that antisocial behavior seems to be upsetting or potentially upsetting behavior by someone to whom one is not related. Hence it is always looking beyond the familial unit. While harassment, alarm and distress are not emotional states to be flippant about and can impact one’s emotional wellbeing, this definition does not include harm to one’s body or loss of one’s possessions. It is instead about subjective feelings and peace of mind. The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 broadens this definition to include causing or being capable of causing “annoyance to a person in relation to that person’s occupation of residential premises”. Here, antisocial behavior is not just

⁸⁴ Also see Squires 2006.

something encountered in the public realm, but also something that can seep into the private realm. An example of this would be loud noises from outside or from another household that people in their private residences can hear. This addition also adds a more explicit focus on annoyance, which seems to represent a less threatening emotional state than harassment or distress.

Finally, an ‘Anti-Social Behavior Action Plan’, announced for proposed policy changes in 2024, describes antisocial behavior as

a disturbance or disruption to the normal order of things; an attitude and show of disrespect for a place and the people that call it home. Often repetitive and oppressive, anti-social behaviour leaves victims and communities feeling powerless, spoiling their normal enjoyment of their spaces and chipping away at their peace of mind in their own homes (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities & Home Office 2024).

Here, antisocial behavior is again linked to disordering as well as disruption of the status quo and disrespect for others. It is also experienced as an assault on the feelings and overall wellbeing of people just trying to go about their lives and enjoy themselves. Therefore, in tracing these definitions, antisocial behavior broadly consists of low-level nuisance behavior that happens between non-family members.

While these definitions focus more on the feelings particular behaviors incite, there is still not a clear sense of what the alarming, distressing or annoying behaviors themselves might actually be. After all, annoyance is subjective. The Metropolitan Police do however list thirteen different categories that clarify what antisocial behavior might look like. These include “Vehicle abandoned”, “Vehicle nuisance or inappropriate use”, “Rowdy or inconsiderate behaviour”, “Rowdy or nuisance neighbours”, “Littering or drugs paraphernalia”, “Animal problems”, “Trespassing”, “Nuisance calls”, “Street drinking”,

“Activity relating to sex workers or sex working”, “Nuisance noise”, “Begging” and “Misuse of fireworks” (Metropolitan Police). This is an expansive list that includes activities as marginal as putting up posters (known as fly posting and listed as an example of littering), asking for charitable donations in a public space without a permit (begging) or having a dog who barks loudly (animal problems). The list also clearly differentiates between when activities within these categories stop being antisocial behavior and start being more severe offenses. This appears to happen when the behavior stops being annoying or a nuisance and starts having the potential to cause more serious harm. For example, nuisance calling does not cover “indecent, threatening or offensive” calls and ‘rowdy or inconsiderate behavior’ does not include domestic violence, harassment or public disorder; more serious criminal law covers these behaviors (Metropolitan Police).⁸⁵

Individualization and Moralization

Overall, while antisocial behavior claims to be about protecting and preserving the peace of mind and the enjoyment of ‘law-abiding’ people, I see it as individualizing and moralizing broader, structural issues so that they emanate from bad individuals. Yet the UK is facing a series of interconnected crises and, as pointed out by Peter Marcuse, neoliberal capitalism creates existential insecurity (2006a). However, tackling the structural roots of these crises and existential insecurity would require a break from the neoliberal consensus. Consequently, I see the construction of the category of disorderly people as a convenient scapegoat for neoliberalism’s existential insecurity. After all, it is easier to pose the problem as getting rid of homeless people and blame them for their plight rather than tackling the financialized housing system. It is easier to blame young people for being annoying on the streets rather than considering why they are not playing sports or socializing in community

⁸⁵ The police indicate that these behaviors should be reported as crimes, rather than as antisocial behavior (Metropolitan Police).

centers. Instead of acknowledging how neoliberalism has harmed the social fabric, decimated formal and informal infrastructures of non-marketized care beyond the family and reduced opportunities for socialization, antisocial behavior makes bad behavior, insecurity and societal discord a problem of bad individuals to be solved through increased policing. This individualization and moralization functions to deflect from structural causes that could explain societal distrust, fear or declining quality of life.

By making the problem ‘the job’ (to return to Blunkett’s prejudicial language), antisocial behavior discourse makes the symptoms of broader social problems stemming from a disjointed and fractured society into the problem itself. However, research on perceptions of antisocial behavior found that judgments of antisocial behavior appear to be related to “the observation of a particular phenomenon (e.g. teenagers hanging around) as a ‘shorthand’ way to judge the level of disorder in an area” and, most importantly for my purposes here, “linked to deeper seated anxieties about the state of society in general, and qualities of the neighbourhood in particular” (Mackenzie *et al.* 2010, iii). While this reinforces my previous point that disorderly bodies are seen as broken windows, or symptoms of disorder, I also want to consider how this report suggests antisocial behavior is related to feelings about society in general. The connection between a sense of generalized anxiety about an unstable, insecure society and perceptions of antisocial behavior is key; it reinforces my argument that disorderly people are constructed as a ‘nightmare’ that the people need protection against to displace the insecurity of neoliberalism.

In a tired phrasing used constantly by the government over the past few decades to describe both antisocial behavior and disruptive protest, the problem is ‘a small minority making things difficult for the law-abiding and/or the hardworking majority’.⁸⁶ However, in

⁸⁶ This framing is used repeatedly to describe antisocial behavior and disruptive protest. As an overview, see the following: in announcing New Labour’s stance on antisocial behavior to the National Community Safety

constructing a field of meaning where you have the law-abiding majority on one side, and the small minority of antisocial behaviors on the other, structural factors are ignored and a political decision is made instead about who belongs and who is depicted as a threat to the social order. Yet in claiming to protect those who belong from disorderly people through increased policing and policy against antisocial behavior, there is a strange defensive slant to this framing. To better understand these logics that pit some against others I turn to Butler, whose work will help me to unpack the implications of posing disorderly people as a key source of existential insecurity.

Bodies and Butler

Beginning in *Precarious Life* (2004a) and continuing through *Frames of War* (2009) and *The Force of Nonviolence* (2020) Butler has been grappling with an important question: Why do some lives matter more than others? This question leads to a series of interrelated questions: “Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives?” and, what conditions or norms must be in place so that a life that is lost will be mourned (2004a, 20)? These

Network, the then Home Secretary David Blunkett claimed “the law-abiding majority should have the confidence to reassert their right to live peacefully, free from danger and harassment” and that they should not have to “put up with the actions of an anti-social minority” (quoted in LGC Contributor 2004). In speaking about the problem of antisocial behavior, the then PM Tony Blair described it as “the work of a very small minority that makes the law-abiding majority afraid and angry” (quoted in White 2005). Also see Scottish Conservative environment spokesman Maurice Golden speaking about proposals to increase fines for littering by stating “A small minority are spoiling Scotland’s streets, parks and countryside for the law-abiding majority” (quoted in Newsdesk 2018). The BBC wrote that, since the lifting of lockdown measures, there have been “A minority of young people” causing “trouble in public spaces since lockdown was eased” who are “spoiling it for the majority” (2020). In a speech at the Conservative Party Conference vowing to stop disruptive protest, the then Home Secretary Priti Patel promised to “give the police and courts new powers to deal with the small minority of offenders intent on travelling around the country, causing disruption and misery across our communities” (2021). She continued this attack, in reference to protest group Insulate Britain, stating “this government will not stand by and allow a small minority of selfish protesters to cause significant disruption to the lives and livelihoods of the hard-working majority” (quoted in BBC 2021). In discussing the government’s plan to criminalize nitrous oxide, the then Home Secretary Suella Braverman proclaimed “This Government is on the side of the law-abiding majority. We will take the fight to the anti-social minority” (quoted in PA reporters 2023). Finally, in justifying the need for the Public Order Act 2023 the Home Office contend that “Over recent years, guerrilla tactics used by a small minority of protesters have caused a disproportionate impact on the hardworking majority seeking to go about their everyday lives” (2023) and in justifying the need for even more police powers as part of the Criminal Justice Bill 2024, the then Home Secretary James Cleverly said “Recent protests have seen a small minority dedicated to causing damage and intimidating the law-abiding majority” (quoted in Home Office 2024).

questions, relevant to understanding the divide between the people needing protection and the disorderly, ultimately culminate with the contention that not all bodies are recognized and understood as lives with value. Some deaths matter and spark action and outrage and others are hardly, if at all, acknowledged.

Butler's work on this matter began by looking at how the "permanent war" (2004a, xix) waged by the US against Muslim-majority countries is justified and ultimately made legitimate and necessary through claims of protecting freedom and democracy at home and fighting for the liberation of Islamic women. The way this equation, and the trade-offs it entails, is made to make sense is through war logics that pit certain bodies and lives against one another—as if the survival (and paradoxical freedom) of some requires the death of others. Yet these logics extend beyond conflict zones and enter our daily lives. For the purposes of my research, I will focus on how these war logics underlie the concept of antisocial behavior and determinations of legitimate users of space. Nonetheless, just as in spaces of armed conflict and war, in everyday life these logics also determine who lives, who dies and who is left without support or resources because they lack value.⁸⁷

The framework for understanding Butler's initial questions is deepened in *Frames of War*. Here, Butler frames the text's opening question "*What is a life?*" as simultaneously ontological, epistemic and ethical (2009, 1). First, the line between life and not-life is ontological as it concerns the mechanisms of power and normativity that allow subjectification or being to take place. This ontological process generates epistemic considerations regarding the frames of knowledge necessary both for apprehending life and for determining which lives are losable or injurable—which must be preserved, and which do not really exist as such—rely on the normative schemas that allow a life to be perceived as

⁸⁷ See Mbembe 2019 for a discussion of the politics of life and death.

life in the first place. Finally, determining what is life triggers ethical questions. Figuring out what is life and what is not life is the first step in determining what actions should be taken to preserve life and encourage its flourishing (2009, 1-4). I also would add that these threads are all inherently political as considerations about which lives should be preserved and which bodies do not constitute lives (and may instead pose a threat to the livability of actually existing lives) structure the political field and lie underneath policy decisions—such as those being considered here.

Differential Grievability

To unpack this dilemma where some lives matter, whereas others are neglected as if they do not exist or depicted as a threat, Butler focuses on the idea of death in life and introduces the theoretical construct of differential grievability. Whereas grieving is a process that takes place after a life is already lost, grievability exists (or does not exist) in life. It refers to a body that has sufficient value or matters in a way so that its loss is certain to be grieved. Butler explains the grievability of the grievable life comes from it being the right type of life, embodying hegemonic normative standards and values. Nonetheless, grievability is not a quality all lives are naturally imbued with, and Butler focuses their theory on the differential way grievability is distributed within a population (2009, 15). Some deaths are mourned—even publicly—and others are hardly noticed, seen as natural or inevitable. This focus on grievability, with its constant foreshadowing of death (rather than perhaps livability), forces us to maintain awareness of the fragility of existence and the unequal distribution of the conditions that make life possible.

To outline how grievability is allocated Butler differentiates between recognition, recognizability and apprehension. Whereas apprehension is simply to apprehend and know something is a human body, apprehension is not equivalent to recognition; we can also apprehend that a form is not recognized as a life. Meanwhile, Butler adds recognizability to

their Hegelian interpretation of recognition as a sense of respect or humanity. Recognizability then can be understood as a construct proceeding recognition, or “the more general conditions that prepare or shape a subject for recognition” (2009, 6). It is the conventions, norms and societally acceptable ways of being that allow a subject to be recognized and ultimately be seen as a life worth preserving. A body that is recognized is accepted as a life, and consequently grievable (though there is always variation in value even within normatively grievable lives). Therefore, while we may be able to apprehend bodies as such, to fully recognize a body as a life and imbue it with value, it needs to adhere to certain social norms according to Butler’s work.⁸⁸

Ultimately, while a Butlerian framework claims these normative conditions essential for recognition draw upon “shifting schemas of intelligibility” (2009, 7), I prefer to think these norms are determined by the dominant neoliberal ‘markets and morals’ common sense (Brown 2015, 2019). In coupling these two frameworks, the normative common sense lens through which we can—or cannot—understand “the lives of others as lost or injured (lose-able or injurable) are politically saturated” and “operations of power” (Butler 2009, 1). There may be some variation in these norms in different localities, yet for the purposes of this research, I see the lenses through which some lives matter more than others as reinforcing the traditional hierarchies of value that constitute the social order.

Nonviolence and Self-Defense

Butler’s work goes beyond outlining why some lives matter more than others. In *The Force of Nonviolence* Butler applies their framework on the differential allocation of

⁸⁸ It is this differential allocation of grievability, and the long history of ignoring black death at the hands of the state—or else seeing it as deserved or inevitable—that has animated the Black Lives Matter movement in recent years. Calls to ‘say their names’ (to repeat and remember the names of black people killed unjustly, at the hands of the police) are practices of public and collective mourning for those bodies and lives who, for so long, have not had the same value as white lives. These bodies have not been considered grievable. To mourn for them is to challenge the hegemonic understanding that makes this the case.

grievability to understanding why certain bodies and lives are pitted against one another in a Hobbesian nightmare where the survival of grievable lives seems to require the expunging of other lives (2020); these lives become undeserving of the care required to maintain life. They do this by outlining a theory of nonviolence that includes an imperative against violence justified as self-defense. Butler understands self-defense as an act of violence that entails differentiating between the 'self' or 'selves' worthy of defending, and the 'other', who must be defended against. Looking at how the defensible self is constructed will help me to analyze the defensive framing of antisocial behavior and protectionist policies.

Butler calls for an aggressive pursuit of nonviolence. They interpret nonviolence not as passive or without force, but as an ethico-political principle reliant on fighting for equal livability. Crucially, nonviolence means refusing to differentiate between lives so that some are more grievable and thus more livable than others (2020, 52-61). Nonviolence then becomes a practice that requires careful thought about how these categories are constructed—so they can be deconstructed. Within this definition of nonviolence, a definition of violence appears in the negative. Violence is the drawing of lines between lives that matter and lives that do not. To Butler, the meaning of nonviolence is not subject to debates about the difference between damage to property versus damage to the body.⁸⁹ Instead, it is rooted in an acceptance of interdependency and a refutation that some lives matter more than others (2020, 62). Further, it entails fighting and working towards a politics that reflects this.

While it is beyond the scope of this research to analyze the accuracy and efficacy of Butler's claims about nonviolence as the optimal moral or strategic means through which to fight differential livability, I am interested in how, in outlining this position, Butler takes a stance against violence justified as self-defense. They acknowledge that there may be

⁸⁹ See Malm 2020 and the various essays in *Property Will Cost Us the Earth: Direct Action and the Future of the Global Climate Movement* (Verso Books 2021) for an overview of this debate.

situations when one would need to raise an arm to stop a blow or prevent harm, yet they question self-defense as a justification for violence. In acknowledging that the need may arise for interpersonal defense, it seems apparent that Butler's focus is on broader, more macro-level instances of claiming self-defense. They stand against the notion that the means justify the ends, and that harmful and forceful methods, even when practiced against inherently harmful institutions or individuals, are justifiable. They ask how one can be sure that violence in pursuit of a just end will stop once the end is achieved (2020, 13). The very idea of finality, of reaching an endpoint where everyone will be content, is, after all, to deny the inherent antagonism that will always exist between different groups—particularly in the process of world-making (Mouffe 2013).

Beyond this simple question of how strategic violence can be stopped abruptly once an outcome is achieved, the most pertinent point of Butler's critique of self-defense is how the notion of defending the self relies on delineating between the self and the external other who needs to be defended against. After all, when thinking beyond interpersonal conflict, questions arise like where does the self end? Am I acting in self-defense when I defend the interests of my family versus others? Of my class/gender/ethnic group versus other class/gender/ethnic groups? Of my country versus other countries? Of people who look like me versus those who do not? Butler contends that an "egalitarian approach to the preservation of life" and accepting that all life is grievable requires rethinking how the construction of the self/selves needing defense entails a decision that certain bodies are less valuable and disposable (2020, 56). Defending the self always entails a justification of harm against the one you are defending yourself against. Understanding how the construction of selves needing defense implies the construction of a subject-group who can be harmed, even killed, to protect the more valuable selves, allows greater insight into the defensive slant of antisocial behavior discourse and protectionist policies.

Whose Streets? Our Streets!

Thinking about antisocial behavior—what self is being defended here? When people are banned from gathering in groups larger than two or three due to fear they will behave badly⁹⁰ who is being defended? When Rishi Sunak says: “We are going to make our streets and neighbourhoods safer by strengthening the powers of the police, local authorities and other partners to tackle anti-social behaviour” who is the one with implied ownership of the streets (quoted in Home Office & Ministry of Justice 2024a)? Further, how can these acts be defensive when they are largely in the absence of an actual threat?

To address these questions, I turn to Neil Smith’s work on the revanchist city (1996). Revanchism, which means “the principle or practice of seeking retaliation or revenge” is most associated with the nineteenth-century French revanchists who “initiated a vengeful and reactionary campaign” (1996, 207) against “the working class and the discredited royalty” and were “devoted to a vengeful and reactionary retaking of the country” (1996, 43). Smith sees the idea of a vengeful group aiming to retaliate against perceived harm (typically loss of territory) and seek revenge as akin to neoliberal urbanism (1996, 207). Smith is primarily using the concept of revanchism to describe the ‘re-gentrification’ of the 90s as the white middle classes re-entered urban spaces to reclaim them from “minorities, the working class, homeless people, the unemployed, women, gays and lesbians, immigrants” (1996, 207) and for ‘civil’, ‘respectable’ people instead. Yet it is also applicable to antisocial behavior. Smith writes that a key component of revanchism is “an active viciousness that attempts to criminalize a whole range of ‘behavior’ individually defined” (1996, 222) and to try to blame the lower classes for their status. This is evident in antisocial behavior’s construction of

⁹⁰ Dispersal powers, an aspect of the range of police and community powers used to address antisocial behavior since 2014, give the police the ability to ban people from public spaces for a set period (maximum of 48 hours) and to ban people from gathering in groups if there is fear they will behave badly (*Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014*).

disorderly people as the root of insecurity and subsequent attempts to criminalize a vast and seemingly random list of annoying behaviors. Crucially, I see a revanchist attitude in the continual rhetoric about the need to retake or reclaim spaces from disorderly people. While this framing appears nearly every time antisocial behavior is mentioned in British politics at length, I will introduce a few key examples.

As of 2024, the UK's two biggest political parties both want to help orderly people take back control of their cities and towns. The Conservative party promises to “help communities take back control of high streets” (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities 2023) while the opposing Labour party's website⁹¹ pledges to “take back our streets’ to improve security”, iterating that the party is on a “mission to take back our streets” and “rebuild security on Britain's streets”. This rhetoric of taking back control has also repeatedly appeared in debates and public discussions on antisocial behavior since its inception. To give a brief overview: in 2003 Helen Jones from Warrington praised early efforts at tackling antisocial behavior, stating, “We can also start reclaiming our public spaces so that people feel safe” (HC Debate 8 April 2003).⁹² In justifying a review to change how antisocial behavior is policed in 2010, the then Home Secretary Theresa May asserted: “we will support people so that they are willing and able to reclaim their communities”. The same year, Chief Inspector of Constabulary, Sir Denis O'Connor, told BBC Radio 4 that there is a need to “reclaim some neighbourhoods” (quoted in BBC 2010). In a 2023 debate on ‘Violent Crime and Anti-Social Behavior’, Elliot Colburn, Member of Parliament (MP) for Carshalton

⁹¹ At the time of writing in February 2024.

⁹² Her full statement is quite telling: “We can also start reclaiming our public spaces so that people feel safe. That is why I welcome the provisions about graffiti and fly posting. Of course, we can all read about crime. If people go out and find that the lights are out and the walls are covered in graffiti—perhaps a group of young people are gathered at the end of the street and are not doing any harm, but because of the way they are dressed they look intimidating, especially to an elderly person—they are fearful. We must reclaim public spaces by improving the environment and through far more community policing”. Here, the potential for fear matters more than whether a crime is committed. So, ‘reclaiming’ is clearly about removing risk factors for fear and things that make some uncomfortable rather than actually protecting anyone or seeking a proportionate balance of rights.

and Wallington, said: “We must do all that we can to tackle violent crime and anti-social behaviour and reclaim the safety and security of my constituents” (HC Debate 7 December 2023). Here then there is a clear pattern of the claim that safety and security rely on eliminating antisocial behavior so the people whom spaces are intended for can reclaim them.

This revanchist rhetoric becomes less polite and more dehumanizing in local tabloids. To give a sense of the onslaught of articles published daily across the UK on antisocial behavior; a resident interviewed for *Kent Live* about antisocial behavior in a nearby park said: “It used to be so lovely, now it’s like a jungle” (quoted in Doherty 2018). Meanwhile, in Shrewsbury, after concerns were raised about the behavior of some people in the town center, a local business owner told the *Shropshire Star* that the area was like “the Wild West” (quoted in Trigg 2023). In Colchester, plans to open a church’s courtyard to the public and relocate a cemetery have been met by the bizarre fear printed in the local press that the area will become “a hotbed for anti-social behavior” with unfounded claims that pubgoers will use the green space as a public loo (Deady 2024). These depictions of ‘wild’, untamed spaces where people disregard social norms and behave in nearly bestial ways are ridiculous and loaded with neocolonial tropes of incivility. Yet such rhetoric is integral to understanding the revanchist city. According to Smith, it is constructed through imperial tropes of noble white pioneers tackling and taming unruly spaces filled with “disease and disorder, crime and corruption, drugs and danger” (1996, xv). In this way, disorderly people are cast as obstacles to the full use and enjoyment of spaces for those to whom they truly belong.

Groups Hanging Out

To highlight the revanchism inherent in antisocial behavior I want to focus on the group considered the most heinous antisocial offenders, working-class young people. While less obvious and explicit than Giuliani’s outright war on the homeless (Giuliani 2015), who he promised to “chase ... out of the city” (quoted in Bellafante 2015), in the UK, the most

common group derided for behaving antisocially are young people congregating. This group is the most common symptom of disorder highlighted by people interviewed about their perceptions of antisocial behavior (Ipsos 2023; ONS 2015). Research by The Youth Taskforce in the Department for Education found that respondents were most likely to say that young people hanging out was the *most serious* form of antisocial behavior they encountered. In comparison, noisy neighbors and abandoned cars were seen as the least serious forms of antisocial behavior. Those who described teenagers as a major problem in this survey stated that the young people were typically taking part in activities that caused annoyance or irritation such as “swearing, being loud or noisy, drinking alcohol, being a general nuisance and littering” (Moon, Small & Cambridge 2010, 12). While this list contains some standard activities such as socializing loudly and swearing, nearly one-third of respondents felt that, just by virtue of hanging out as a group in a public space, regardless of their demeanor or activities, young people were being antisocial (Moon, Small & Cambridge 2010, 12). This is an appalling figure. It seems as if one-third of people seem to think children should not be seen *and* not be heard.

Further research has suggested that the media, with its ‘if it bleeds it leads’ slant, fuels widespread societal concerns about young people and potential criminality (Hough & Roberts 2004; Minton 2009, 137).⁹³ One study found that 71% of stories about young people that year were negative, and one-third dealt specifically with crime. The same study also found that the public overestimates the criminality of young people. Of those interviewed, respondents thought that half of all youth crime was violent; in reality, the actual figure is roughly one-fifth (Ipsos 2006). Given the UK tabloids’ obsession with stigmatizing working-class youth

⁹³ See Duffy *et al.* 2008 for a related discussion on how the media is largely to blame for the gap in perception between fear of crime and actual risk of being a victim of crime.

as chavs, yobs and NEETS⁹⁴—feckless, unruly, and dangerous—this is unsurprising (Hayward & Yar 2006; Jones 2011). In highlighting the association between young people, class and antisocial behavior other research has considered the role of aesthetics, clothing and values in determining who is seen as antisocial (Millie 2014) and looked at how the working-class is constructed as a ‘risky’ population from birth, almost genetically predisposed to criminality (Goldson & Muncie 2006). This all highlights the stigmatization of poor young people in the UK.

It seems clear there is a fear of young people—specifically groups of young people in public spaces. According to research conducted by the Institute for Public Policy Research think tank, British people are more afraid of the young than Europeans and more likely to blame them for societal dysfunction, disorder and antisocial behavior. They are also less likely to intervene if they see young people misbehaving due to fear of being subject to physical violence (Dixon *et al.* 2006). While fear of young people is nothing new, what is new is the criminalization of young people for socializing or existing in public. For many young people, particularly working-class and poorer young people, public spaces are the only places they have to socialize. While Goldson and Muncie contend that young people are one of the most visible groups in our societies (2006), I would argue that it is specifically poorer young people—or the poor in general—who are most visible. They are less likely to have access to large indoor spaces to hang out. They also have less disposable income to afford to spend time in cafes, shops, diners or restaurants.

Will McMahon makes the argument that the reason working-class people are seen to be bastions of antisocial behavior is simply because their normal, social behavior is so much more visible. He writes how “affluent teenagers 'hanging around' at the local pony club,

⁹⁴ An acronym for ‘Not in Education, Employment, or Training’. It essentially highlights that these people are not viewed as economically productive.

stockbrokers playing heavy metal on their home stereo systems in their large detached house, or aristocrats tearing around the country estates” could also be accused of antisocial behavior (2006). Yet because the mischief of the well-to-do takes place behind closed doors and far away from others, it is okay. Such a perspective is also interesting when considering the role of drugs and alcohol; whereas the middle and upper classes do more drugs and are more likely to drink excessively (Social Metrics Commission 2023), middle-class youth taking ecstasy at expensive music festivals are less likely to be subject to societal stigma and accusations of antisocial behavior than working-class teenagers smoking a joint in a public park. Similarly, a homeless man sipping from a bottle is subject to far greater disapproval than city workers regularly knocking back several pints after work. However, given as many as one-third of people see teenagers just existing in public space to be an issue, the increased visibility of young and working-class people, even if they are partaking in similar activities as those with more capital, makes them a target for disdain.

I will argue in this thesis that people should be able to use public space and just hang out. Public space is not simply for passing through but vital for democratic, social life. Loiterers should not be automatically perceived as strange. Nonetheless, it is worth highlighting here that the increased visibility of young people in public space can also be traced back to neoliberal policies and austerity decimating alternative spaces for them to spend time. Community centers, libraries and other public facilities have increasingly shut due to cuts in public funding. Cash-strapped councils have sold off their parks, pools and playing fields (Billingham *et al.* 2023). It is no wonder that less than half of British young people meet the Chief Medical Officer’s guidelines for minimal physical activity; black, Asian and poorer children are less likely than their peers to meet these minimum targets (Sport England 2023). Yet access to sports and community spaces is linked with improving life outcomes and even potentially decreasing criminality (Gaffney, Farrington & White

2021). However, beyond a cost-benefit analysis, sports, culture and socialization are enjoyable and something everything should have access to. It is vital that young people, regardless of their class, can create, exercise, bond and blow off steam in this way. In lacking the facilities to do so they are pushed into the public realm instead.

Overall then, there are substantially fewer spaces for young people to enjoy themselves, socialize and have foundational life experiences. Trying to criminalize their fleeting attempts to congregate only exacerbates the issue and further stigmatizes them. This is reflected in *Ground Control* when Minton details going to Salford, an area with an intensive antisocial behavior policing strategy focused on young people. In meeting with a local youth social worker, Graham Cooper, Minton is surprised to learn that, in addition to a lack of youth services and spaces to hang out, local pubs have started banning anyone under twenty-five. When Minton asks Cooper what young people do, he states that this is a huge problem in the area: “Friday night in a city like Salford and there’s nothing for them to do. They have to go into the bushes with a six pack and then they go out on to the streets because they feel strangled. The city centre would be all right, but they don’t go because they don’t have the money for that kind of night out” (2009, 160). Evident in this description is that young people are socializing in public in a way that is likely to be perceived as antisocial largely as a last resort due to excessive regulation, assumptions of criminality and cuts to community services. As Cooper later states, in an indictment of broken windows policing: “They’d far rather be flying through the countryside on mountain bikes than breaking windows” (2009, 195). At the beginning of this section, I mentioned Giuliani’s hopeless war on the homeless. This was because the UK is doing similar with its young. Vital services for working-class young people are cut and then they are criminalized just for existing publicly—but they do not have anywhere else to go. Young people want to discover themselves and have fun; they do not naturally want to distress others.

Therefore, if antisocial behavior is considered a key cause of insecurity, and young people just existing in public is the most prominent and problematic form of antisocial behavior, then are young people at the heart of Britain's insecurity? Such a suggestion, seemingly implied by antisocial behavior discourse, also captured in former PM Tony Blair's Labour Conference Speech in 2003 where he said "We cannot say we live in a just society, if we do not put an end to the anti-social behaviour, the disrespect, the conduct which we wouldn't tolerate from our own children and shouldn't have to tolerate from someone else's" (quoted in Evans 2005, 14) is ridiculous. Society is unjust due to the destruction unleashed by neoliberal capitalism, not disrespectful children. Yet, by focusing on young people, particularly working-class young people, and stirring up anger through the media and fiery speeches, neoliberal politicians save face and maintain support and their power. Poor young people become agents of harm and aggressors, destroying the social fabric, rather than victims of harm. Instead, it is those with more social power who are cast as victims of these unruly youths. Yet all this does is criminalize an outcome of neoliberalism's assault on the social. Where else can working-class young people go?

Legitimate Self-Defense

In outlining the logic behind the construction of disorderly people I have argued that self-defense is drawn on to legitimize revanchist attempts to clear undesirable users from space and deflect from the societal harms of neoliberalism. Now, I want to return to Butler to understand why the powerful can act in this way and call it 'defense', framing it as 'reclaiming' what is rightfully theirs. According to Butler, self-defense is only available to some bodies. Other bodies, those lacking grievability, are always understood as violent. Even when they are occupying space, seeking survival or simply existing outside the realm of normativity they are a threat. They suggest there is something inherent in these bodies—they somehow embody the label of violence or seem to be 'the violent type' due to societal

prejudices. Often, police attempting to justify excessive violence against black bodies give this kind of excuse and Butler highlights the racial undertones inherent in this violence—here understood as a naming practice utilized by the powerful to justify their behavior (2020, 3). Indeed, racialization is key to the over-policing of nonwhite bodies, particularly black youth. This also seems to reflect the UK’s labeling of working-class young people as potentially violent hoodie hoodlums (Marin-Lamellet 2020),⁹⁵ NEETS, yobs or chavs. All these classist labels stereotype young people as lurking, potential threats.

In *Self Defense: A Philosophy of Violence*, Dorling explores how legitimate self-defense, as determined and understood by the state, often ends up as little more than preemptive strikes by a dominant class to maintain their power (2020). While Dorlin’s argument on who has access to self-defense is broadly in line with Butler’s,⁹⁶ I find Dorlin’s analysis more compelling. In particular, I want to focus on her account of the trial of the white police officers who brutally beat Rodney King.

Gestures of Violence, Gestures of Defense

On March 3rd, 1991, several white police officers in Los Angeles beat King after he initially refused to pull over for a speeding violation. After stopping, when he would not exit his vehicle, they drew their guns on him. Eventually, he complied. However, the police tasered him and beat him with batons. They continued even when he fell on the ground and left him unconscious with a fractured jaw and skull. During this assault, from a position of weakness, King made several gestures attempting to protect himself, such as raising his arms. The officers perceived these gestures as threats, thus justifying their escalating brutality as the beating continued (Dorlin 2020, xi-xii).

⁹⁵ See Greig 2019 for a discussion of the hoodie and its relationship to class, youth and politics in the UK during the 2000s.

⁹⁶ However, Dorlin’s ultimate argument is a reversal of Butler’s as she argues for self-defense, even violent self-defense, as the only option for those systematically disenfranchised and disempowered to regain their subjecthood and humanity.

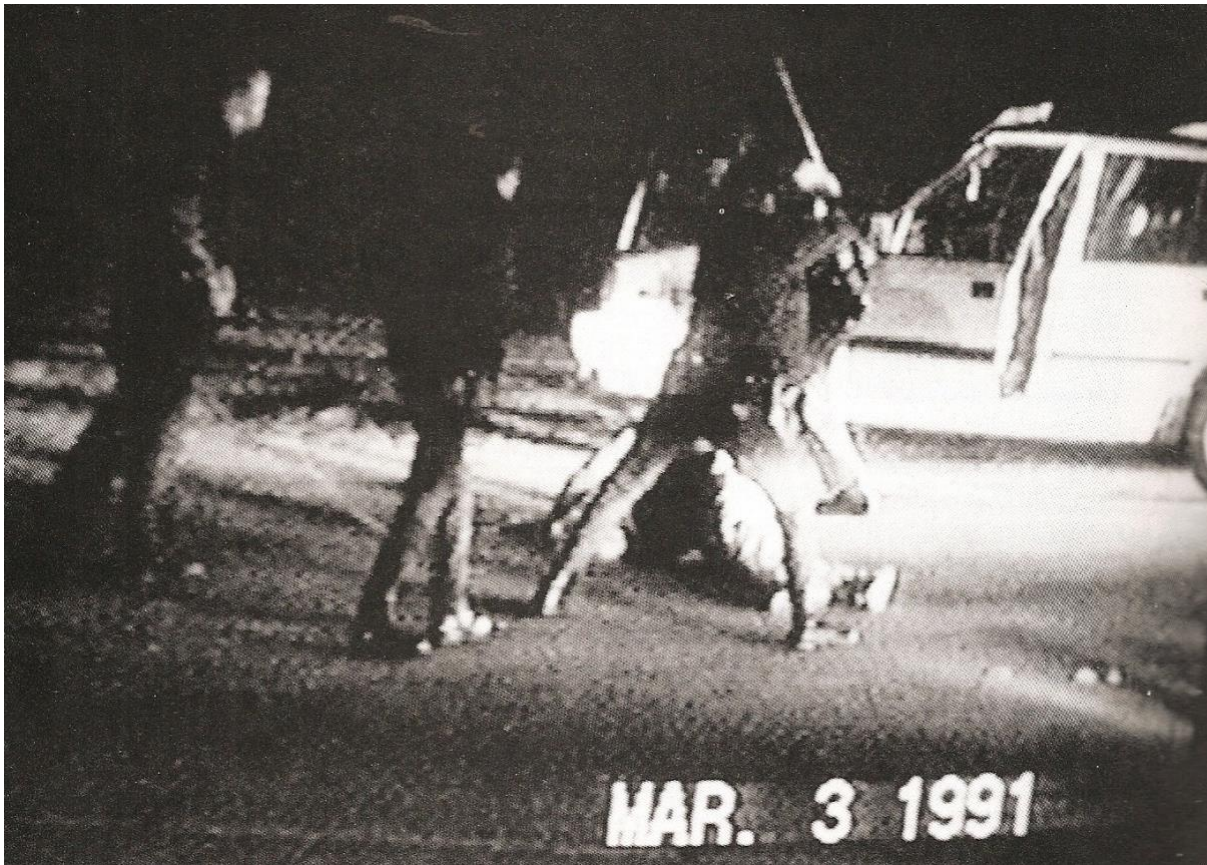


Figure 5: Still from the video of Rodney King's beating (Source: Public Domain).

As a result of footage of this incident being broadcast around the world and public outrage, the officers involved were put on trial for using excessive force. They argued they were under attack from a giant (King is over six feet tall) who continued to attack them even when prone and who seemed to be on drugs that made him feel no pain. King and his legal team argued he was merely defending himself, trying to stay alive; for many who saw the video, this seemed obvious. After all, he was on the ground for a large part of the assault and entirely unarmed. Yet the officers were ultimately acquitted with the video the prosecution argued showed *excessive force*, ultimately interpreted and understood by the jury as demonstrating *reasonable force*. Dorlin asks how this interpretative gap is possible (2020, xi-xvi). How can police action be seen as legitimate self-defense to some and needless violence to others? How can King's gestures clearly indicate defense to some and provocation to others?

To unpack this interpretive gap, Dorlin relies on Butler's writing on the case where Butler urges attention to the racialized field of intelligibility that structures the encounter between King and the white police officers. As a black male body, through the "phantasm of white racist aggression" King can only ever be understood as an "agent of violence" (Butler 1993, 11; quoted in Dorlin, 2020, xiv). Dorlin continues that "by defending himself against police violence, Rodney King became indefensible... the more he defended himself, the more he was beaten and the more he came to be perceived as the aggressor" (2020, xv). This distinction, only possible through a racialized framework of understanding "continually updated with material and discursive techniques of power" (2020, xv), relies on reversing what it means to attack aggressively and what it means to defend or protect. Regardless of the actions taken or movements made, there is an underlying framework that determines which bodies and social groups can be understood as agents of defense and those who can only ever be agents of violence. Essentially, nothing King could have done would have resulted in his actions being understood as legitimate. Even still, the murder of black people can be excused as self-defense even in the absence of any provocation. While Dorlin's work emphasizes the racist, colonial nature of the framework of intelligibility which means that only certain bodies can be understood as legitimately defending themselves I want to consider how her analysis can shed light on the matters I am looking at.

Defense of Power

To complete my argument that the construction of disorderly bodies as a group needing to be cleared from public space is not defensive but offensive and serves to reinforce the neoliberal status quo by justifying the harm and violence faced by those with less social power, I return to Butler and Smith. Butler echoes Dorlin's position above. Although self-defense is typically thought of as reactive, Butler explains that *privileged selves do not need any kind of provocation to strike pre-emptively to protect their privilege* (2020,12). This is

vital. When dealing with hierarchal relations of power, a threat does not need to be genuine, proportionate or even actually exist to legitimize brutal ‘defensive’ action. Fantasy of threat animates anxiety and justifies subsequent action. Any imagined threat, no matter how unlikely, is enough to begin fortifying barriers (Atkinson 2006; Atkinson & Blandy 2005) and policing exclusions. This phantasmic threat may be something literal and material, like the weapons of mass destruction the US and UK claim were held by Saddam Hussein to justify the subsequent military intervention in Iraq.⁹⁷ Yet, in the case of antisocial behavior, the perceived threat is more abstract. The most prominent potential threat I have argued, is strange working-class bodies hanging out. These bodies are marked by excess and ‘otherness’ (Tyler 2008). They loiter, seemingly without productive purpose. They do not use public space ‘correctly’—as a space primarily meant for passing through. The fact they exist so publicly as, to paraphrase Butler, ‘the wrong kind of bodies’ is precisely what makes them so distasteful.

Through the increasing policy focus on antisocial behavior in the twenty-first century UK and the subsequent construction of a disorderly class through this policy, the existential insecurity produced by neoliberalism has become attached to those described repeatedly by politicians as the root of disorder and insecurity. As I have elaborated here, the framing of disorderly people as the main cause of insecurity and instability has continually been repeated in the years following. Such a simplistic framing allows politicians to offer an easy solution. Improving life chances will not require dramatic socioeconomic or systemic change—it just requires a deepening of law and order and targeting this group for increased penalties and criminalization.

⁹⁷ See Gusterson 1999 for a more in-depth commentary on fears of nuclear weapons in the hands of ‘third-world countries’.

Revanchism—retaking space by seeking to criminalize and stigmatize certain behaviors and bodies, is the response to the construction of disorderly people as the root of existential insecurity. This is why, according to Smith, revanchism represents “a desperate defense of a challenged phalanx of privileges, cloaked in the populist language of civic morality, family values and neighborhood security” (1996, 207). In this chapter then, seeking to protect ‘good, law-abiding people’ from the disorderly becomes an attempt to deepen the power of the privileged. Rhetoric of moral decline and security become window dressing to justify and legitimize what, I contend, can only be called an unprovoked attack on those least responsible for societal insecurity. There is a switch in agency whereby those least responsible for existential insecurity become aggressors, responsible for societal ills. I see this as the logic underlying protectionist policies structuring behavior in public space and will continue to explore how it manifests in other measures and policies in the coming chapters.

Ultimately, there is a cruel reversal at the core of antisocial behavior where the poor and marginalized, those most exposed to harm by neoliberal capitalism, as well as most exposed to bad behavior, are transformed instead into sources of societal risk, danger and even violence. They not only attract more and more severe crimes with their disorderly presence but are powder kegs of potential violence themselves. This justifies their increasing criminalization and more brutal policing practices while providing an effective justification for the continual expansion of the private protected sphere to restore order and control.

Conclusion

There certainly are things that individuals can do that harm the collective whole. Driving an SUV places other road users at a greater risk of harm, decreases air quality and releases far more climate-heating emissions than a standard car (Miner *et al.* 2024). A small number of people fly so regularly that they are at risk of blowing the entire world’s carbon budget (Gösling & Humpe 2020). Even more minor, everyday occurrences can be harmful;

smoking subjects those around you to secondhand smoke and can trigger those with asthma. Some behaviors also can be seriously annoying. Holding a phone up during a concert and blocking those behind you from seeing can ruin their experience. We are an interdependent species and we live in a society. Nothing we do is in a vacuum. Our every action impacts others. Yet only some individual actions that harm or frustrate others are policed.

Antisocial behavior, a category of offense that has become increasingly common since its inception in 1998, targets disorderly people. These disorderly people are blamed not only for attracting crime but also for moral decline, lack of trust and societal insecurity. Here, I argued that the construction of disorderly people as a category serves to deflect blame from structural causes of instability, precarity and working-class visibility by transforming the marginalized into agents of societal harm.

This argument regarding the individualization and moralization of societal issues is vital to understanding the politics of protection. The politics of protection primarily frame social harm as stemming from problematic, ‘bad’ individuals. Given the prominence with which people rate antisocial behavior as a key problem in their area and point towards benign issues, like the existence of groups on a street corner, as evidence of insecurity, such a framing seems to have become broadly accepted. In this research, I am trying to understand what the politics of protection does to individual subjects and their relationships as well as whether it makes people safer. Here, I have found that such an individualistic and moralizing framing is mainly just smoke and mirrors. It does not make people any safer. Yet it allows politicians to offer an easy solution. Improving life chances will not require dramatic socioeconomic or systemic change—it just requires a deepening of law and order and targeting this group for increased penalties and criminalization. However, in distracting from the real source of instability and insecurity—neoliberal capitalism—ever-increasing violence and harm towards the marginalized is justified. Here, lines are not just drawn just between a

deserving and an undeserving population but also between a deserving population and a threatening population. Such a construction is hostile to a more social and caring politics.

Crucially, even when just existing or trying to survive, the marginalized, or those with less social power and grievability, can be perceived as potential threats. Legitimate defense is something that only belongs to the powerful; they can act offensively in pursuit of their interests and claim that they are acting in self-defense. The next chapter interrogates this point further, looking into what this right to claim victimhood and put up barriers against supposedly threatening others means for the production of subjects. Through the concept of a ‘bubbled’ or ‘bubble wrapped’ subject, I provide a concrete way to understand the implications of this offensive ‘defensive’ logic on subject production.

Finally, I have begun to introduce the strange way British policies legislate against some forms of annoyance while ignoring others. This thesis is interested in whose annoyance and irritation become not just policy issues, but issues of security. Therefore, I will continue to unpack the way protectionist policies seem premised on eliminating these uncomfortable emotional states for those with more social power, rather than providing material support or targeting structural causes of bad behavior or societal tension/distrust.

Chapter 4

Comfort and the Production of ‘SUV Subjects’: On the Right to not be Affected

“In today’s world, other people have become an obstacle to our individual pursuits. They impede our progress on urban streets and highways; they compete for parking spots and jobs; they drive up the price of housing and ‘ruin’ our favorite vacation spots with their crass enjoyments and noisy presence; they may even be criminals or terrorists.”

— Barbara Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy*

“Sovereignty is the name for a confused, reactive, often not-quite- thought view that there ought to be a solution to the pressure of adapting to ‘other people’ ... Sovereignty is thus a fantasy of jurisdiction. It is a defense of entitlement, reference, and agency.”

— Lauren Berlant, *On the Inconvenience of Other People*

Building on insights from the previous chapter where I sketched out the logics of defensibility, here I will begin theorizing the type of subject who comes into being in a world obsessed with safety and security.⁹⁹ I will argue that, constituted by policy that provides subjects with a right to not be affected by others, are subjects who find comfort—and the illusion of security—in their insulation from others. This comfort, and the ability to disavow one’s dependency on others, is also experienced as freedom. Further, the imperative to care for others or the future is experience as an imposition antithetical to freedom. Therefore, I contend that protectionist policies are constituting subjects who find freedom in their ability to disengage from the collective social whole and in not having to care about others—and crucially, in not having to feel bad about not caring and pursuing personal comfort. In making this argument, I aim to highlight the politics of comfort and suggest that discomfort is vital to democratic politics and progressive change.

I begin with Don Mitchell’s work on ‘SUV-citizenship’ (2005) to outline the new judicial subject of changing property relations who carries a bubble of personal space with

⁹⁹ Here, my understanding of subjects and subject formation is generally reflective of a Foucauldian understanding that technologies of power create subjects who govern themselves in the interests of power/the social order—but that subjects themselves also have power that they can exercise to challenge the social order (Foucault 1979, 1982). However, rather than engaging extensively with Michel Foucault I have drawn my understanding from Brown’s work on the subject and social power—which draws heavily on Foucault (2015, 2019).

them, even when in public. After outlining Mitchell's argument, focusing on the buffer zones constructed by *Hill v. Colorado*, and considering further insights from Margaret Kohn (2004) on this case, I concentrate on Mitchell's notion that the foundation for a new form of citizenship is being formed through 'bubble laws' that provide subjects with a 'right to be left alone'. This right changes the possibilities for association in public and, as I see it, creates the foundation for a radically individualized subject premised on the pursuit of personal comfort.

To understand the relevance of bubble laws and the right to be left alone to my research, I look at Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs). While PSPOs do not provide subjects with a literal bubble of private space in the same way that buffer zones do, in looking at trends in their content, I argue that they too are indicative of the right to be left alone. Crucially, I make this argument by focusing on how the aim of PSPOs is to preserve 'peace of mind' and 'quality of life' by preventing subjects from having to engage emotionally or be affected by anything they may encounter in public without their express consent. While they may be imperfect at achieving this, I see PSPOs as an attempt to provide a new right, the right to not be affected. Though I look at this right in relation to PSPOs specifically, it seems apparent in other protectionist policies, such as attempts to securitize the public realm and prevent disruptive protest. Finally, I suggest that the individual comfort gained in being insulated from others becomes a stand-in for collective safety and security in a neoliberal world marked by instability and precarity.

Then, to further outline how personal comfort comes to stand in for collective safety—yet ironically works against it—I move to consider why Mitchell relates his model of citizenship to an SUV (2005). After reviewing how SUVs are generally understood as providing safety and security despite the reality that they are far more dangerous for their occupants and other road users (Edwards & Leonard 2022; Monfort & Mueller 2020), I contend that the safety they provide is primarily limited to the ability to control one's

environment completely, staying comfortable and being able to tune out the outside world. To better flesh out this argument, I turn back to Wendy Brown's work on the subject of late neoliberalism. Brown sketches out a new subject who, aggrieved by a sense of lost entitlement, desires a self-destructive form of freedom marked by not having to care about others or the future. I theorize this in relation to my research, deepening my earlier account of antisocial freedom. To differentiate this analysis, I call the form of freedom theorized here 'freedom-as-disengagement' and consider it as integral to the subject I am describing who comes in being through late neoliberal protectionist measures and discourse. What is novel about this form of freedom is that it is not just freedom from dependencies; it is freedom framed in opposition to care. This freedom from caring is deeply affective and licenses actions that are not only harmful to others and the broader collective whole, but, even one's own future.

Overall, this chapter then has two key aims. The first is to begin theorizing an apathetic, radically atomic and individualized subject who comes into being through protectionist policies. This subject finds comfort in their distance from others and freedom in their disconnection from the collective whole; they are not just free from the will of others but also free from having to care about others or the future—even their own; it is a self-destructive form of freedom. The second key aim is to begin analyzing the relationship between comfort and oppression, an idea I continue to develop in later chapters.

On Bubbles and the Right to be Left Alone

To understand the connection between comfort, individualism, oppression and protection I first turn to Mitchell's work on SUV citizenship (2005).¹⁰⁰ Mitchell argues that there is a new model of citizenship emerging from laws and policies that expand private

¹⁰⁰ Also see Mitchell 2003, 2020.

personal control into the public realm; this mode of citizenship features a subject who fears collision, or unintentional interaction and engagement with others, and therefore aims to have the option to disengage from collective and public life.

The property relations outlined by Locke (1689) and Hobbes (1651) constitute the traditional liberal philosophical-judicial subject.¹⁰¹ This subject, as described by C.B. Macpherson, owns himself¹⁰² and his capacities, “owing nothing to society for them” (1962, 3). He relates to others through relations of exchange. Freedom for this subject is “a function of possession” and, at its core, the “essence” of his freedom is not being dependent on the wills of others (1962, 3). Such an understanding of freedom as emerging from being a self-owning subject who eschews dependencies is reminiscent of Hayekian freedom, understood as non-coercion, as discussed in the first chapter. Crucial to note for my argument here, the origination of this subject is intimately tied up with how he experiences freedom.

Yet in ‘The S.U.V. model of citizenship: floating bubbles, buffer zones, and the rise of the ‘purely atomic’ individual’ Mitchell makes the case that a new subject is emerging/being constructed by the courts through bubble laws (2005). He begins with Karl Marx’s assertion that subjects of capital are released from any kind of social or mutual obligation.¹⁰³ Made solely responsible for their successes and failures (a process that deepens under neoliberalism),¹⁰⁴ these subjects, according to Marx, are unchained—free to collide with others in (abstract) space. Just as in Macpherson’s description, relations between subjects are economic and based on exchange; they have no obligation to one another and find freedom in being independent and separate.

¹⁰¹ Also see Waldron 1988 for a discussion of the history of private property rights.

¹⁰² I use male pronouns here intentionally as I see the traditional liberal subject as gendered male.

¹⁰³ Also see Fromm 1942 for a discussion on capital granting ‘freedom from’ having to depend on others.

¹⁰⁴ See Lemke 2001 on neoliberalism and responsibility.

Yet Mitchell seeks to update this assertion by focusing on the idea of collision; he believes that we are witnessing a shift in the kind of individual Marx depicted. This subject is not just autonomous and detached, but “surrounded by a moving zone of autonomy... like a personal bubble of inviolable private property” (2005, 78). This personal bubble promises to act as a barrier, preventing any kind of unplanned collision. Collision here is any kind of interaction, engagement, or, as I will argue, emotional response to others or the world that one does not intentionally seek out. It is being affected without one’s express consent. According to Mitchell, subjects are increasingly seeking to avoid collision because collision “is as frightening as it is lonely: it is defined, for many, by an almost abject sense of insecurity” (2005, 78). Consequently, there is an association between the avoidance of collision and a feeling of security that I will further unpack throughout this chapter. Initially, I see collision as inducing insecurity because it is an event that we cannot control. We cannot control what others will do or what our response will be to them; this lack of control leads to a sense of insecurity. Indeed, in a ‘culture of fear’ (Furedi 1997; Glassner 1999), where strangers are viewed with suspicion and we tend to perceive the world as more threatening than it really is, collision, with its inherent unpredictability, goes from being annoying or irritating to feeling potentially dangerous. As a result, the law has aimed to respond to this feeling of insecurity by providing subjects with some insulation from collision by constructing a subject ‘surrounded by a moving bubble of autonomy’.

Hill v. Colorado

To understand how subjects are provided with this bubble of autonomy, Mitchell examines a series of laws he refers to as bubble laws. I will focus primarily on his account of the US Supreme Court’s approval of the constitutionality of Colorado’s bubble law in *Hill v. Colorado* (2000). This is because this case is most emblematic of the judicial right to be left alone. The statute in question sought to protect “access to health care facilities for the purpose

of obtaining medical counseling and treatment” by making it an offense if one “knowingly obstructs, detains, hinders, impedes, or blocks another person’s entry to or exit from a health care facility” (Colorado Rev. Stat. 18-9-122 2022). Here, the clinics being protected were women’s healthcare clinics that practiced abortion. Yet in ensuring that the rights of protesters were respected,¹⁰⁵ they were not banned from being near the clinics entirely. Instead, Colorado’s statute (versions of which have since been established in other states),¹⁰⁶ determined that individuals approaching healthcare clinics have a right to a bubble of impermeable personal space as they enter the building. Protesters or agitators are not allowed to approach within eight feet of those approaching the building and are also not allowed within one hundred feet of the healthcare clinics themselves. There is essentially a bubble of private space around people approaching the buildings and around the buildings.

Nonetheless, it is the bubble around individuals that is most pertinent here. Eight feet was determined to be the ideal size for this floating buffer zone to balance the rights of protesters to be heard and to communicate their message with the right of individuals to be left alone while seeking medical care and advice. Individuals have long had the right to be left alone in their private or residential space or when they are a “captive audience” (*F.C.C. v. Pacific Foundation* 1978; *Frisby v. Schultz* 1988), meaning when they cannot get away. However, the difference here is that this right to be left alone is being extended into the public realm.

The intention of this statute, to protect access to healthcare, is understandable—particularly when considering anti-abortion activists’ lengthy history in the US of charging women entering health centers with graphic, gory images; cruel and hateful accusations and

¹⁰⁵ The right to protest is not a stand-alone right and is based on the right to free speech, the right to assembly and the right to free association.

¹⁰⁶ In addition to Colorado, buffer zones have been implemented in Maine, Montana and Massachusetts (though in Massachusetts this is only if ordered by police). However, the Massachusetts buffer zone was struck down as unconstitutional in 2014 (Guttmacher Institute 2023).

even, in some cases, resorting to violence (Foster *et al.* 2012; Jacobson & Royer 2011; Winter 2013). However, the law ensures that everyone has this right to be left alone from *all* kinds of protest or otherwise unwanted interference; if it did not, it would have been illegal as a ‘content-specific ban’ and therefore an act of censorship and repression of a particular viewpoint. Indeed, the text of *Hill v. Colorado* clearly states that the statute is also applicable in other “confrontational settings” (2000, 717). Therefore, it has far wider ramifications in restructuring engagement and associational possibility in public space.

Analysis of Bubble Laws

Kohn also discusses *Hill v. Colorado* in *Brave New Neighborhoods* (2004). She sees the case as one fundamentally about political speech and democracy—about the rights of groups to make their voices and views heard in the public realm. She argues that the right to free speech and right to assembly are foundational to liberal democracy. People must be able to share and express their views freely; there also must exist physical, material public spaces for them to do this. She is careful to assert that this is not a rationalist argument; she is not stating that, if different groups are all given equal to air their arguments, the ‘best’ argument will automatically win (2004, 64). Indeed, this is clearly not the case as it denies the relevance of personal favors, lobbying, capital and emotional responses in determining winners in political decision-making.

Nonetheless, she focuses on how speech, in particular speech that is shocking, compelling or discomfoting, is often the only—or at least the most effective—means that minority groups / those with minority viewpoints have to express their point of view, change minds, reach hearts and gain supporters and allies. Eventually, through access to free speech and the ability to be heard and affect others then, they will retain the right and the possibility of becoming a majority. Kohn contends that our “ability to hear those voices ensures the viability of a democratic political system” (2004, 42). If alternative, marginal and minority

views are silenced because we find them offensive and upsetting, as with anti-abortion protesters, this is a slippery slope that ultimately undermines the democratic system. Such a perspective is reflective of an idealistic, agonistic view of democracy (Connolly 2005; Mouffe 1993, 2013).¹⁰⁷ However, I focus on Kohn's account as the affective dimension of her work, in particular, her emphasis on (dis)comfort reflects my interest in the politics of affect.

While Kohn views bubble laws as detrimental to democracy as they limit free speech, she claims they stop short of granting a right to be left alone (2004, 42). Instead, at the root of Kohn's argument is the idea that confrontation and collision, unexpected, unplanned and even undesirable experiences in the public realm, are the basis of a free and functioning democracy. Though I concur with Kohn's views on the importance of collision, and particularly of minority or marginal groups retaining the right to affect others—and even to make them uncomfortable—rather than being stigmatized and criminalized as ‘a small minority making things difficult for the law-abiding/hardworking majority’, I do not see this primarily as a free speech matter. Instead, I want to turn back to Mitchell and his contention that bubble laws *do* grant subjects a right to be left alone.

The Right to be Left Alone

An integral component of liberal democracy is the division between the private and public realms and the right to be left alone in private spaces. The government, and others, cannot arbitrarily interfere in the private sphere. Here, we have a reasonable expectation of privacy, and it is an offense to intrude on that.¹⁰⁸ Yet in *Hill v. Colorado*, according to Mitchell's account, this right to be left alone was extended to public spaces by giving subjects a bubble of privacy that others cannot approach or enter without being granted express

¹⁰⁷ Also see Wenman 2013.

¹⁰⁸ Of course, this is complicated by increasing surveillance technologies invading the private realm and tracking people's online activities.

consent in the public realm (2005). Within these bubbles, subjects can essentially exercise private property control over space by determining who is allowed to enter and who is not. This changes relations between subjects and the possibilities of association in public spaces.

Owning private property differs from owning an object. When one owns an object, they exercise control over it and can dictate how it is used and who it can be used by (Waldron 1988, 39). However, Mitchell contends that there is a slight difference when one owns private space as “it is a bundle of rights that imply some set of *duties* on the part of others, like the duty to stay out of private property without the property-holder’s permission to enter” (2005, 87). Therefore, by virtue of having ownership over space, others are subject to responsibilities regarding their engagement within that space. The property owner determines who can access the space; they have the authority to invite others in or to exclude them. If one enters a private space or private property without invitation, or against the wishes of the owner, they are committing an offense.¹⁰⁹

Mitchell argues that bubble laws give subjects these same rights within their eight foot bubbles. Simultaneously, they also imply a set of duties on others, since others must wait for permission to enter one’s personal bubble; if they do not, they will violate the law. This represents a shift. In the public realm, the obligation to avoid collision used to be with the individual; if you did not want to see or hear something, you needed to avoid it. Now, with bubble laws explicitly recognizing individuals’ interest in avoiding contact with others that may be upsetting or disagreeable and providing them with eight foot bubbles of private space to deflect such contact, there is a shift in obligation. People cannot be approached without their permission. It is up to all of us in public to get this permission before broaching someone’s personal space. Therefore, it is no longer up to individuals themselves to try to

¹⁰⁹ Typically, the offense would be trespassing—but as we will see, the list of offenses grows when privatization becomes more pervasive.

avoid unwanted collisions in public; it is up to all of us to take care not to collide with anyone unless they have clearly consented. This is why Mitchell contends that bubble laws lay the groundwork for a right to be left alone. It is a private sphere right that has entered the public realm. In this way, it also represents an expansion of the private protected sphere.

Therefore, in Mitchell's analysis, the problem, or thing that we should be worried about with bubble laws, is what they mean for the nature of citizenship and association. The flipping of rights and responsibilities so that we do not have a natural right to approach people in public and can deflect those who want to engage with us and be backed up by the law in doing so, is vital. He argues that in altering the possibilities of engagement that can take place in the public realm, the right to be left alone "determines the quality of civic engagement and through that the content of citizenship" (2005, 88). This is because "the nature of public space in part defines the nature of citizenship. It shapes modes of engagement, the visibility of alternative politics, and the possibility for unscripted (that is involuntary) interactions" (2005, 86). Here, politics is extended beyond what dialogue and debate is possible in the public realm. Mitchell's emphasis on citizenship not only highlights the importance of minority political views having the opportunity to be presented publicly but also the importance of spontaneous, unexpected and even undesirable interactions that are not political in a normative sense. Separate from political or public free speech, the associations and connections we make in the public realm matter.

Protecting the Public



Figure 6: Colchester PSPO sign (Source: Self, taken in Colchester’s Lower Castle Park on August 12, 2022).

Beyond the Colorado bubble law, Mitchell also sees the right to be left in laws regulating the behavior of/seeking to ban panhandlers; there are some intra-state variations in these laws, but broadly, like bubble laws, they ban panhandlers from approaching anyone in the public realm without permission. In mandating that those panhandling wait to be approached, people passing through space are granted the right to be left alone from an experience they might find annoying or distressing. According to Mitchell, this constructs a “public geography in which non-indigent people can move unhindered by panhandlers”

(2005, 91). In this way, the agency of those begging on the streets is suppressed. Whereas non-begging individuals can move through space unhindered, those begging have lost the ability to communicate openly with others. Therefore, even without explicitly giving subjects a bubble of personal space, the right to be left alone is implied in how these laws determine who can exercise agency and who cannot in public space—who must be passive and who can be active. Further, this account demonstrates that the implications of bubble laws go beyond the practice of political speech and instead structure interaction and possibility in space.

I want to build on Mitchell's contention that laws limiting panhandling are an extension of the right to be left alone. However, I will be considering this right in a less spatialized way. Rather than looking at policies or laws that ensure people cannot physically get near others, I will be looking at policy that protects subjects from being *affected by others*, through an analysis of PSPOs, one of the primary police powers used to 'protect' the people against antisocial behavior. While these may have spatialized aspects, I will argue that they grant a right to not be affected through protecting people from the possibility of being annoyed, irritated or exposed to anything they could find unpleasant in public spaces. They are about protecting 'peace of mind' and 'quality of life' and ultimately making space more comfortable for radically isolated, atomic subjects.

What are PSPOs?

The name 'Public Space Protection Order' instantly generates questions: is it the public or public spaces that are being protected? What are they being protected from? I will aim to address these questions by briefly reviewing the history of PSPOs. In doing so, I highlight their defensive logic, building on the framework I established in the previous chapter whereby protectionist policies create an inner group of selves worth defending, and an outer group of selves who can only be viewed as a threat and, consequently, become

expendable. The rights and freedoms of this outer group to use space do not matter; only the comfort of the inner group matters.

PSPOs are one of the most prominent Behavioral Control Orders brought in under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. They replaced ‘Designated Public Place Orders’, which gave the police the right to seize alcohol within a given area; Gating Orders, which allowed restrictions to public access to areas as needed to control antisocial behavior and Dog Control Orders, which placed restrictions on the behavior of dogs and posed responsibilities on their owners in the public realm. However, PSPOs are far broader than the orders they replace; they are meant to give local authorities control over how best to limit antisocial behavior or other undesirable, disorderly behavior in their areas. They consist of two components: the first is a set geographic space that the order applies to, known as the ‘restricted area’.¹¹⁰ The second is a list of behaviors and practices that are prohibited in the area or behaviors and practices that must be done in the area (*Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014*).

Decisions on what behaviors to regulate do not require democratic or public input.¹¹¹ They can be put into effect by a single council representative and are valid for up to three years (*Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014*). The campaign group, The Manifesto Club,¹¹² has found that PSPOs are often passed by a group of elected council

¹¹⁰ See Figure 6 of Colchester’s PSPO map to see how large these spaces can be. The sideways triangle in the middle, which covers the entire city center and expands well beyond is the area subject to the PSPOs. Often, they cover entire city centers or downtown areas.

¹¹¹ When establishing a PSPO, the local authority should consult “the chief officer of police, and the local policing body, for the police area that includes the restricted area; whatever community representatives the local authority thinks it appropriate to consult; (and) the owner or occupier of land within the restricted area” (*Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014*). It is concerning that the police are considered more relevant actors to consult than the people who regularly use an area. However, despite not legally needing to, many councils will still consult the public on PSPOs and abandon poorly supported initiatives.

¹¹² It is relevant to note that the Manifesto Club, while they have done some useful work collating and seeking information on PSPOs, are libertarian and have an approach to them that I do not fully endorse. In particular, they continually refer to PSPOs as ‘busybody powers’, a framing that suggests hostility towards government interference and a belief in personal choice (2023a). While I am interested in radical and collective notions of freedom in this thesis, I do not see all government interference as harmful and, rather than focusing on the act of

representatives, but they also note that councils told them they also have brought PSPOs in at the request of the police (2023a).¹¹³ Therefore, similarly to defensible space, PSPOs represent a deepening of the control that police and unelected bureaucrats have over public life. To establish a PSPO, a local authority must believe two conditions have been reasonably met. The first is that “activities carried on in a public place within the authority’s area have had a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality, or it is likely that activities will be carried on in a public place within that area and that they will have such an effect”. The second is that “the effect, or likely effect, of the activities—is, or is likely to be, of a persistent or continuing nature, is, or is likely to be, such as to make the activities unreasonable, and justifies the restrictions imposed by the notice” (*Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014*). Therefore, these orders seek to limit the possibility of behavior that undermines ‘quality of life’ and are subject to the vagueness of ‘detrimental effect’. Yet, these are subjective qualifications; it is not clear whose ‘quality of life’ is meant and what activities are ‘detrimental’.

There are hundreds of PSPOs in effect across the UK in nearly every council area;¹¹⁴ while some councils only have a few, others have dozens. Common PSPOs include bans on public drinking, bans on begging, orders against loud noises or music and bans on skateboarding (Manifesto Club 2023a). However more bizarre PSPOs include several banning swearing (Burke 2019), prohibiting cycling “in a wanton or furious manner” (Peterborough City Council 2017), bans on climbing trees (Rugby Borough Council 2022),

interference itself as a key problem of PSPOs, I want to focus on the particular activities and behaviors that are banned and construct an argument pertaining to how PSPOs frame encountering annoying, frustrating or upsetting phenomena in public as harmful.

¹¹³ At the time of writing, new policy is being debated that would allow the police to issue PSPOs without needing to consult local councils (*Criminal Justice Bill 2024*).

¹¹⁴ The Manifesto Club found that, between October 2014 and January 2019, 595 PSPOs had been issued; however, twenty-eight councils did not respond to their Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, so these figures are not a complete picture (2023a).

an order against practicing parking in public car parks (BBC 2022)¹¹⁵ and even one forbidding charity fundraisers from making people feel guilty (North Somerset District Council 2023). While some PSPOs ban activities outright, others simply ban them if they are having (or could possibly have) a negative effect on others. For example, you can ride a bike in Southend-on-Sea, but you cannot use “bikes in a way that has a negative effect for others” (Southend-on-Sea City Council). The same goes for drinking in Chelmsford; you can drink, but you cannot “drink alcohol in a way that causes harassment, alarm, distress, nuisance or annoyance to other people” (Chelmsford City Council 2023). The subjectivity of these bans gives those enforcing them leeway to determine whose behavior is permissible and whose is not. Whose drinking is acceptable, and whose is a bother? It is also striking that, rather than certain behaviors being limited outright, they are limited only when others find them irritating. This gives a great deal of power and agency to those external to these kinds of behaviors and can license discrimination against the vulnerable in the name of ‘protecting the public’ and preserving ‘quality of life’.

Failure to comply with a PSPO is a criminal offense subject to an on-the-spot fine of £100. Refusal to pay this can result in prosecution and up to a £1,000 penalty in the Magistrates’ Court. The Manifesto Club found that as many as forty-eight councils pay private companies on commission for issuing Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN) (2023a) They suggest that this incentivizes these firms to fine people. Given there have been bizarre cases in the news where people have been fined for fairly innocuous activities, such as feeding the birds in a park, this seems possible (Khorsandi 2024).¹¹⁶ This notion that there is an incentivization to penalize people for violating a PSPO for financial reasons rather than for is

¹¹⁵ This PSPO, which applied to the London Borough of Hillingdon, was removed in 2023.

¹¹⁶ While the person who was fined for feeding a pigeon a chip in Khorsandi 2024 was issued an FPN, this was not for violating a PSPO; it was for violating an obscure byelaw. Nonetheless, the article makes the case that FPNs seem to be given out arbitrarily to plug holes in local authority funding. Therefore, it is equally applicable to the case being made here that more FPNs are being given out each year for violating PSPOs.

also supported by the ever-increasing number of FPNs given out each year¹¹⁷ as depicted in Table 1. Nonetheless, whether or not fiscal motivations are relevant, it is striking that the number of penalties for violating PSPO regulations has been increasing dramatically year on year.

YEAR	NUMBER OF PENALTIES FOR PSPO VIOLATIONS
2015	470 (Press Association)
2016	1,906 (Press Association)
2018	9,930 (Manifesto Club FOI)
2019	10,413 (Manifesto Club FOI)
2020	5,491 (Manifesto Club FOI)
2021	7,970 (Data below)
2022	13,443 (Data below)

Table 1: Penalties Given for PSPO Violations 2015-2022 (Source: Manifesto Club 2023a).

Criticisms

PSPOs have been criticized for criminalizing “entirely normal behaviour” (Manifesto Club 2023a), particularly that of children and young people (Squires & Goldsmith 2017) and for their targeting of the poor and vulnerable (Brown 2017; Brighthouse 2018; Pattison 2020).¹¹⁸ With their vague language and subjective framing, they are indicative of a superficial and moralizing view of crime and civil society that eschews structural factors (Johnstone 2016) and is largely ineffective at targeting complex issues. Instead, they just fast-track people into the criminal justice system (Liberty) and deepen cycles of crime and poverty. Finally, reflective of Kohn’s earlier argument, they have been criticized as damaging to human rights, particularly those relating to political participation (Stanford 2019) and essential freedoms (Garrett 2015a; Manifesto Club 2023b).

¹¹⁷ Other than 2020 and 2021 when the UK was in and out of COVID-19 lockdowns.

¹¹⁸ Also see Garrett 2015a.

Yet a major criticism of PSPOs worth focusing on is that they target the homeless (Heap, Black & Devany 2022; Sanders & Albanese 2017). Amid concerns that councils were relying on these powers to criminalize poverty, The Home Office issued guidance in 2017 stating that PSPOs could not be used to target vulnerable individuals and that the orders “should not be used to target people based solely on the fact that someone is homeless or rough sleeping, as this in itself is unlikely to mean that such behaviour is having an unreasonably detrimental effect on the community’s quality of life” (LGA 2018, 7). However, this has not led to substantial change; instead, targeting the homeless via PSPOs occurs via stealth, with the proliferation of new orders that target the behaviors of indigent populations. These include orders banning begging (as in Figure 6), leaving possessions on the street, blocking doorways or lying down in public, sleeping in certain areas during darkness (Your Voice Wrexham 2016), or “sleeping in a manner which has a detrimental impact on the quality of life of others” (Southend-on-Sea City Council). All these ban activities that homeless individuals, particularly those sleeping rough, will inevitably partake in (Heap, Black & Devany 2022). By banning practices associated with the homeless rather than the state of being homeless itself, councils have been able to claim they are adhering to equality and rights legislation despite much criticism from rights groups, campaigners and organizations representing and supporting rough sleepers (Greenfield & Marsh 2018; Liberty; Sanders & Albanese 2017).

Beyond these bans more specifically targeting rough sleeping, campaigners have also asserted that other PSPOs, such as those banning swearing or drinking, are also disproportionately used against indigent populations (Heap, Black & Devany 2022). In the same way that the laws restricting panhandling that Mitchell considered are indicative of a right to be left alone in how they restrict the agency of those panhandling, these provisions criminalizing the behaviors associated with the homeless also curtail their agency. They aim

to push these populations outside of central urban spaces. I argue that this is because the existence of these people makes many of those who are not marginalized feel uncomfortable (Kohn 2004, 170); their existence reminds non-indigent populations of the structural violence of the capitalist system we all live in and how precarious all of us but the very wealthiest are (Standing 2011). This sense of discomfort is then perceived as harm (Kohn 2004, 171). Consequently, as I will continue to unpack here, rather than protecting anyone, PSPOs seek to make public spaces more comfortable for the non-indigent population by prioritizing a ‘peace of mind’ premised on not having to see the most visible symptoms of capitalism’s harm. While PSPOs are framed as making space more welcoming (Croydon Council 2022; North Somerset Council 2022; Swansea Council 2022)¹¹⁹ and safer for the public (who after all, as implied by the name, either need to be protected or have their public spaces protected) I contend that they do so by instilling a right to not be affected.

Don’t Stand so Close to Me

While broad, unclear and difficult to enforce, I argue that PSPOs are an attempt to target the possibility of unwanted collision in public spaces. Collision here is any interaction or exposure that is not explicitly sought out by the individual traversing the space. It is not always limited to interpersonal interactions and can also refer to the interpenetrative possibilities of loud sounds or music, as well as unwelcome smells,¹²⁰ which are also legislated against in some PSPOs. Here, I am considering collision as being affected, being made to feel, by something outside of one’s control. Though some PSPOs may contain spatialized aspects, overall, I see them less as giving bubbles of private space and more as ‘bubble wrapping’ individuals moving through space. The difference is that, while there is no

¹¹⁹ Also see Chelmsford City Council 2023; Haringey Council 2024. While more councils use this language, I have cited an indicative list of several who feature this prominently on their websites or on documents pertaining to proposed or current PSPO regulations.

¹²⁰ See PSPOs that focus on the smell of drugs as a particular problem (Barnet Council 2022; Brent Council).

set amount of space that someone must leave when approaching someone, others are prevented from affecting the subject; they cannot cause them to feel anything or otherwise impact their peace of mind or quality of life. Here, peace of mind and quality of life are equated to not being affected by others. Just as bubble wrap prevents an object from being harmed by the outside world, cocooning it, PSPOs are indicative of a legislative framework that aims to do the same.

Comfort

Having outlined policy that is expanding private control through the impetus not to affect others without their consent in public, I want to focus on my contention that this insulation or bubble wrapping that subjects get as they move through space is premised on comfort. I will argue that this comfort comes to be a stand-in for security in an unstable world where the security of the social has been stripped away. Instead, we get the ‘comfort’ of not having to interact with others, not being challenged and of not having to care about others.

Collision involves confrontation. Whether one collides with labor union picketers, environmental protesters, young people drinking in a public square or the homeless, collision threatens to force apprehension. Some collisions force subjects to deal with cruel and difficult realities that are often swept under the rug and kept out of sight and out of mind. Some collisions force subjects to account for how their daily behaviors are harming the planet and the world around them. Some collisions just force subjects to try to tolerate those with views they profoundly disagree with or lifestyles that they do not understand. Collision then, in my understanding, threatens to interpenetrate the self; it fractures contentedness and the comfortable “fantasy” of bounded, sovereign individualism (Berlant 2022, 3). It fractures a ‘peace of mind’ built on being able to keep one’s head down and mind one’s own business without having to care for how going about one’s own business may impact others. As Price, McNally & Crang remind us, “Comfort *is* political” and so here I will argue that comfort, as a

key feature structuring interaction, becomes a substitute for genuine security and reinforces a denial of interdependency (2021, 4).

According to Kohn, part of the violence inherent in bubble laws is that they fail to acknowledge the need for those seeking representation and recognition in public to be confrontational—to make others uncomfortable. She asserts that “the power of speech often lies in its capacity to disturb and agitate (2004, 63). Hence its power is in causing discomfort. While she understands the need to protect against some kinds of harassment and intimidation, after all, allowing harassment by majority groups and those with more social power would also diminish the associational capacities of space, she makes the point that protest and fighting for change requires collision stating, “protesters always cause discomfort in those whose views they seek to change” (2004, 63). Indeed, she continues that “the discordant protests of others that are unpleasant to hear (are unpleasant) because they remind us about what is unpleasant” (2004, 43). In Kohn’s account, the role of protest or of seeking representation and inclusion in public more broadly is to make others uncomfortable. Comfort here is almost like a bubble that needs to be popped to shock subjects out of their apathy and complacency so that they can engage with the world around them and care. Collision in her account can achieve this. It makes people feel. It can make them confront their inherent biases, ingrained views and ideological positions. It can confront their apathy and disaffection. It can also have the opposite effect and further annoy or anger someone, heightening their resentment. It can also make someone so sad or hopeless at the scale of a challenge that they retreat from the difficulties of the world. I do not want to be naïve in suggesting that confrontation automatically makes someone more empathetic and caring. Yet it retains the possibility of challenging de-democratizing apathy.

Comfort and Security

Ultimately, in discussing how bubble wrapped subjects find comfort in their insulation from the problems of the world, I argue that this comfort provides the illusion of security. To make this argument, I turn to Cindi Katz. In ‘Me and My Monkey: What’s Hiding in the Security State’, Katz looks at the proliferation of personal security practices and devices targeting children and their parents, premised on the notion that children are in extreme danger from strangers and external threats. She contends that, rather than dealing with “the political, economic, and social effects of capitalist globalism” that harm children and make social reproduction a struggle, the contemporary harms faced by young people are rescripted and individualized as issues of personal insecurity (2008). Similar to what I have been arguing in this thesis, she contends that the genuine structural harms faced by young people are ignored in favor of an obsession with individualized security meant to protect against dangerous strangers. Yet these do not make anyone safer.

Instead of making anyone safer, Katz outlines how these devices are instead “supposed to offer peace of mind” (2008, 314). This ‘piece of mind’ seems premised on feeling as if one is entirely in control and safe in an existentially insecure and unstable world. In Katz’s account, parents’ peace of mind is based on having tracking information to monitor and keep tabs on their children’s interactions with the outside world. In my analysis, I see peace of mind in being able to ‘keep calm and carry on’ without having to feel guilty about seeing someone begging for money, annoyed at rowdy street drinkers or loud skateboarders or morally outraged/disgusted by smelling cannabis. The comfort of being able to flow freely through space unimpeded makes one feel secure in themselves, fortified against the world. Yet Katz argues that ‘peace of mind’ based on a feeling of being in control and secured against the world is a “false sense of security” (2008, 317). After all, the factors causing insecurity are structural, not individualized.

She continues to assert that striving for ‘peace of mind’, rather than structural change, is indicative of “the very retreat from the social that ushers in so much of the apparatus of security” (2008, 321). Peace of mind is thus profoundly antisocial in a normative sense. Katz calls it “a privatized existential state”, arguing that “its desirability marks a defeatist recognition that collective peace is virtually impossible” (2008, 321). It is marked by an acceptance that we cannot (or should not) solve broader problems of violence, harm and existential insecurity, but we can find a bubble of personal comfort to shield ourselves from it. We can find a way to feel safe and enjoy our lives. Thus, we feel safe and insulated from the outside world, without actually having made ourselves or those around us any safer. Applying this to my account, rather than collective safety and wellbeing or equal livability, which would require dismantling neoliberal capitalism, subjects settle for a sense of individualized personal comfort in being insulated against unwanted intrusion or interference by others. After all, the kind of changes that equal livability and prioritizing collective safety require would be deeply discomforting for many in the Global North as ‘quality of life’ in the Global North is built on the oppression and exploitation of the Global South in terms of labor and resources. Katz’s analysis also highlights how dismantling the social obliterates our ability to survive and flourish together. It is not that people or the state have chosen security over freedom. Instead, we get neither. We get an individualized form of comfort, a peace of mind that does not provide security or freedom.¹²¹

In losing the freedom to associate freely and engage with others in public spaces we do not gain any security and are not any safer. Instead, we gain a sense of comfort and peace of mind, knowing that we can move through space unimpeded or interrupted. We know that others are liable to be penalized if they try to engage with us or unintentionally affect us

¹²¹ A paradox emerges in that this peace of mind and comfort seem often to be premised on designing comfortless spaces with hostile, spiky architecture and a lack of places to sit and relax.

against our will. All of this reflects Michael Sorkin's contention that, securitization, measures and policies that respond to culturally produced "threats" or 'nightmares', "in the guise of offering us 'comfort' – narrow the terms of our freedom of association, interaction, and choice" (2008, xv). Rather than these regimes of control improving safety, they instead provide a sense of comfort premised on restricted freedoms and association. In the first half of this chapter, I have aimed to establish how a new atomic individualism is emerging out of laws governing public spaces; this individual subject pursues privatized comfort as a means of protection against having to deal with the realities of an unstable, existentially insecure world. In the next section, I will consider the relationship of personal comfort to freedom and argue that pursuing a form of freedom premised on being disconnected from others is to pursue collective harm.

On Gigantic Vehicles

To further develop my argument, I want to address Mitchell's assertion that the kind of subjects formed through bubble laws are analogous to SUVs and their increasing prominence on the road. In doing so, and in extending the SUV metaphor, I do not intend this chapter to become one on why SUVs are bad. I am instead focusing on the metaphor as I find it useful in developing my argument that there is a collective harm in the comfort that is felt in radically isolated, atomic individualism.

Whereas SUVs are designed to drive off-road and contain features useful for scaling and descending mountains, they are primarily bought for use in wealthy, paved city center locations. In the UK, most SUVs are in London, with the large majority in the wealthy (and well-connected by public transport) Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (Possible 2023). Given the first SUV was designed to transport US soldiers over rocky terrain in World War II, it seems bizarre that most SUVs are now in locations where their special features are

entirely superfluous. Why are so many people buying SUVs who do not technically need them?

Like with defensive strategies for moving through and engaging with the public realm, most agree the chief factor in explaining the rise in SUVs is that their gigantic size provides the driver with a sense of safety and security through being insulated from others (Edwards & Leonard 2022; Gladwell 2004; Thomas & Walton 2008). Further, they offer a feeling of total control over one's environment. This reflects Mitchell's assertion that, in an SUV,

Cocooned in a sealed chamber, behind tinted glass, with the temperature fully controlled, and the GPS system tracking, and sometimes dictating, our every turn, our every stop and start, we are radically isolated from each other, able to communicate only through the false connectedness of the cell phone. We ride high and sovereign; we are masters of space; we are safe against all who might intrude, all who might stand in our way (and against the weather, too) (2005, 96).

An SUV is therefore symbolic of this form of individualism that provides a false sense of safety and security through limiting unwanted collision, prioritizing personal comfort and offering a sense of total control in an uncontrollable world.¹²² This also reflects Stephen Graham's contention that the SUV functions as a "defensive capsule", providing the "urban middle classes" with a barrier against the "risky and unpredictable urban life 'outside'" (2004, 51). Yet while one may feel more secure driving an SUV, they are not safe. Due to their heavy weight and high centers of gravity, SUVs are prone to roll-over incidents (Kallan, Arbogast & Durbin 2006), have a slower stopping speed than regular cars, and

¹²² Also see Lauer 2005 who makes a similar argument that SUVs are desirable because they provide 'safety' and 'space'. However, the safety and space they provide are not literal. Instead, the 'safety' SUV drivers feel is related to their sense of insulation from others and the 'space' they get is distance from "the hazards of modern civilization" (151).

overall, come with a higher risk of dying for both the driver and their passengers (Godart 2023; Monfort & Mueller 2020).

If SUVs do not make anyone safer, why are more being sold every year (Cozzi & Petropoulos 2021)? While one certainly could argue about their status as a luxury object, I want to focus on their function as a ‘defensive capsule’. I assert that, like my argument in the previous section, and building on Mitchell’s depiction of the SUV as providing a sense of control and mastery over one’s environment, SUVs provide a sense of comfort that has become a stand-in for, and perhaps more important than, actual safety. In this way, it does not matter whether or not one is in more physical danger driving an SUV, as the danger of collision, of being affected, or of being uncomfortably crammed into a hot, sticky tube carriage, is more pressing. If one were to take public transport rather than drive, they would be statistically safer, but they would be surrounded by a variety of stimuli and people they cannot control. They might face delays, gross smells, annoying sounds and chatty strangers—all of which would violate their personal bubble. It would be far less comfortable. Therefore, these forms of transport feel substantially riskier than driving when ‘peace of mind’, insulation and the comfort they provide have become stand-ins for genuine safety and security.

Individual Comfort vs. Collective Harm

Yet, there is a socially violent edge to SUV ownership I want to focus on. They are, after all, not only more dangerous for their occupants. While many find them to be a visual nuisance and their size makes them a nuisance on roads and in small spaces like parking lots, they also directly and indirectly cause harm. The SUV is designed as a passive fortress of security that functions as a violation. They are substantially more likely to kill pedestrians in a collision than a medium-sized car (Edwards & Leonard 2022; Monfort & Mueller 2020) and their large size causes them to have poor visibility, which can increase the likelihood of

accidents (Hu & Cicchino 2022; Kidd & Brethwaite 2014). Combine this with their slower than average stopping speeds (Rakotonirainy *et al.* 2006), and they entail a dramatic risk to those around them—who ironically, the SUV owner seems to be trying to protect themselves from.

SUVs also cause significant indirect harm. They are huge polluters, emitting substantially more carbon dioxide than a standard car. SUVs emit 900 megatons of carbon dioxide each year (Cozzi & Petropoulos 2021); this is more than the emissions from the UK and the Netherlands combined (Milman 2020). It is estimated that if SUV drivers were a country, they would be the sixth biggest emitter. Their large size also means they have a larger material footprint and require great amounts of material from violent and ecologically harmful extractive industries. Finally, and most starkly, the increase in SUV sales represents the second-biggest rise in global emissions, behind energy use (Cozzi & Petropoulos 2021). Given the deadly consequences of the climate crisis, with over four million people dying globally from outdoor air pollution alone (World Health Organization 2022), and uncountable numbers displaced by extreme weather events and subject to deaths from heat and cold (IPCC 2022), the proliferation of carbon-intensive, materially intensive vehicles among the world's wealthiest people is certainly a substantial factor in causing collective harm.

It is also ironic that, despite their immense social harm, there is little broader political interest in adapting a comprehensive range of policies aiming to control SUV use, as has been done in France (Dragonetti 2024; Laker 2023).¹²³ This is because the ability to buy whatever you want is a fundamental part of how British neoliberal capitalism functions. There is a deep irony in this. What we need protection from, what is actually making us unsafe—unfettered societally destructive global capitalism—is considered sacred freedom. Meanwhile, what we

¹²³ The mayor of London has indicated some interest in considering similar policy in London. Yet the major political parties have not (Horton 2024a). Indeed, this would be seen as another 'attack' in Rishi Sunak's faux war on motorists.

are told the state is protecting us from—annoying behaviors in public—is really just an inconvenience or irritation rather than a deep social harm. This is fundamental to the politics of protection under late neoliberal capitalism—it encourages focus on the threats that are most useful to the maintenance of power rather than those that are actually threatening to the people (Sorkin 2008, xiv).

Not My Problem

Ultimately, in highlighting the harm caused by SUVs I want to raise the next part of my argument. The false security of comfort is not just harmless. It is premised on an antisocial form of freedom that is destructive to the collective whole. Whereas for Macpherson’s subject of possessive individualism freedom is premised on the ability to own the self and not depend on the wills of others, and the new judicial subject depicted by Mitchell experiences freedom from their ability to exclude others from their personal space, I have aimed to expand this understanding through my analysis of PSPOs and the right to not be affected. Now, I will argue that, for SUV subjects, freedom is premised on the ability to choose to disengage affectively from public life—to be free from caring. To better understand this form of freedom, which I call ‘freedom-as-disengagement’ because it relies on disavowing our innate relationality and dependency, I turn to the conclusion of Brown’s argument in *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*.

Freedom-as-Disengagement

In ‘No Future for White Men’ (2019) and ‘Neoliberalism’s Scorpion Tail’ (2020) Brown couples Friedrich Nietzsche’s work on nihilism, the devaluation of value which lessens consciousness, with Herbert Marcuse’s work on repressive desublimation and happy consciousness to claim that there is a new subject emerging from wounded entitlement who would rather “burn down the planet rather than adapt” than lose any power in it (Brown 2020, 43). Here, Brown expands her earlier work on a deeply undemocratic subject who not only

desires its own subjectification but is “complicit in its subordination” (2006, 702). Central to this account is a self-destructive form of freedom that is premised on being free from having to care about others and the future. Crucial to this account is a new subject formation premised on being released from the restraints of care.

Brown’s argument goes as follows. Not only has neoliberal economization drained the world of meaning, making “selling one’s soul quotidian, rather than scandalous” (2019 164), but its nihilism has devalued values, releasing subjects from the restraint of the force of conscious. Without any values, subjects are freed from the “restraint, self-blame, and self-abuse that conscious imposes” (2019, 164). As a result, this desublimated will to power negates any kind of care for the other or future generations. This is the result of the hollowed-out husk of neoliberalism’s moral project, with appeals to traditional values and morals utilized as blunt instruments of power.

Then, Brown turns to Marcuse and the concept of repressive desublimation, or a world in which access to pleasure and desirable stimuli has become oppressive and non-liberatory as subjects desire immediate gratification rather than freedom from oppression. Thinking these two theories together and in relation to the late neoliberal moment, Brown describes her account of the late-neoliberal subject. Without any imperative from consciousness to care for others, and awash in a world of trivial and addictive stimuli, subjects lack any kind of ethico-political concern and accept the flaws and faults of society—even celebrate them. These subjects are in a state of happy consciousness where they have access to so many enjoyable and pleasurable experiences and stimuli that they do not desire anything more and are prevented from fully coming to consciousness. Brown gives a damning account of the nihilistic subject of happy consciousness as “free, stupid, manipulable, absorbed by if not addicted to trivial stimuli and gratifications ... not just libidinally unbound, released to enjoy more pleasure, but released from more general

expectations to social conscious and social comprehension” (2019, 167). Ultimately, this is a state of being free from needing to care about anything but one’s own comforts and pleasures. Yet, while this freedom from having to care for anyone other than the self, and license to pursue whatever one wants, appears to be freedom (since one is not hindered by the dependencies of others or having to consider their needs), it functions to facilitate the oppression of the status quo. Crucially, these subjects accept their oppression and resist one another rather than power.

The way in which care—both for others, the world and even the future—is framed as antithetical to freedom and something to escape from is key to understanding the subjectification inherent in protectionist policies. According to Brown, this subject orientation allows us to understand our “broken relation to the world demographically outside and temporally after one’s own”, or how the Global North can continue its violent ecological and socioeconomic politics without a care for how this will impact the global poor (within and outside of national borders) as well as future generations (2019, 169). This is because, in a world drained of meaning with subjects who desire nothing but power and revenge for their woundedness, there is a loss of care. Here, her analysis of a wounded subject seems to be focused primarily on straight white (typically conservative) men in Trump’s America who feel that their entitlements are slipping. This group would rather bring the world to the brink of climate catastrophe than make changes to their own individualized comforts (meat eating, excess driving and flying, etc.); these changes are not just uncomfortable, they rely on having to recognize our relationality and to care, taking steps to promote equal livability. Yet the subjects Brown depicts care only about their personal comforts and do not even care about the long-term effects, even when the effects will presumably be felt by them. As she puts it: “If white men cannot rule the planet, there will be no planet” (2019, 180). Nonetheless, despite the narrowness of this group, her analysis is still useful to understand the generalized

crisis of care that plagues the UK, as discussed in the Introduction (Chatzidakis *et al.* 2020). After all, there is a pervasive sense of woundedness and lost privilege among a broader white, middle-class group than the one Brown depicts. Further, the UK's policies, particularly their climate policies, are nothing if not self-destructive, almost begging for climate collapse and catastrophe.

Brown's account can also explain the aggressive monitoring and policing of collision I have been exploring. Collision entails the possibility of being affected, of being made to feel. To the subject Brown describes, this is seen as a gross violation of their individual autonomy and freedom to enjoy themselves without having to think about how their actions always impact others. This helps us to understand the hostility towards those who try to pop bubbles of unconsciousness, or who, just by their presence, make others feel and reinvigorate social consciousness. Eschewing this, the apocalyptic subjects detailed by Brown experience a disinhibited freedom she depicts as "unbridled and uncultured", a freedom gained from not having to care about tomorrow or those around you (2019, 171). Without rooting in the social, this "freedom becomes doing or saying what one likes without regard for its effects, freedom to be genuinely without care for the predicaments, vulnerabilities, or fates of other humans, other species, or the planet" (Brown 2018, 71). Here, Brown's 'good freedom' is theorized further. I would call this freedom, freedom-as-disengagement, given it is premised on being able to disengage affectively from the social whole. As Brown highlights, this is not just disembedding spatially (Rodgers 2007), but about disavowing *moral care or concern* for the present and the future itself—not just the future of others, but even one's own future.

Brown expands on this point regarding a generalized culture of carelessness through a discussion of Arlie Hochschild's account of interviewing right-wing Americans in *Strangers in Their Own Land* (2016). Hochschild mentions how her interviewees mention their desire for freedom "from the strictures of liberal philosophy and its rules of feeling" (2016, 219). In

particular, she notes how they feel frustrated by the sense that they are supposed to care. They feel that they are supposed “to feel compassion for the downtrodden” but they do not want to (2016, 219). This notion that one is supposed to care and her account of how this imperative to care is experienced as a violation corresponds to my argument in this chapter. SUV subjects do not want to care. They do not want to engage. They want to be comfortable. Comfort is premised on being free from caring about anyone other than the self in the current moment. Brown notes that Hochschild’s subjects also disdain environmentalism due to it relying on caring for others—both around the world and for future generations.

This freedom-as-disengagement then is the freedom to lock up behind a fortress and pursue private pleasures and comforts, including those that are socially harmful, like excess consumption, as the world falls apart outside. This is akin to the protagonist’s brother in the post-apocalyptic film *Children of Men* who dedicates himself to collecting art as the world falls apart around him, justifying it through the chillingly delivered line “I just don’t think about it” (2006). Why bother thinking about anything other than how one feels? Caring about others is a violation. Or one could think of it as the ability to sit back, idling in one’s SUV with the air-conditioning blasting in a world of climate collapse. To think about the external world and all those one is connected to, to allow affect into one’s privatized bubble, or to become a porous subject, is not just uncomfortable; it is far too painful. When genuine security and protection from the existential harms outside is not possible, personal, individualized comfort and ‘peace of mind’ become appealing alternatives.

While this subjectification is not total, and indeed Brown’s account is hyperbolic and polemical, overly focused on a particular type of Trump supporter, it is important to recognize how provisions against affecting others, becoming more frequent in the law, impact subjectification and encourage a self-destructive disavowal of interdependency. This disavowal of interdependency is rooted in a generalized lack of care for those beyond the

confines of one's familial home. The argument in this chapter aligns with my broader concerns that increasing individualization, excess policing of contact and seeking to design and regulate public spaces to minimize the possibility of being affected is dangerous for human safety and survival. If we do not care, cannot come together and instead pursue individualized comfort and peace of mind, we cannot mount any kind of resistance to pressing global challenges arriving from neoliberal capitalism.

Against Comfort

In highlighting the social and collective harm of SUVs and coupling this with Brown's analysis of self-destructive subjects, I have aimed to show that the right to not be affected and avoidance of collision is not harmless. Instead, I have suggested that disavowing our innate dependency is a harmful act of aggression against the safety and wellbeing of the collective whole. This is because it prioritizes private, individual comfort over working together. This private comfort then licenses acts that can be profoundly harmful to others and even to the self; it is premised on harm, even as it casts others as sources of harm to be protected from. As subjects fail to recognize their interdependency in the web of life, they fail to realize that an SUV, or a privatized hyper-individualistic existence, will not protect them. I have taken Mitchell's argument beyond perhaps his original intention. However, my aim here has been to address my central research question and begin considering how a new subject is constructed through policy that claims to be protecting the people from the 'threat' of other people. Yet this 'threat' seems to be primarily the threat of being made uncomfortable or having to care. Being protected from these things may be comfortable, and ease one's mind, but in the long run, I have argued that this comfort is antithetical to both personal and collective safety. I have also suggested that comfort is intimately bound with the continuation of the status quo and want to conclude by stating that change, including the kind of change that would actually enhance collective safety and wellbeing, will require learning how to

become comfortable with discomfort, notably the discomfort that comes from a realization of our dependence on others.

Conclusion

Overall, this chapter has aimed to understand the relationship between comfort, freedom and a new individualism arising from shifting property relations. I have argued that this individualism is based on a turn towards personal, private comfort or ‘peace of mind’—understood as being able to avoid collision or unwanted interaction with others—rather than collective safety or security. While this form of individualism is desirable and pleasurable in its comfort, I have also suggested that it depends on disavowing one’s dependence on others. I see this as a problem both because the pursuit of individualized comfort and pleasure is destructive to the collective whole, and because it prevents people from being able to come together to resist the forms of power that are actually causing existential insecurity. After all, coming together and engaging with others can be deeply uncomfortable. Yet personal, private comfort will not protect us from existential threats.

With its emphasis on subjectification, this chapter begins fleshing out an answer to my first research question on the kinds of subjects that come into being through protectionist policies. Crucial to this subject form is that it is premised on a particularly affective form of freedom: the freedom of being able to disengage from the collective social whole, or freedom from having to care point blank. As Brown puts it, it is “freedom from care of the morrow” (2019, 171).

Care is theorized in the negative here, as something to escape from. Indeed, I have argued that protectionist policies seem to bubble-wrap subjects so that they are free from having to be affected by anything that they do not want to. This releases them from the imperative of having to care about anything or anyone else. Consequently, I see care as closely bound with interdependency. With the freedom-as-disengagement releasing subjects

from having to care, they can deny their dependency and reliance on others. Yet this is a fantasy; I see it as little more than the freedom to suffer collectively.

The next chapter builds on this subject-form, considering how SUV subjects are brought together in ways that provide the illusion of social contact without popping their privatized existence. In doing so, I also will challenge the fantasy of total sovereignty and the idea that we can fully disavow our dependency on others. At the same time, however, I consider how dependency is inherently twinned with anxiety. After all, it is not pleasant to recognize that factors entirely beyond your control, having to do with those you cannot control, are vital to your life. In this way, I understand the appeal of being a bubble wrapped subject. Yet I will move to argue later in this research that there are more progressive, social forms of seeking comfort that, instead of relying on placing barriers between the self and others, rely on embracing interdependency and forming broader networks of care and support. In doing so, I gesture towards the possibility of a more social form of freedom.

Chapter 5

Fear and Desire: POPs, Passivity and Power

“I am put in mind here of the student who complained about how inferior her experience of Europe was compared to Disney World:

At Disney World all the countries are much closer together, and they show you the best of each country. Europe is boring. People talk strange languages and things are dirty. Sometimes you don't see anything interesting in Europe for days, but at Disney World something different happens all the time and people are happy. It's much more fun. It's well designed.

While this sounds a laughable judgment, it is sobering to reflect on how much Europe is attempting to redesign itself to Disney standards.”

— David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*

“We have yet to understand that if I'm starving you are in danger. And if people think that my danger makes them safe, they're in trouble.”

— James Baldwin in 1987 Interview with Mavis Nicholson

Cities are marked by contrast. They represent intoxicating, endless possibilities for pleasure and excitement—yet they are filled with so many unknowns and, along with the possibility of pleasure, the possibility of harm or unpleasurable experience is always around the corner.¹²⁴ The sense that anything could happen is what makes them so thrilling. It led Italian novelist Italo Calvino, to write “cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears” (1972, 44). Several decades later, Zygmunt Bauman muses on the topic, stating:

the wide and narrow streets of the everyday life city, its spacious and cluttered squares, bright and dark passages, near and distant quarters of the city – tempt with the promise of a gamble: there are exciting adventures and unspeakable dangers mixed in proportions that the hapless stroller cannot calculate, and coming in a succession that s/he cannot anticipate (2003, 26).

Here, Bauman emphasizes that urban life means encountering entirely unknowable risks. In this chapter, I will be considering this push and pull of the city, focusing on attempts to remove the fear of unpredictability through privatization. Specifically, I will be looking at

¹²⁴ See Wilson 1991 for an account of the gendered way that cities offer distinct freedoms and risks for women.

privately owned public spaces (POPs). These spaces feel safe and comfortable for the middle and upper classes and are therefore ideal for SUV subjects. I then argue that these spaces prioritize passivity and what John Hannigan calls ‘riskless risk’ (1998), rather than interaction, activity or collective responsibility. In this way, I focus on the intersubjective dimension of protectionist measures in this chapter, looking at how SUV subjects encounter one another while maintaining their affective distance. My concern with this is how a passive orientation is antithetical to democracy, understood as the people’s capacity to act. Finally, I assert that increased interaction and engagement, even if it is scary, is a crucial first step to reinvigorating the demos as a collective rather than a collection of passive individuals.

To make this argument, I first outline a theoretical framework for understanding how planners and authorities seek to remove the risk inherent in urban life while emphasizing its desirable features. Following Michael Sorkin, I consider how this process of sanitization, coupled with top-down forms of control and opportunities for fun and entertainment, remakes the city as if it is a theme park (1992). In addition to Sorkin’s work in *Variations on a Theme Park*, I look to Mike Davis’ work on middle class demand for insulation and segregation from lower classes (1990, 1998) and Hannigan’s work on ‘riskless risk’ (1998, 2007) as emerging from a history of race and class anxiety. Here, I emphasize Sorkin’s concerns that this mode of design is antithetical to democracy.

I then introduce the concept of POPs and consider their history in the UK due to local authority funding cuts and the hegemonic common sense that private firms are better equipped to design and maintain public spaces. After considering the appeal of POPs, I move to look at the interaction, sociality and democratic (im)possibility they entail. Building on Kohn’s work on the intersubjective dimension of space (2004, 2008), I argue that, with their emphasis on comfort, safety and entertainment, in addition to their exclusivity, POPs curtail the possibility of interaction and dialogue. In this way, they are indicative of a shift whereby

the people are brought together only as a passive audience, interacting not with one another but only with 'the spectacle' (Debord 1967) of urban life. POPs are thus a means for SUV subjects to engage with the city in a risk-free way.

As an alternative to a disengaged, individualized means of bringing people together, I then examine shared space. Considering this concept just as much a philosophy as a traffic management method, I outline how shared space forces people to become active agents and to work with one another through casual forms of interaction as they traverse space. Rather than turning to external power and forms of authority for protection, people instead come to recognize their own power over space and, with this, gain an understanding of their personal and collective responsibility towards those around them. I see this forced interaction as a means to reinvigorate a recognition of interdependency among subjects. Yet I stop short of fully endorsing this mode of design. In addition to not touching on privatization and how it impacts intersubjectivity, shared space fails to solve the problem of power differentials and how it impacts interaction and possibility in the public realm. So, while shared space is useful for thinking about how interaction and engagement are vital yet frightening because they represent a recognition of dependency, the roll-out of shared space schemes alone is insufficient to address the problems considered in this thesis. Therefore, I finish this chapter with a partial solution and a problem of challenging power.

In making this argument, I am not trying to idealize ownership as the most essential quality of public space. Instead, following Kohn, I see ownership, accessibility and intersubjectivity all as factors that determine the 'publicness' of space (2004, 2008). These factors can be present to various degrees in different spaces. Further, there can be privately owned spaces that are more inviting and welcoming for marginalized groups than publicly owned spaces (Mitchell & Staeheli 2006, 153). Yet I see a problem with the spread of POPs in the UK due to their excessive sanitization, exclusivity and the loss of democratic rights in

these spaces. Further, I want to build on Sorkin's argument that they are problematic for democracy; I do not mean this in a normative sense. Instead, I see the encounters and relationships we can or cannot have as foundational to political struggle.

In this way, this chapter aims to address the second half of my first overarching research question on how subjects come to be constituted and relate to one another through protectionist measures by building on the previous chapters where I looked at the cultural fear of strangers, the defensive logic of protectionist measures and the formation of a subject who finds freedom in being able to disconnect affectively and disavow moral care and concern for the collective whole. In doing so, I argue that the interests of power are maintained in keeping people apart and passive. I also begin to address my secondary question on how subjects can come together to resist the structural forces causing them harm—though this will be addressed more fully in the next chapter.

Theoretical Framework

Before looking at POPs in the UK, I first want to outline a theoretical framework for understanding how privatizing public space functions as part of a broader urban strategy to provide access to the excitement of the city whilst minimizing risk and fear. I will first look at Davis' work on how this trend arises from middle class desire for insulation from the lower classes (1990, 1998) before turning to Hannigan's work (1998, 2007), which outlines how sanitizing inner-city spaces functions to 'revitalize' cities by attracting the white middle classes.¹²⁵ I then focus the concept of 'riskless risk' to describe urban spaces that contain all the excitement and thrill of the city in a carefully controlled, predictable way. Finally, I turn to Sorkin's seminal work on this mode of urban design as akin to the aggressively themed and regimented environment of Disneyland (1992).

¹²⁵ Also see Smith 1996 on revanchism.

Davis and Class Warfare

Davis' work, in particular his theorization of how fear, and the construction of 'fears' or 'nightmares' function to justify and deepen power, has been vastly influential to this thesis (1990, 1998, 2002).¹²⁶ In *City of Quartz* (1990) and *Ecology of Fear* (1998) Davis sketches out how power has constructed a hyperreal, hypersecuritized landscape in Los Angeles that serves the interests of capital and elites at the expense of working people and the natural environment. Davis particularly emphasizes how classed battles over the design of the city, fought for "the defense of luxury lifestyles" have led to "new repressions in space and movement", an "obsession with physical security systems" and "the architectural policing of social boundaries" (1990, 223). Key to defending a luxurious way of life then is restricting the movement of lower classes and maintaining rigid boundaries from them via security infrastructure. This reflects my account of the defensive logic of protectionist policies and discourse from Chapter Three. Yet Davis is not talking about the extremely wealthy and powerful here.¹²⁷ Instead, he is talking about the American middle class who demand "increased spatial and social insulation" from the lower classes (1990, 156). As highlighted in the previous chapter, insulation from others is comfortable, and perceived as security in an insecure world. Davis' work then also reflects this desire for the illusion of security through separation.

Yet an environment built solely for security is no fun. It is austere and sterile—a city drained of all that gave it life and energy. This leads Davis to state that "the accelerating privatization of experience associated with life in gilded ghettos and gated suburbs has created a craving for crowds, street life, and spectacle" (1998, 393), particularly among the younger middle classes. To feed this desire for the excitement of the crowd and the possibility

¹²⁶ Also see Davis & Monk 2007.

¹²⁷ For a similar argument that is focused on elites and the extremely wealthy, see Atkinson 2020.

of street life without compromising on distinction and separation spaces designed to cater to this function to exclude lower classes and discourage disorderly behavior. This occurs through “architectural and semiotic barriers” or means of communicating to particular people that they are unwelcome (1990, 257),¹²⁸ alongside harder barriers like gates around parks or bans on rough sleeping and begging. While exclusivity may be intentional and is often a result of trying to build ‘nice’ and ‘safe’ spaces (Low 2009), privatized and securitized environments subtly (and sometimes unsubtly) homogenize crowds so that they are more comfortable for the middle and upper classes.

The result of this mode of design is the creation of bourgeois utopias (Fishman 1987), for the upper and middle classes where they are separated from and secured against intrusion from the lower classes, or “‘unsavory’ groups and individuals, even crowds in general” (1990, 224). Here, “hetero-geneity (is) virtually impossible” (Davis 1990, 231). Then, once undesirables are filtered out, those who enter the space are carefully controlled in a “Skinnerian orchestration, so that they move from one point of consumption to another (Davis 1990, 257). Consequently, by providing a sanitized simulacra of street life, “a seamless continuum of middle-class work, consumption and recreation, without unwonted exposure” to others is formed (Davis 1990, 231). In this way, the desirability of the city is maximized while ‘unwonted exposure’ to crowds and people unlike oneself is minimized. Yet while Davis uses the metaphor of a ‘fortress’ to describe this form of design, despite being military-like, it is not dull. Subjects may be carefully controlled, but they are having fun! However, to better understand the desirability of these spaces beyond their promise of insulation, I turn to Hannigan.

Fantasy City

¹²⁸ Obvious examples include ‘spiky’ or anti-homeless architecture and security guards.

Hannigan also writes about how privatization functions as a tool to attract the middle classes back to the city (1998, 2007). He understands this to be through the creation of a new urban form “located at the intersection of leisure, consumption, tourism, and real estate development” that he calls the ‘fantasy city’ (Hannigan 2007). In the fantasy city, like in what Davis calls the ‘fortress’ city, anything that could be upsetting or difficult is obscured; “all the messiness of the urban space, its unpredictability, homelessness, poverty, social strife and protest is hidden. Instead, it is replaced with a ‘prettified’, homogeneity and uniform cleanliness” (Hannigan 2007). Also similar to Davis, Hannigan roots the formation of this kind of space in “the middle-class desire for experience and their parallel reluctance to take risks, especially those which involve contact with the ‘lower orders’ in cities” (1998, 7). Therefore, though using different terminology, both Davis and Hannigan are describing a process whereby cities are sanitized so that the middle class SUV subjects can engage in leisure without having to be affected by the potentially upsetting presence or behaviors of strangers—or those unlike themselves.

Hannigan also traces how this form developed, rooting it within the history of ‘white flight’, when the American white middle classes fled inner cities and large cities beginning in the 1950s and 1960s in favor of the (at least perceived to be) safer and more comfortable urban environments where they could be surrounded by people like themselves (Fishman 1987; Crowder 2000). Further, white flight continued into the 1980s and beyond due to racial tension (Kye 2018) and a perception decline in inner cities due to rising crime rates (Cullen & Levitt 1999; Liska, Logan & Bellair 1998). This is the same anxiety out of which ‘defensible space’ was born (Newman 1972). While Hannigan is primarily looking at this urban form in the US, and British racial segregation in the twentieth century is more complex, rooted in

Britain's imperial legacy, with the term 'white flight' not as commonly used,¹²⁹ what is crucial to take from Hannigan's account is that the fantasy city is a means to make white middle classes, who began feeling unsafe and unwelcome in the city, start to feel more comfortable there. Attracting back these classes, with their increased capital and spending power, is seen as vital to the economy of cities.

Whereas white British people may have not left cities in such dramatic numbers, the twentieth century in the UK was one of tremendous racial strife. While Hannigan writes about "urban riots in the late 1960s which depicted the inner city as a battle zone and wasteland" in the US (Hannigan 1998, 40), the UK was beset by a series of race-related riots and violent clashes primarily between black Britons and the police across the country notably in Brixton¹³⁰ (in London) and Toxteth (near Liverpool) as well as in Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham. The rioting peaked in the 1980s in Thatcher's Britain, as her economic reforms plunged the country into a deep recession with skyrocketing rates of unemployment (Hayes 2015, 256-269; Peplow 2019). Thatcher also increased the powers of the police at this time and these new powers were disproportionately used to target black Britons and migrants, many of whom had come to the UK from Commonwealth countries following World War II and encountered disdain and discrimination. These groups were also subject to violence at the hands of the police (Peplow 2019). Consequently, British inner cities were seen as spaces of discord, chaos and potential violence. Therefore, without trying to oversimplify the differences between the US and the UK, or force a comparison, in both countries, the white middle classes in the mid-to-late twentieth century felt a sense of anxiety about economic decline and racial tension in urban centers.¹³¹

¹²⁹ I have mainly found the term being used in the right-wing media, who cite studies from anti-migration think tanks to argue for the need to 'reclaim' cities for white British people. See Johnston 2005 as an example of this.

¹³⁰ As captured in the 1983 song 'Electric Avenue' by Eddy Grant.

¹³¹ For a nuanced account of racial and class tension in the twentieth-century UK, including the racialized anxiety and fear whipped up by far-right politicians and the right-wing media, see Peplow 2019.

Yet, according to Hannigan, after this period of tension was an attempt by developers to reattract those who had left the inner cities to ‘revitalize’ or ‘regenerate’ the downtown and inner-city spaces. This is also discussed in Smith’s work on gentrification as a means to recivilize the city by repopulating it with the white middle and upper classes after a period of perceived decline blamed on the poor and people of color (1996). Therefore, I see it as important to highlight how this new fantastical form of design emerges from a sense of urban decline and fear, as I will consider how POPs also emerge from a more contemporary sense of decline. Yet, to attract people back to the city, spaces not only needed to feel safe and comfortable for those who had fled to the suburbs. People also needed “to have somewhere to go which was exciting, safe and not available in the suburbs” (Hannigan 1998, 47).

Hannigan considers how various new flagship projects emerged to fulfill this task from luxurious malls, to the ‘festival marketplace’, to other large-scale entertainment venues. What all these spaces have in common is that they promote consumption as an idyllic experience and are explicitly “aimed at a specialized target market: affluent, educated, young adults” (1998, 49). These reattract those with capital back to the city to spend it. These projects are akin to “glittering, protected playgrounds” that provide fun things to do, for those who are allowed access (1998, 7). While Hannigan does not explicitly discuss pseudo-public spaces here, I will argue that they fulfill the same function; they attract more desirable people to spend and consume. Specifically, they attract those who are wary of excess social mixing and unpredictable environments.

Ultimately then, the fantasy city is an attempt to have it all: the joy, excitement, energy, liveliness, cultural difference and spontaneity of a traditional city, without any of the perceived negatives—exposure to homelessness, poverty, crime or racial and class conflict. Following Davis, this entails the privatization of public space to insulate the middle classes as they work, live and play. This trend emerges from a desire to attract wealthier people with

more social power back to urban centers following racial and class strife in the twentieth century. At its core, the fantasy city is an attempt to “provide middle-class residents with a measure of urban experience in what is essentially a suburban context” by ensuring total “predictability and security” (Hannigan 1998, 68). It is therefore a suburbanization and sanitization of urban space to make it feel safe and comfortable.

Riskless Risk

A particular concept I want to focus on is ‘riskless risk’. This is what the fantasy city aims to provide and why the sanitization it brings is so appealing to those who prioritize comfort and not being affected (Hannigan 1998, 67-68). After all, the fantasy city emerges to satisfy the risk-averse middle-classes want for entertainment and experience. Riskless risk then, originally used by Russell Nye to discuss the appeal of rollercoasters (1981), is a sense of chance that is not really a chance because the outcome is knowable and predictable. To engage in riskless risk is to take an action or go to a location that gives the illusion of riskiness, when in fact all the possible outcomes are fully known. In this way, it is a carefully controlled and regulated simulacrum of risk or spontaneity. Riskless risk is used to describe the fantasy city because it relies on providing middle classes with inner city spaces that replicate the fun and spontaneity of street life, but in a way that is regulated and carefully controlled. In particular, the riskiness inherent in broader social mixing between classes and races, political activity like protests or leafletting and other alternative and more active uses of space is not present.

Las Vegas, a city that has captured the imagination of scholars across a range of disciplines from postmodern philosophy (Eco 1973; Baudrillard 1989), to social sciences and cultural theory (Fox 2005; Rothman 2003) to architecture (Venturi, Brown & Izenour 1972) and, of course, gonzo journalism (Thompson 1971), is emblematic of riskless risk in action. Acknowledging Rothman and Davis’s criticisms of the broader obsession with Las Vegas and

how many of the aforementioned accounts fail to account for the reality of everyday people's lives in and around the city (2002), I do not want to further contribute to overblowing the significance of Las Vegas as a city. Nonetheless, I want to briefly consider Don Mitchell's description of a desire for Vegas-like design emerging from social agoraphobia and widespread paranoia. This is because I find Mitchell's account useful for further fleshing out the concept of riskless risk.

Mitchell describes Las Vegas as a place in which "every social act, and every *risk*, is scripted in advance" (2009, 243). Indeed, whereas Vegas gives the illusion of endless possibilities from becoming a millionaire to meeting interesting people to unforgettable nights of fun and revelry, the experience of going there follows a carefully ordered script. Each experience from the moment one pulls up at the casino is carefully scripted and controlled. Anything that could disrupt this script, like a protest or homeless people, is suppressed or else hidden away (Rothman 2002, 103). As Mitchell puts it, this predictability is "the true attraction of Las Vegas ... You know the odds, and you know they are not in your favor and that the house always wins, but that is better than not knowing what is around the next bend or about to happen in the park across the street" (2009, 243). This is why Vegas is emblematic of riskless risk; it is a space of hypercontrol and knowability, where everyone who enters suspends awareness of this fact. It provides a technicolor sense of wonder and possibility, without any unknown variables. After all, those visiting Vegas know what is going to happen to their wallets.

Yet, as previously mentioned, Vegas is an extreme example. Despite the apparent "Las Vegas-fication" of London's Stratford (Minton 2022b), a neighborhood home to one of the UK's largest shopping malls and a variety of expensive themed experiences and opportunities

for entertainment,¹³² plans to build a twin to Las Vegas' MSG sphere, which attracted a diverse range of media attention (Barrett 2023; Bryant 2023; Lodge 2023),¹³³ have been quashed at the time of writing and seem unlikely to go forward. The UK does not have its own Las Vegas. Nonetheless, riskless risk appears in the city in more subtle ways.

A brief example is through the practice of buskers being forced to audition and receive permits to perform in central London (including in the major tourist areas likely to get the highest footfall), the London transportation network and other privatized city spaces across the UK (City of Westminster 2021; Covent Garden; Liverpool ONEb; Transport for London). Whereas street magicians and musicians are a vital part of the life and color of the city, in forcing these performers to audition and then granting permits only to those deemed 'good' enough, and limiting the space in which the performer is allowed,¹³⁴ the possibility of encountering the unexpected is curtailed. After all, avant-garde, bizarre and groundbreakingly novel forms of performance are unlikely to be selected in favor of more traditionally entertaining, and family-friendly, acts. Acts that seem too dangerous or too loud are also not allowed. Here, the 'risk' inherent in allowing anyone to perform and seek attention in public is removed through the introduction of auditions and permits. While this is ostensibly a means to ensure quality, I understand it as a top-down process of control that removes the riskiness of what was once an entirely unpredictable experience of encountering a busker.¹³⁵

Theme Parking

¹³² Stratford was 'redeveloped' as part of the UK's hosting of the Olympic games. The games were meant to boost the local economy. The area therefore includes thousands of luxury flats, the UK's largest shopping mall, the world's largest tunnel slide and themed entertainment venues—such as the Abba Voyage Arena where you can watch a hologram Abba concert. It certainly has aspects of the fantasy city.

¹³³ Also see Makwana 2023; McRedmond 2023; PA Media 2024; Ravenscroft 2018; Vickers 2023; Wainwright 2021.

¹³⁴ While part of a permit will stipulate where the performer may busk, in some areas, like London's Covent Garden, performers are given a literal circle of space that they must not leave.

¹³⁵ This is not to say that some do not busk unlicensed. In less heavily policed areas this is still common. Yet in popular, central locations and in privatized spaces where there is intensive security, it is too difficult to do this for a substantial period of time before being kicked out.

Finally, few have been as influential in describing the rise of hypercontrolled, privatized environments as Sorkin. In *Variations on a Theme Park*, Sorkin outlines how these Disney-like spaces blend an “obsession with security” with a desire to maintain rigid control and keep people entertained and pacified (1992). However, I want to focus on Sorkin’s concerns that this mode of design is dangerous for democracy.

According to Sorkin, in remaking and sanitizing space, “by stripping troubled urbanity of its sting, of the presence of the poor, of crime, of dirt, of work”, this mode of design advances a “happy regulated vision of pleasure ... as a substitute for the democratic public realm” (1992, xv). Here, Sorkin is not necessarily discussing formal political possibilities that are disallowed in private spaces. Instead, he is worried about the impact on democracy when people are kept pacified and separated through an urban form that is focused on entertainment. Here, people are an audience, rather than a collective demos. As Sorkin puts it, the privatized city simulates “its connections” and obliterates “the power of its citizens either to act alone or to act together” (1992, xv). In this way, what is so damaging for democracy is the intersubjective impact of the fantasy city. In pacifying public space, it also pacifies the people as consumers of an ‘experience’—just as they are at Disneyland—and, as Sorkin puts it, “there are no demonstrations in Disneyland” (1992, xv). Therefore, in looking at POPs as indicative of the fantasy city, I will follow Sorkin in focusing on the democratic ramifications of the privatization of public space, understood as people’s capacity ‘to act alone or to act together’. In doing so, I will build on my analysis from the previous chapter where I outlined a hyperindividualized subject emerging from policy that aims to protect from the threat of being affected by others. However here, I will focus on how these subjects come together—without actually coming together.

Here, I have described a mode of spatial design based on Davis’ (1990, 1998), Hannigan’s (1998, 2007) and Sorkin’s (1992) description of postmodern design that blends

middle class desire for exposure to the excitement and spontaneity of the city without mixing with social inferiors or encountering any risks. I have also introduced the argument I will continue to develop in this chapter that such a mode of design encourages passivity, turning people into an audience rather than an active, democratic citizenry. Hence SUV subjects can pursue pleasure, without sacrificing their freedom. Yet these theoretical texts are broad in scope, considering both pseudo-public spaces as well as spaces that are more obviously private, like shopping malls and theme parks. Further, they have focused on the US. While I still hold that this theoretical framework will be useful for unpacking my topic, I now turn to consider how this theory can help me better understand POPs in the UK.

POPs



Figure 7: Granary Square POP in King's Cross, London (Source: Matt Kieffer, licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0).

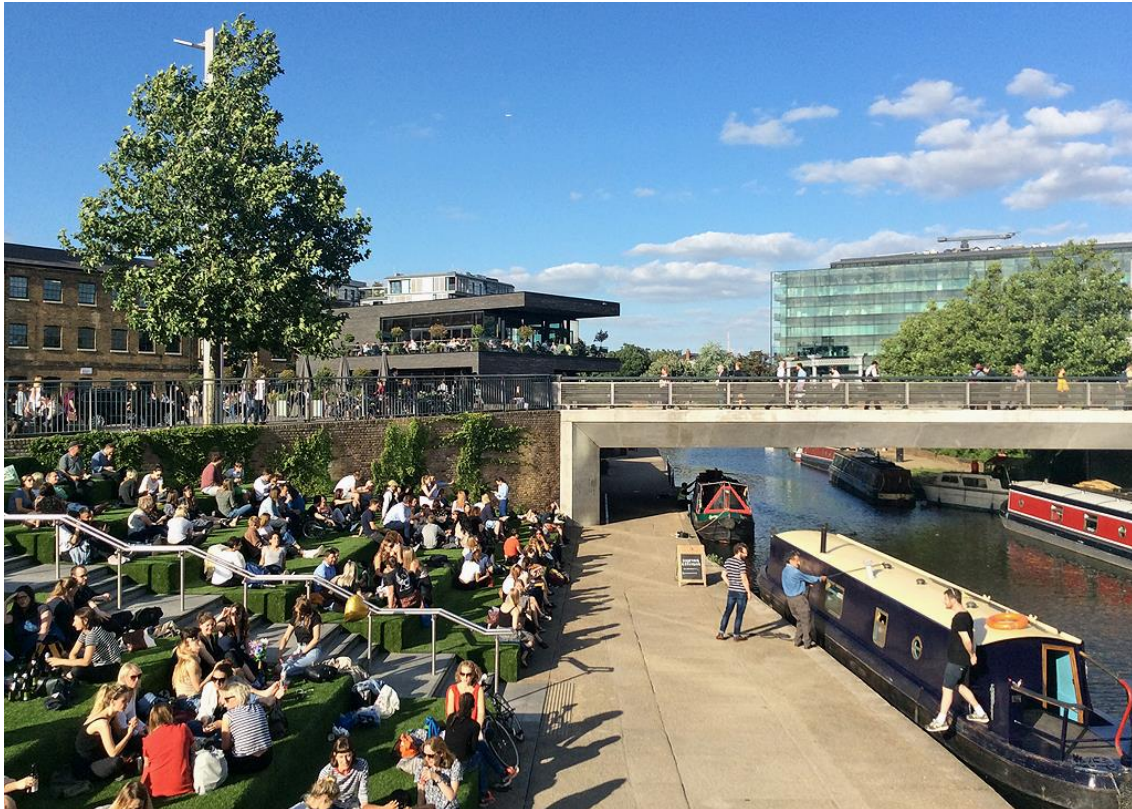


Figure 8: Steps at Granary Square POP in King's Cross, London (Source: John Sutton, licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0).

Privately owned and managed spaces appear in various forms from shopping malls (Crawford 1992, 3-30), festival marketplaces (Boyer 1992, 181-194; Goss 1996; Rouse 1984), Business Improvement Districts (BID's) (Anderson & Arms 2022; Coleman 2004; Ward 2007)¹³⁶ and gated green spaces. Spaces that are publicly owned, or owned in common, are also subject to temporary privatization for one-off events, such as music festivals or food fairs. While I acknowledge the variety of ways that the privatization of the city may appear, here I want to focus on spaces that, at first glance, and for many who use them, appear public. These POPs (Kayden 2000) are interesting in that they are not obviously private. While a reasonable person is aware they are in a private space when in a shopping mall, they do not have this same expectation in a centrally located, publicly accessible square (Shenker 2017b). Indeed, for some, it is only after violating a regulation set by the private landowner and

¹³⁶ Also see Minton 2009, 37-58.

attracting the attention of a private security team that they realize they are in a privately owned space. Due to appearing public, POPs are also sometimes referred to as ‘pseudo-public space’.

Yet all public spaces are subject to a level of regulation and exclusion regardless of their ownership status. Whereas the state and the police force have the power to exclude in public spaces, in privately owned spaces this power is with private landowners (Mitchell & Staeheli 2006, 149). I do not want to get caught up in arguing whether these spaces are really public or if, as Sorkin mused, they represent ‘the end of public space’ (1992). This will also not be an overly simplistic argument that such spaces are bad, and we should return to some imaginary past of fully open and accessible public spaces. Instead, by focusing on what happens when spaces are increasingly transferred to private companies for control, I will outline how, in the pursuit of capital and ‘niceness’ (Low 2009), private landowners encourage and enforce a passive view of public space that centers safety and comfort. I worry that as these pacified spaces become more common, so too does passive engagement between subjects. This leads me to argue that POPs are crucial to understanding the intersubjective and undemocratic shift Sorkin is concerned about in *Variations on a Theme Park* (1992).

History

POPs are not a recent development; they have existed across the world for decades. The term was first used to describe a zoning practice introduced in New York City in the 1960s where private developers who wanted to build additional floors had to agree to provide and maintain publicly accessible space as a trade-off (Kayden 2000). In the UK, they began appearing from the 1980s onwards (Pratt 2017). Yet in the 2000s, POPs started to become more common, leading the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors to deem the increased privatization of public space a “quiet revolution in land ownership” (quoted in Shenker 2017b). While there is a great deal of attention on POPs in London (Garrett 2015b; Pratt

2017; Shenker 2017b)¹³⁷ with some mention of flagship POPs in other major British cities like Liverpool, Manchester and Bristol (Minton 2022a; Pipe 2017; Mac Síthigh 2012),¹³⁸ they are also spreading to smaller cities and towns across the UK including Portsmouth, Exeter (Townsend 2016) and Colchester (Culver Square).

Andy Pratt understands the rise of POPs in the UK as part of a broader process of financialization and privatization emerging from neoliberalism and the desire to attract high-power consumers to inner cities, notably the so-called ‘creative class’ (Pratt 2017; Florida 2002).¹³⁹ Whereas some councils lease public squares to private companies whilst maintaining ownership and others fully sell their land, I consider both these to be POPs as control of the space lies with private companies. The justification for councils selling or leasing land to private companies is that, due to a lack of funds (LGA 2024), local authorities cannot afford to maintain public spaces. There certainly is a grain of truth to this. Councils in the UK have been subject to continual budget cuts in addition to the loss of their assets through programs like right-to-buy since Thatcher’s government. Austerity only deepened the crisis that many local authorities faced (LGA 2024). Many have suffered dramatic debts and have even been forced to declare bankruptcy in recent years (Harris 2024; Vaccari & Marique 2024). Nonetheless, as recently as 2017, Bradley Garrett wrote that the government was in the middle of “the largest sell-off of common space since the enclosures of the 17th and 18th century” (2017b). POPs are therefore indicative of a general privatization inherent in neoliberalism.

Yet this economic argument for POPs is incomplete. POPs are also increasing in popularity at the same time there is a sense that Britain’s high street is dying. This notion,

¹³⁷ Also see Carmona 2015, 2020.

¹³⁸ Also see Townsend 2016.

¹³⁹ The creative class are young urban professionals working in creative and tech industries. They are cool, trendy and tolerant (though more so when it comes to matters of identity than socioeconomic class)—desirous of exciting experiences and opportunities (Florida 2002).

captured by a range of articles from across the political spectrum,¹⁴⁰ is seen in empty and abandoned shops across Britain's city and town centers. As modes of consumption have shifted in the past decade and more and more people shop online (ONS 2024c), particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic (ONS 2022c) and as rents in the UK continually rise (Christophers 2020), in-person shopping has declined (Thomas 2018). Further, as wages have stagnated and inflation has risen, people also have less purchasing power and are less able to come into town to spend money (Resolution Foundation & Centre for Economic Performance 2022). This sense then of decline and loss also animates the turn to the private sector to 'solve' the problem. Indeed, Liverpool One, a POP, was meant to 'regenerate' Liverpool's struggling city center through the creation of a steel and concrete megalith full of retail and shopping opportunities. According to its website, the development has "restarted the city's beating heart that will power its future growth and development" (Liverpool ONEa).¹⁴¹ In this way, there is also an ideological dimension to POPs. Following the argument sketched out in Chapter Two that neoliberal rationality understands everything private as better and more efficient than anything public, privatizing public space is seen as a way to revitalize and improve Britain's struggling city centers. Further, as Davis and Hannigan highlight, this 'revitalization' is thought to occur by making spaces seem safe and desirable for the middle and upper classes.

¹⁴⁰ See BBC 2018; Burton, Doyle & Uttley 2018; Butler 2018; 2019; Corfe 2023; Grimsey 2020; Hayward 2018; Jenkins 2023; Johnston 2023; Jolly 2022; Marsh 2018; Payne 2018; Reuben 2013; Westbrook 2018 as an indicative range.

¹⁴¹ Nonetheless, this 'renaissance' of Liverpool (which included buildings other than Liverpool One) led to the stripping of its UNESCO World Heritage status in 2021. The excess development was deemed to have ruined the character of its waterfront.



Figure 9: Liverpool One POP (Source: liverpoolschoolofenglish, licensed under CC BY 2.0).



Figure 10: Liverpool One POP at night (Source: John Bradley, licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0).

POPs and Riskless Risk

Like the form of urban design sketched out in the first section, POPs are a strange mix of desire and security. In them, alongside rigorous security infrastructure, are fun and entertaining features, such as “landscaped gardens and water features, free wi-fi and big screens showing summer sport, as well as activities like table tennis, climbing walls and outdoor gyms” (Shenker 2017b). There are also market stalls selling artisanal goods and fancy food trucks selling £16 burritos and international ‘fusion’ cuisine.¹⁴² While such features attract middle class consumers, CCTV, private 24-hour security personnel and ‘defensible’ design features serve as signals to the poor, disorderly people and others perceived as evidence of decline that they are not welcome. As Davis writes, “upscale, pseudo-public spaces ... are full of invisible signs warning off the underclass ‘Other’” (1990, 226).¹⁴³ In particular, POPs are hostile to the homeless, who are excluded by ‘spiky’ or hostile architecture and, if they do enter, removed by security guards. As one homeless man interviewed by the *Guardian* about his relationship with a nearby POP stated: “To the ordinary person, there’s no distinction between here, and there” but “to me, the difference is everything, because I’m not the sort of person they want over there” (quoted in Shenker 2017b).

Security is therefore a key feature of POPs. As private landowners of POPs in London, interviewed by the Centre for London iterated, they see their role as maintaining safety, security and comfort, even if paradoxically some people feel unwelcome or targeted

¹⁴² This is based on my personal experience of living near one of the biggest and most well-known POPs in London, Granary Square (as pictured in Figures 7 and 8) and purchasing such a burrito from a food truck. It was a Korean-inspired kimchi burrito—and tasted terrible. As Sharon Zukin highlights, sanitized versions of ethnic food are a key component of gentrification (2008). They provide the excitement and fun of trying something different but without the possibility of not being able to tolerate the spices of another culture or not being able to stomach their more traditional, non-fusion cuisine.

¹⁴³ Also see Crilley 1993.

by the excessive security infrastructure (Bosetti *et al.* 2019). Crucially, profitability remains a key aim as well. Commercial landowners explained “We want the public to have the comfort that they can actually sit here and not be in a threatening environment and be safe”, “having a security presence is important for people to feel safe in these spaces” and “We don’t do anything that would attract an audience that is not in keeping with our retailers” (Bosetti *et al.* 2019, 26-27). Therefore, POPs aim to provide an environment that is ‘safe’ and ‘secure’ for consumption. Researchers found that POPs were generally successful in this aim as people interviewed in the aforementioned study stated that, in London’s POPs, they felt “safe” and “welcome” and the spaces were “well-looked after” (Bosetti *et al.* 2019, 16). Granary Square, one of the largest POPs in the UK (Pratt 2017), located near King’s Cross station in London, even rolled out facial recognition technology in secret “to help ensure public safety” (King’s Cross Estate Management, quoted in Sabbagh 2019), working with the police to look for anyone who had a history of formal contact with the police, from cautions to convictions (Sabbagh 2019). However, once this information became known and the plan was subject to public backlash and concerns about rights (Stuart 2019), the scheme was scrapped (Naldi 2021).¹⁴⁴

In this way, POPs are indicative of the fantasy city in that they represent a way to ‘revitalize’ locations perceived as in decline through the provisioning of enjoyable activities and entertainment alongside an intensive security infrastructure. This attracts young professionals and the middle classes to these spaces to consume and be entertained while making the poor, particularly the homeless, feel unwelcome. Even if they wanted to enter, the high price of food and goods sold in POPs serves as an additional code to communicate who is wanted and who is not. They provide a sense of endless possibility and risk, even as private

¹⁴⁴ This suggests some tension in understandings about what the city should be for as some were outraged by the level of security posed.

security guards enforce numerous rules¹⁴⁵—from bans on photography, protest, leafletting, cycling, or conducting interviews—to ensure that all behavior stays ‘acceptable’ and ‘appropriate’ (Garrett 2017; Minton 2011). As I see it, POPs enforce a passive view of what the city should be and are spaces designed to satisfy SUV subjects’ desire for pleasure without the possibility of unwanted affect.

A crucial distinction to highlight between POPs in the UK and POPs in the US is that private companies have the right to ban protest in POPs in the UK, unlike in the US.¹⁴⁶ In this way, British POPs are fully undemocratic spaces of consumption, leisure and enjoyment. They provide a right to enjoy the city and all it has to offer while protecting the right to not be affected.

Intersubjectivity

To make the argument that POPs are hostile to democracy, I want to focus on their intersubjective dimension, or how people are brought together in the fantasy city. In defining the intersubjective dimension of space, Kohn writes how

Some places encourage interaction between people whereas others foster a kind of collective isolation by focusing everyone on a central object of attention. Stadiums and theaters, for example, position individuals as members of an audience whereas others—a playing field, a plaza, a meeting room—may position them as co-creators of a shared world (2004, 10).

¹⁴⁵ Reporting by the *Guardian* found that the UK’s POPs not only do not tend to post lists with the rules enforced in them, but, when those investigating contacted the landowners of over fifty POPs in London asking for clarification on what was allowed and what was not, only two provided information (Shenker 2017b). The *Guardian* also sent FOIs to local councils asking about POPs in their areas, and again, only two councils (Cardiff and Cambridge) provided information (Shenker 2017a).

¹⁴⁶ It is notable that one POP (owned by the sovereign wealth fund of Kuwait) includes the area outside the building where the Mayor of London works. Therefore, it is illegal to protest or conduct interviews outside of the mayor’s office (Shenker 2017b).

Building on this definition, it does not just matter that people are brought together. It matters how they are brought together—as a passive audience of isolated individuals or as active participants in creating meaning. In thinking about the relationship between subjects and space, I see this as reflective of Mitchell’s assertion, drawing on Henri Lefebvre, that there are two competing views of public space: one that is “planned, orderly, and safe”, and one that “is politicized at its very core; and it tolerates the risks of disorder” (1995, 115). In outlining how POPs are reflective of the former, and considering the intersubjective consequences of ‘planned, orderly, and safe’ space, I am advocating for a more political understanding of public space that encourages action and discomfort.

Kohn further fleshes out her distinction between spaces that encourage co-creation and spaces that isolate people as an audience in ‘Homo spectator: Public space in the age of the spectacle’ where she states that people can be brought together in ways that support feelings of solidarity and a “democratic ethos of equality”, or in ways that destroy and weaken solidarity and instead enhance individualism (2008, 468). When people are brought together as an audience, they do not interact with one another and thus stay safe and comfortable in their SUV bubbles. Yet when people are brought together in a way that encourages interaction, even subtle forms of interaction, to Kohn, this augments democracy. Rather than separate individuals, they can become a demos. Kohn’s perspective reflects Sorkin’s concerns that the pacification and sanitization inherent in the fantasy city are destructive to democracy. I contend that, with their emphasis on comfort, safety and entertainment, along with their bans on protest and intolerance of disorder, POPs bring people together in a fundamentally apolitical way.

To advance this argument, Kohn relies on a metaphor of the theatre to consider how, in certain spaces, people are brought together to gaze at a spectacle rather than to interact

with one another.¹⁴⁷ In these spaces, instead of being part of the performance themselves or making their own meaning, people are passive observers of social life and externally controlled. She also relies on Guy Debord's argument in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967). In this text, Debord looks at how capitalism constitutes people as spectators rather than participants. As spectators, they are separated from one another as they move through space and are "linked only by a one-way relationship to the very center that maintains their isolation from one another" (1967, 22). In relation to the privatized city, this intersubjectivity is inherent in how POPs function as forms of entertainment that attract people to consume and enjoy themselves. There is nothing inherently wrong with this, and indeed pleasure and leisure are vital, yet there is an asociality in how this occurs. Rather than interacting with strangers, people interact with the forms of entertainment that are provided—be this the large screens to watch Wimbledon that appear in POPs (in addition to in public spaces) across the UK every summer, market stalls or water features. Again, there is nothing inherently wrong with these features. Yet I worry about landowner's attempts to design space for comfort, security and maximum revenue for retailers.¹⁴⁸ This is part of a broader depoliticization of space that, in this research, I see as connected to an undemocratic and uncaring subject formation.

In differentiating between an active and passive means of bringing people together and criticizing POPs I am not aiming to reify traditional public space as somehow dramatically different. Nor am I taking an overly romantic position that public spaces used to always bring people together in a more active way. Nonetheless, I think the pacification inherent in POPs, both through the provisioning of activities and entertainment as well as

¹⁴⁷ Also see Crilley 1993, 153.

¹⁴⁸ However not all spaces in the UK are like this. There is also a pushback against the sterility of these kinds of spaces. See Sendra & Sennett for a discussion of a public space in Dalston, London that encourages interaction between strangers and is open and flexible in design so that meaning can be co-created by those who use the space (2020, 73-86).

through their intensive securitization and exclusivity, is vital to highlight as novel and distinctive. They are ideal ‘glittering playgrounds’ for SUV subjects to enjoy the thrill of the city without compromise. Yet I do not believe that design or ownership alone can be held fully accountable for people’s interaction—or lack of it—as power differentials between different groups also limit their openness to taking risks in public spaces (Kern 2021a). Nonetheless, Kohn begins to touch on power by outlining how public spaces can “aggregate or exclude; they encourage or inhibit contact between people; and they determine the form and scope of the contact” (2004, 12). Indeed, I have highlighted how POPs welcome some while subtly indicating to others that they are unwelcome. If these people enter, they are often kicked out. To Kohn, this “desire to exclude the unsettling and the unattractive” is indicative of the subject as a spectator (2004, 11). It is reflective of the belief that one should not have to view the poor and be affected by them. Thus, in excluding certain people and homogenizing space, the possible forms of public interaction become limited.

To Kohn, a more active public space would encourage interaction and reciprocal relations between different people. Yet this need not be through literal dialogue, such as casual conversation between two strangers. Instead, Kohn highlights how some dialogue is figurative, a product of being exposed to others who make one think. She writes, “Often the dialogue is the internal kind that is motivated by viewing and reflecting upon a range of people and activities” (2008, 483). In this way, a crucial component of the intersubjective quality of space is its diversity. Even when different people do not formally interact, through being exposed to one another and seeing how others use space, interact and live, there is a form of dialogue taking place. Given POPs are artificially homogenized to exclude those with less social power the possibility for this kind of communication is limited.

Overall, POPs reinforce an individualistic, passive subject orientation. They bring people together not as an active demos but as passive consumers (both of products and of

experience). This corresponds to Lefebvre's concerns in *The Production of Space* (1974). According to Lefebvre, as capital continues to prioritize abstract space and minimizes difference and heterogeneity, keeping people separated and insulated from one another, social contact is replaced by "signs (or images) of contact" (1974, 375). Through generating large crowds of people who are not actually interacting with each other, except through shared engagement with external forms of entertainment, some of which have been selected to seem more spontaneous than they are, like buskers with permits, POPs provide signs of contact. Given the popularity of POPs, constantly triumphed as safe and comfortable (Bosetti *et al.* 2019),¹⁴⁹ Mitchell's concern that "signs and images of contact (are taken) as more natural and desirable than contact itself" seems to have come true—at least in one regard (2003, 141). While I do not believe that the illusion of contact is truly more desirable than real contact and sociality, continuing the argument in the previous chapter, it seems to be posed as the most we can (or should) hope for in an existentially insecure world where genuine contact seems like too big of a risk. Ultimately, in limiting social contact, POPs are a form of riskless risk. Engaging fully with other people is risky. They cannot be controlled and are entirely unpredictable. By providing a sense of being part of a crowd, without the actual risk inherent in being part of a crowd, POPs satiate the need for socialization without the insecurity inherent in encountering a stranger.

Shared Space

Finally, I want to consider an alternative design approach that encourages interaction and engagement with others and decenters security in the pursuit of enhanced safety: shared space. While shared space typically refers to a way to manage the interaction between cars, cyclists and pedestrians, shared space is more than just a traffic management scheme. Instead,

¹⁴⁹ For research triumphing the positives of POPs see Carmona 2013, 2015, 2020.

I will consider shared space as a broad philosophy that emphasizes the importance of interaction, reliance on others and personal and collective responsibility for reducing harm and enhancing wellbeing. Rather than a top-down model of control and separation, like POPs, in shared space schemes, people are forced to be active and “use their brains” to negotiate and construct their experiences (Monderman, quoted in van de Vliet 2013). In this way, it forces a recognition of relationality; we inevitably affect others and cannot disavow this.

Shared space, a concept that originated with Dutch traffic engineer Hans Monderman, is simple. Noticing that traditional forms of managing traffic via speed bumps, road signs, speed limits and traffic lights failed to reduce traffic fatalities, Monderman wondered, if, instead of relying on external control, accidents could be reduced by removing the security and safety features (van de Vliet 2013). In Anna Minton’s understanding, he felt “barriers, railings, kerbs and even traffic lights – all the signs intended to keep pedestrians and motorists apart – actually discourage both groups from engaging with each other, making life more dangerous” (2009, 179). Instead, he proposed a mode of design that would remove the security infrastructure and restructure spaces to force people to engage with one another, which he theorized would result in safer spaces. Essentially, he saw excessive separation and a lack of engagement between users of space as dangerous. Monderman tested out his hypothesis in a small Dutch village, removing all traffic signs and forms of separation between people and cars, including curbs; the scheme was an instant success (at least in terms of reducing traffic fatalities) (Monderman in Sharedspace 2007). Following this success, shared space schemes were rolled out across the Netherlands and, eventually, spread across the world (Hamilton-Baillie 2008).

Inherent in the idea of shared space is what risk theorist John Adams calls the ‘risk-compensation effect’. According to Adams, everyone has a natural level of risk they are comfortable with. When external features are added to enhance one’s sense of safety, such as

road signs or traffic lights, we all recalculate our level of risk and end up behaving more recklessly than we otherwise would have (Adams 1995). This is why improving safety features on roads has failed to staunch accidents and deaths; people just drive faster, brake less, pay less attention and generally take more risks. Adams worries that people come to rely on external forms of control rather than paying attention to how their behavior impacts those around them (quoted in Minton 2009, 182-183). Removing security infrastructure, on the other hand, forces people to pay closer attention to the world around them and interact with others. According to Monderman, shared space forces people “to look each other in the eye, to judge body language and learn to take responsibility – to function as normal human beings” rather than as pedestrians or cyclists or motorists (quoted in Brunton 2008). In this way, shared space suggests that interaction and association between different people is the key to increased safety, rather than external forms of control or punitive policy measures to solicit obedience. Further, this notion that interaction is safer than securitization and control seems to have empirical backing, at least when it comes to limiting traffic fatalities (van de Vliet 2013).



Figure 11: Shared Space at Seven Dials in London (Source: Shazz, licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0).



Figure 12: Shared Space on Exhibition Road in London (Source: DiscoA340, licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0).

Interaction, Discomfort and Responsibility

However, shared space has relevance beyond traffic management. It raises questions about the efficacy of insulation, separation and individualization as means of ensuring safety and security. As I have been arguing in this thesis, these practices do not prevent harm and reduce vulnerability; instead, they bolster the power of the social order. They legitimize neoliberalism's assault on the social even as they promise 'protection'. In contrast, shared space gestures towards the fact that we are dependent on one another and cannot simply disavow this reality and instead rely on external forms of power to keep us safe. When it comes to shared space, we are less safe in doing this. This coincides with my argument in this thesis that there is a collective danger in freedom-as-disengagement and pushing away from others. Pursuing the illusion of security will not make us any safer and disavowing dependencies and seeking 'protection' through a bubble of personalized comfort, prevents the possibility of resistance against oppressive and harmful power structures.

We are dependent on one another and the planet for survival and cannot simply disavow this. While the wealthy are most likely to disavow their relationality, as the Care Collective highlight, they are actually the most dependent on others, from those whose labor they profit off of to “those they pay to service them in innumerable personal ways” Yet they fail to recognize their “own enduring need for care” (Chatzidakis *et al.* 2020, 45). This fantasy of total self-sovereignty is rooted in the denial that we all require care and cannot survive without it. As Judith Butler elaborates, this myth of a subject who does not require care ignores the reality that at various stages in life we all rely on others to care for us (2020, 37-38). We require care not only as children and in old age, but in times of sickness and struggle. Such a myth also excludes those who are not able-bodied. Consequently, survival is impossible to understand separate from our constant need for care. The notion we can survive without others is an illusion.

It is also important to highlight that, against the view of the natural world as a passive commodity or ‘stingy’ and needing to be dominated for human progress (Bookchin 1982), we also rely on the natural world for survival and, our individual and collective wellbeing will continue to be impacted should we continue destroying it through razing rainforests and burning fossil fuels. Yet, as Bauman contends, the more people are insulated from difference, in the

company of others ‘like them’ with whom one can ‘socialise’ perfunctorily and matter-of-factly without incurring the risk of miscomprehension, and with no vexing need to translate between distinct universes of meaning, the more one is likely to ‘de-learn’ the art of negotiating shared meanings and a *modus covivendi* (2003, 32).

What Bauman is highlighting here is that, while insulation and disavowing dependency are comfortable, as is finding an inner group of selves with whom one feels comfortable and

protected against the risk of encountering difference, without interaction and engagement across differences we cannot figure out how to live with one another.

This relates to how Monderman, and other supporters of shared space, see its relationship to personal and collective responsibility (Minton 2009). Underlying shared space is the idea that, when interacting solely with top-down forms of power or relating to one another only through shared reverence to the spectacle, we have become alienated from a sense of personal responsibility for our actions and how they impact others. As Monderman puts it, “We’re losing our capacity for socially responsible behavior. The greater the number of prescriptions, the more people’s sense of personal responsibility dwindles” (quoted in Schulz 2006). Essentially, responsibility is lessened through surrender to external forms of authority that we trust to keep us safe. This is not a neoliberal understanding of responsibility as responsabilization, where people are made responsible for their successes and failures and structural causes of harm or inequality are ignored (Lemke 2001). Instead, responsibility here is rooted in acknowledging interdependency and that our actions impact others. A car driver moving through a shared space scheme is forced to confront how their speed makes those around them feel and move through space. A pedestrian is forced to confront how their movements, whether deliberate and continual or jerky and erratic, impact how others flow around them. Increased interaction then forces greater apprehension of our power to affect others and is thus a prerequisite for taking responsibility for our behaviors. It also challenges the logic of capitalism, which relies on obscuring the harm that it perpetrates by keeping people comfortable and insulated from evidence of its harm.

Such an understanding of our power to affect others does not mean that people will inevitably act responsibly, however. There is a difference between realizing responsibility and acting responsibly and with care. We can recognize that our actions impact others and still decide not to care and to pursue our own interests, especially if we do not value the group

most impacted by our behaviors. Nonetheless, increased interaction and the awareness of responsibility it entails involves a recognition of interdependency. This is why, a thread that connects this thesis, is my concern for declining sociality and interaction. Without interacting with one another, we cannot form the kinds of relations necessary for change to be possible. I believe that recognition of interdependency is vital for being able to resist harm as resisting harm is a collective practice.

Fear of Interaction

Yet, as exemplified in the backlash against shared space schemes in the UK, being forced to take personal responsibility for one's actions and interact with strangers is uncomfortable and can even be frightening. In the UK, shared spaces were rolled out and popularized in the 2000s through the 2010s (Department for Transport 2011; Gould 2006; Hamilton-Baillie 2008, 174-178). However, it was not long before they attracted vehement criticism. The two main criticisms are as follows: the first is that people find shared space schemes scary (Holmes 2015). It is far more comfortable to rely on an external structure to keep oneself safe. The second criticism came from a group representing the blind; they argued that shared spaces simply did not work for those with visual impairments (National Federation of the Blind of the UK). Given the schemes rely on eye contact, those who cannot make eye contact struggle to feel comfortable using them.

In considering these criticisms, it is first important to note that schemes in the UK have been successful in preventing accidents and keeping people safe (Arnold 2007; Cycling England 2007; Gould 2006).¹⁵⁰ This reflects a thread running through this research that often what makes people feel safe is not what actually keeps them safe. Further, while I do not

¹⁵⁰ Also see Scott 2011. It is important to note that, the debate around shared space has become incredibly toxic in the UK. Consequently, many articles discussing the success of schemes (relying on actual data) have been deleted and replaced by fear driven accounts. Therefore, I have had to search archived webpages to find several of the citations listed above.

doubt that some shared space schemes were (and are) hostile to those with disabilities, as indeed a great deal of design is, it is difficult to blame shared space exclusively for this problem. Indeed, those conscious of the concerns of the visually impaired have suggested, and even implemented, forms of design that rely on texture, sound and other forms of demarcation that can maintain the majority of shared space principles, while opening them up for use by the visually impaired (Anderson 2014; Arnold 2007; Childs *et al.* 2010).¹⁵¹ While such modifications may mean straying from Monderman's 'sign-free' streets, they are a way to ensure that such schemes do not abandon those with more complex needs. Nonetheless, even such modifications are not a perfect solution.¹⁵² Indeed, there is no perfect solution; yet to wholesale reject shared space despite its success in reducing accidents rather than negotiating when an obstacle was raised seems to demonstrate a cultural unwillingness to move beyond the (incorrect) common sense that more security infrastructure and control are the best way to stay safe.

However, I want to focus on how the feeling of being unsafe, even if such a reality does not exist, motivates increased obedience to external forms of power. My contention in this thesis is that protectionist measures premised on keeping people apart and separate, beyond just this particular example of street signs, do not make anyone safer. Instead, they encourage individualization, passivity and the disavowal of interdependency. This ultimately makes us all less safe as we are disengaged from how our actions impact others and the world around us—and how dependent we are on others and the world for our survival and flourishing. In understanding the backlash against shared space in the UK, without aiming to

¹⁵¹ Also see the surprisingly detailed and thoughtful blog on this matter by Equipment rental company BigRentz (2019).

¹⁵² One could point out that Monderman used to test the safety of shared space schemes by walking through them backwards (Minton 2009, 179; van de Vliet 2013), to prove that others would ensure his safety. This example suggests that eye contact is not necessary as long as others respond appropriately in a shared space scheme. Yet I do not want to highlight such an anecdote as I feel it may come across as belittling to the concerns of those with visual impairments. Those with disabilities should feel that they have been thought about in the design of schemes.

disregard the concerns raised and the reality that many felt uncomfortable using them, I see the fear of shared space as indicative of a broader fear—the fear of being dependent on others. This is scary to realize. After all, it is comforting to believe that only one’s own behaviors and choices matter. As Lauren Berlant puts it, “any attachment, any dependency that forces us to face how profoundly nonsovereign we are” (2022, 9) can feel frightening. To realize that the behaviors of those around you can, just as easily, directly impede your life chances is deeply discomfoting.

We cannot control others and, therefore, cannot control what happens to us. Messiness, conflict and having to engage with people who cannot fully be known is the reality of being an interdependent species. According to the Care Collective, this dependency and need for care inherently entails “ambivalence and anxiety” (Chatzidakis *et al.* 2020, 59). It is far more comforting to rely on external forms of power that promise to keep us safe and secure than to rely on one another and learn to trust one another. However, to Minton, the collective responsibility inherent in shared spaces is vital for restoring casual forms of trust. This trust could begin to alleviate fears and anxieties about our dependency on others. She continues to explain how, “if trust between people is to grow, that very small element of risk has to be accepted. Life is no fun if it is perfectly safe” (2009, 176). Trusting others, and recognizing our reliance on them, including strangers and those who differ from us, requires taking risks rather than shying away from them. Therefore, the concept of shared space is not only useful for thinking about how increased interaction and engagement are vital for restoring recognition of interdependence. It also underscores the importance of actual risk instead of ‘riskless risk’. Depending on others is a risk—but we do not have any other choice.

Problem of Power

Nonetheless, I can understand the backlash against shared space schemes for traffic management. After all, Monderman refused to make judgments about the social utility of

increased car ownership (Project for Public Spaces 2008), one of the key causes of increased traffic fatalities (Miner *et al.* 2024). He was also not concerned about the difference between public and private space (Honig 2017, 94). Instead, he believed that the removal of security infrastructure deprioritized the car's dominance over space, essentially leveling the playing field between different users of space. Yet what the fears of shared space schemes do illustrate, and anecdotal evidence that some car drivers refused to engage with the schemes and continued to drive recklessly through shared spaces (Holmes 2015), is that, in the interaction between a car driver and a pedestrian, the car driver has substantially more power. If the two collide, the pedestrian is at far greater risk of harm. Knowing this, the pedestrian is motivated to behave with far more caution than the car driver. Just removing security infrastructure fails to address this innate power difference. As cars get bigger and heavier, this only gets worse.

If the concept of shared space is thought of more broadly, those with more social power are less motivated to acknowledge and engage with those with less social power.¹⁵³ This is one of Bonnie Honig's concerns about shared space schemes. She contends that "the idea of shared space is not an adequate remedy for the many contemporary exploitations and inequalities to which democratic politics must respond, for which we are often responsible, and in which we are implicated" (2017, 95). First, Honig highlights how shared space does not challenge the exclusion inherent in the privatization of space. Having spent this chapter outlining issues with privatized space, I echo this concern. However, Honig's other point is that, in a shared space scheme, the norms and terms of engagement will come to be set by the dominant group. For example, the means established of negotiating a crossing with cars and pedestrians will be set by (and ultimately favor) the able-bodied, rather than the disabled.

¹⁵³ See Dorlin 2020 for a discussion of this imbalance where those with less social power are forced to understand their oppressors to anticipate potential harm—whereas the powerful get to know and like themselves instead of having to bother thinking about the other. Dorlin calls this a "dirty ethics of care" (171-175).

Consequently, she worries such a state of affairs that does not address differences in power will disadvantage minority social actors (2017, 94). This concern mirrors my criticism of shared space's failure to address how, when the playing field is leveled, some actors will have more power than others to determine how space is used.

Yet I am not intervening in this issue to suggest the best way to manage traffic. Instead, I have been considering shared space as a philosophy that asserts the importance of interaction and engagement to force an apprehension of dependency and help people get comfortable taking more risks. This is because I see care itself as a vital, yet essential, risk. However, shared space also illustrates that fear and anxiety can be a result of power differentials and simply asking those with less social power to adapt is hardly in the interests of justice or freedom. It also will do nothing to dismantle the social order and the differential allocation of harm. Therefore, while I contend that modes of design like shared space are useful to facilitate interaction and reinstate recognition of dependency, they cannot dismantle and contest power differentials on their own. Improving collective wellbeing then is centrally an issue of power.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have finished addressing my first research question on how measures meant to protect the public impact subjects and how they relate to one another through a focus on 'riskless risk' and the intersubjective dimension of POPs. Building on the last chapter's theorization of the SUV subject, who finds freedom in disavowing their dependency on others and aims to secure themselves against being affected by others, the emphasis here was on how these subjects relate to one another. In outlining the passivity encouraged by privatized spaces, I argued that, in these spaces 'signs and images of contact' become, if not more desirable than social contact, at the very least, more comfortable than contact itself.

Therefore, an artificial type of sociality becomes preferable to the riskiness of genuine social contact and the unpredictability of encountering difference.

However, in integrating insights from previous chapters to address this question I also introduced two further issues to consider; the inherent anxiety of recognizing dependency as well as the limitations of simply increasing social contact to challenge power imbalances. The next chapter incorporates these issues as it moves to focus on my final research question on the practices or modes of resistance that could generate more active subjects capable of coming together to challenge oppressive power and structurally produced harm. While I do not aim to downplay the inherent sense of unease that comes from recognizing dependency, as evidenced by the reaction to shared space schemes, I try and think through how embracing interdependency and rethinking how we relate to others, particularly in the public realm, can be liberating and joyful. Indeed, whereas shared space is a top-down initiative, I instead focus on bottom-up, grassroots projects. Ultimately, in outlining a joyful, caring politics I will be asking what it would mean to frame dependency as a positive, rather than something to be feared.

Chapter 6

Disorder, Freedom and Facing Fear through Embracing Dependency

“To defend oneself against a fear is simply to ensure that one will, one day, be conquered by it; fears must be faced.”

— James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

“The great moments of revolutionary history have all been enormous popular festivals - the storming of the Bastille, the uprisings of 1848, the Paris Commune, the revolutions of 1917-9, Paris '68. Conversely, popular festivities have always been looked on by the authorities as a problem ... Why does power fear free celebration? Could it be something to do with the utopian urges which seize a crowd becoming aware of its own power? ...Carnival celebrates temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and the established order; it marks the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions. Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people.”

— Reclaim the Streets, agitprop 14

What is serious disruption? To any layperson, serious disruption means that the level of disruption is serious, or severe. However, a crucial component of the Public Order Act 2023 was redefining the meaning of ‘serious disruption’. Whereas in The Public Order Act 1986 serious disruption meant a significant delay or prolonged disruption, in the new legislation, the threshold for serious disruption is reduced to any hindrance that is “more than minor”.

The function of this redefinition is to give the state and the police more power to prevent protests from interfering with daily life, attracting attention and causing a semblance of disorder. Despite criticism from rights groups (Feeley-Sprague 2023; Liberty 2023; Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights / OHCHR 2023),¹⁵⁴ the British government justified the change, arguing it is their duty to stand up for ‘hardworking people’ who were presumably having their lives ruined by disruptive protests (Home Office 2023a). The Public Order Act 2023 therefore deepens the right to be left alone and to not be affected in the public realm by asserting the importance of maintaining order and control over space. Public order,

¹⁵⁴ Also see JUSTICE 2023c.

or the continuation of ‘business as usual’, becomes a crucial public good and is even conflated with public safety and security.

However, in this chapter, I will be thinking about the relationship between order and power and contending that oppressive power is maintained through order. This will lead me to argue that continuing to protest disruptively and making disorderly interventions in public space is necessary to challenge the neoliberal order and the state that supports it. Further, in outlining how interventions in the public realm practice alternative forms of caring and living joyfully with one another, I make the claim this is necessary to begin rebuilding the social bonds that have disintegrated under neoliberalism, reinvigorate a politics of care and claim the right to the city. In doing so, I advocate for freedom rooted in changing ourselves and our ways of relating to others by changing the city—even temporarily, as in protest.

To make this case, I first turn to Richard Sennett’s *Uses of Disorder* (1970). I outline how Sennett relates disorder to conflict, contending people have grown unable to handle the conflict that comes from having to rely on one another and work together for survival and flourishing. Turning to Sennett’s reappraisal of this position along with Pablo Sendra in *Designing Disorder* (2020), I focus on their argument about power and freedom—thinking through its relation to the Public Order Act 2023. Through a reading of Hegel (1807), Sennett contends a crucial component of disorder is disobeying authority and refusing to play by the guidelines set by established power (Sennett & Sendra 2020). In disobeying, people can set themselves free from the confines of an oppressive order.

I then move to consider how order and disorder relate to safety and security, beginning by outlining Don Mitchell’s argument ‘against safety’ and ‘against security’ (2009). Here, Mitchell makes a positive argument for a right to the city that relies on accepting risk and chance rather than striving for a sanitized, securitized and knowable existence. He also establishes a position that, in remaking ourselves by becoming active

actors in remaking the city, we find freedom.¹⁵⁵ Further, he asserts that we must strive for a world where values of joy and spontaneity replace safety and security—a point I flesh out further through Barbara Ehrenreich’s history of the repression of festivities and collective joy events in *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy* (2006).

Building on the previous sections, I introduce Kern (2021a) and the Care Collective’s position (Chatzidakis *et al.* 2020) that challenging safety and security must entail rethinking care beyond the confines of the family. I also build on Sophie K. Rosa’s argument that, in remaking our cities, we are not just remaking ourselves, but also remaking our relationships and rethinking how we relate to one another (2023). In discussing a politics of care, I pose it as a social alternative to the individualistic politics of protection premised on disavowing dependency and pushing away from others. I then move to mini-case studies of Sister’s Uncut, the Right to Roam campaign and Reclaim the Streets as examples of social movements that blend joy, care and occupying public space in defiance of oppressive authority to assert their right to the city; though temporary, these groups assert the people’s right to determine what they want their everyday life to look like. In doing so, they change themselves.

Finally, in closing, I argue that, while utopic protests and thinking can be depicted as romantic or naïve, such criticisms miss the point. The significance of occupying public spaces and filling them with joy and care is that this creates spaces and opportunities for people to change themselves through (temporarily) changing the city; it is an opportunity for people to face their fears and begin to see themselves as part of an interdependent collective rather than individualized subjects.

Disorder

¹⁵⁵ Also see Harvey 2008.

To understand the relationship between disorder and sociality I turn to Sennett's work in *Uses of Disorder* (1970). Here, he argues rising affluence has resulted in a population that no longer needs to rely on one another to survive. As a result, people have become increasingly insular, reliant only on their families and unable to handle conflict. He contends that to become more responsible adults, we need to learn to live with disorder, even though this will mean having to deal with conflict and feeling uncomfortable.

In using an adult/child metaphor, Sennett's position is that people have become increasingly fearful; they cannot handle conflict, disorder or anything that could challenge their identity and understanding of the world. They can only deal with what is predictable and knowable. Contending that this avoidance of the unknown leads to a state of continual adolescence, Sennett argues "when the dangers of surprise are avoided, there can be no exploration, and so no inner growth" (1970, 15). His emphasis in the text is primarily psychoanalytic, considering what institutional and structural forms induce this state of perpetual adolescence and examining how disorder can force people to grow up. While I do not like this metaphor, as, following Richard Rorty (1993), I see a colonial inflection in the adult/child metaphor, Sennett's contention that people are fearful, desirous of order and control, and suspicious of others outside their immediate families reflects the argument I too have been making in this thesis.

Sennett follows Herbert Marcuse in focusing on rising affluence, primarily for the middle classes, as underlying this retreat into the self (1964), due to an inability to handle the unpredictability of interaction. He argues that decreased scarcity and increased access to consumer goods led to communities that no longer needed to share or rely on one another materially for survival. Whereas people in the past presumably relied on one another's "services, skills and possessions", needing assistance with basic tasks such as cooking, cleaning and childcare, it is the "hallmark of abundance that the need for such sharing

disappears”. He therefore claims abundance is creating barriers between people as now, “each family has its own vacuum cleaner, its own set of pots and pans, its own transport, supply or water, heat, etc.” (1970, 48). Since people have access to their own appliances and infrastructure, sharing is no longer necessary for survival. Essentially, here he describes a nostalgic vision of community life marked by communal forms of care and sharing that begins to dissipate when people no longer need to rely on one another for help with the reproduction of daily life and can manage everything within the confines of the nuclear family.

Such a story fails to account for (typically feminized) care work such as childcare or care for the elderly or sick—tasks that are not as easily erased with rising abundance due to the high cost of private care. It also seems a bit romantic and unrealistic. Still, Sennett’s contention that increased affluence diminishes the need for social interaction for survival is intriguing. Yet whether the cause of diminishing causal contact and sharing with neighbors is affluence or due to a burgeoning sense of individualism and not wanting to rely on others, in my understanding Sennett is, at the very least, describing a reality that has only become worse. Sharing and living socially and communally with one’s neighbors or others in affluent or comfortable, middle class communities is rare. As people interact less with those around them and fail to get to know one another, according to Sennett, they become more afraid of one another and less able to interact. It is this fear that keeps people stuck in a state of adolescence.

As a solution to help people advance to adulthood, a state that, for Sennett, seems marked by a capacity to engage with difference without fear, he contends people must interact more with one another. Given he sees the problem stemming from people no longer needing to interact, he argues moving beyond fear will require creating “a feeling of need in the individual that he has to get involved in situations outside the little routines of his daily

life in order to survive with the people around him” (1970, 169). In this text then, this need of other people and unstructured, spontaneous interaction with them as a component of living together is understood as ‘disordering’. Yet disorder is not just reducible to increased social contact; it is also about conflict.

Disorder and Conflict

To illustrate this point, Sennett conducts a thought experiment, imagining a diverse community free from rigid planning codes and spatial segregation. Here, a broad mix of people from different ethnic backgrounds, classes and ages live together among a range of small businesses. Rather than individuals relying on the police to handle arguments that arise between neighbors about the use of space and the distinction between appropriate and anti-social behavior, police focus on more serious crimes and the people are forced to figure out how to live with one another by actually interacting (1970, 143-146).

Without the police to provide order, the inhabitants of the community are forced to speak to one another when they become frustrated or want change. They negotiate rules and boundaries and learn how to compromise and how to stand up for themselves rather than hiding behind external authority. Sennett argues “the act of participating in some sort of truce would force people to look at each other, if only to find areas in which some bond, tenuous and unloving as it would be, could be forged” (1970, 143). In this way, the disorder Sennett imagines is linked to an inability to hide from conflict through reliance on police and policies that aim to distance people and ‘protect’ them from the innocuous or annoying behaviors of other people. Instead, interpersonal conflict is framed as necessary and productive. It not only generates a greater depth of understanding between dissimilar people by forcing interaction

and engagement, but it also creates more mature subjects who can survive in the world without bubble wrap.¹⁵⁶

A point already established in this thesis is that living in a society and engaging with one another in the public realm will always involve a level of conflict. I therefore echo Sennett's position that this inherent conflict between different peoples and different groups as to how to live with one another must be played out rather than suppressed or denied (1970, 147). The criminalization of disorderly activities and separation of people may provide a sense of comfort in its lack of challenge, yet it does nothing to alleviate broader tensions. Conflict can only be alleviated if it is played out.

Yet allowing conflict to play out will not always lead to an ideal solution. Larger groups and those with more power will have an inherent advantage. Violence may erupt. The experience of negotiation will inherently be filled with friction. Conflict is not 'safe and secure'. However, as I have highlighted in this thesis, attempting to avoid conflict and prioritize a feeling of security through separation, privatization and criminalization only heightens feelings of insecurity¹⁵⁷—and, as Sennett claims here, leads to an immature population, reliant on external forms of power and unable to work together. As outlined by Wendy Brown, this is a population that is indifferent to and even desires its own subordination rather than working together and making any self-sacrifice (2019, 161-188). To learn to embrace disorder and conflict, Sennett argues for a "dense, disorganized city" (1970, 189), where people would be forced to come into conflict with one another and the world to survive and thrive with one another.¹⁵⁸ His assertion is this will also lead to greater freedoms

¹⁵⁶ Reference to Chapter Four and the right to not be affected as bubble wrapping subjects.

¹⁵⁷ Also see Marcuse 2005, 2006a, 2006b for a similar argument that insecurity is heightened through measures that induce a sense of anxiety about the risk posed by other people.

¹⁵⁸ Note the resonance between this account and shared space as a philosophy highlighting the importance of interaction and engagement rather than reliance on external power to keep people safe and induce a sense of personal and collective responsibility.

as “freedom lies in ... acceptance of disorder” (1970, xvii). However, I find Sennett’s description of the relationship between disorder and freedom clearer in his follow-up to *Uses of Disorder*, published several decades later.

Order and Power

In *Designing Disorder*, Sennett joins forces with architect and urban designer Sendra to think about how unexpected encounters and social interaction can be designed into the built environment to increase disorder (2020). Whereas *Uses of Disorder* was a response to modernist planning and design, which instilled rigid order and control over space, *Designing Disorder* responds to the homogenization and securitization of “a globalised real estate industry”, which wants to create entirely knowable and predictable spaces for safe capital accumulation (2020, 3).

In this text, the psychoanalytic focus from *Uses of Disorder* and the adult/child metaphor is discarded; instead, *Designing Disorder* looks at the built environment, contending “rigid, overdetermined forms are smothering the modern city... suppress(ing) people’s freedom to act, stifl(ing) informal social relations, and inhibit(ng) the city’s power to grow” (2020, 1). Sendra and Sennett argue that disorder, understood as forcing people into contact with one another and creating the possibility of encountering conflict, will not only enhance people’s freedom but improve the city. They also argue living in a more disorderly environment will help people to “overcome fear towards the unknown” (2020, 126). Consequently, rather than ‘growing up’, disorder functions to reduce the fear and paranoia that legitimizes the expansion of security infrastructure and restrictions on freedom.¹⁵⁹

Crucially, this text sets out a concrete understanding of how the suppression of disorder or disruption functions to maintain the social order. According to Sennett, despite

¹⁵⁹ Under this I include the protectionist policies I have been looking at in this research.

new technologies and understandings about urbanization and its potential, these advancements “have been subordinated to a regime of power which wants order and control” (2020, 23). Rather than spaces being designed for people, technology and knowledge are employed to design for the interests of power—and power prefers order. Orderly, abstract spaces are not just more profitable for capital (Lefebvre 1974; Harvey 2001) but maintaining order and keeping people apart in public is a way to prevent the kinds of collective gatherings and protests that challenge authority, and are, at the very least, embarrassing and annoying for those in power.

In this thesis, I have rooted my discussion in an understanding of neoliberalism as a rationality of oppressive power that maintains a particular hierarchal order. From this perspective, the obsession with ordering space is a means not only to pave the way for capital accumulation but also a way to ensure hierarchization and separation. A crucial part of order then is keeping people apart. Order is particularly hostile, as I will argue, to crowds and large gatherings. This is because collective gatherings represent a threat to oppressive power. To consider how order functions to maintain power, I move to analyze the Public Order Act 2023 as a response to disruptive or disordering protests.

Reasserting Power: The Public Order Act

The Public Order Act 2023 follows the PCSC Act 2022 in limiting the rights of protesters in the name of public safety and protection. The Act consists largely of “a series of amendments to the PCSC Bill that were unsuccessfully proposed by Government at Committee Stage in the House of Lords” (Joint Committee on Human Rights 2022). These include “new and expanded use of stop and search”—including a provision for suspicionless stop and search, “orders that ban people from participating in protests and control their movement/activity/associations” and “new offences that criminalise certain kinds of protests altogether” (Liberty 2023).

Yet, while these measures were rejected by the House of Lords previously, the then Home Secretary Suella Braverman used secondary legislation (called Henry the VIIIth powers)¹⁶⁰ to force through the redefinition of serious disruption without the opportunity for parliamentary scrutiny. Therefore, this limitation on protesters' ability to cause disruption or disorder without immediately being arrested by the police is not just a means of consolidating power by criminalizing forms of dissent; it is also part of a cynical "power grab" (Hart, quoted in Mureithi 2023) by an increasingly authoritarian government in defiance of democratic norms (CIVICUS 2023). While the bill was heavily criticized by national and international rights groups as unnecessary, disproportionate and a violation of the UK's human rights obligations (Feeley-Sprague 2023; Liberty 2023; OHCHR 2023)¹⁶¹, it received Royal Assent on May 3rd, 2023—right in time to be used to 'protect' King Charles' coronation on May 6th from legal forms of protest that would have embarrassed the state.¹⁶²

Serious Disruption

The Public Order Act 2023 redefines serious disruption as being "hindered to more than a minor degree". This shift is vital because, though often frowned upon, an unauthorized, disruptive protest or event is typically legal up to the point it causes (or a senior police officer believes it may cause) 'serious disruption'. Once a gathering meets this threshold, police have a number of tools, including arrest, that they can use to clear the space and return order. Lowering the threshold for police interference to such a low degree then

¹⁶⁰ Human Rights group Liberty has brought a lawsuit against Suella Braverman for utilizing these laws to bypass democratic processes. At the time of writing, the verdict is pending.

¹⁶¹ Also see JUSTICE 2023c; Türk 2023.

¹⁶² Dozens of people were arrested in the hours preceding the coronation under suspicion that they might stage a protest. This included a group of anti-monarchy protesters who had liaised with the police and received permission for their protest (Bubola & Specia 2023), three women's safety volunteers handing out rape alarms who were not involved in protest in any way (Warren & PA Media 2023), a group of animal rights activists undertaking a Nonviolent Direct Action training several miles away (ITVX 2023) and a group of climate activists who were planning an entirely legal protest (which they did not have permission for) (Durbin & Sandford 2023). I was among those arrested.

gives the state a “carte blanche to target protesters” (JUSTICE 2023c). The Act considers disruption serious if anyone or any organization is

by way of physical obstruction prevented, or hindered *to more than a minor degree*, from carrying out—their day-to-day activities (including in particular the making of a journey), construction or maintenance works, or activities related to such works, are prevented from making or receiving, or suffer a delay that is *more than minor* to the making or receiving of, a delivery of a time-sensitive product, or are prevented from accessing, or suffer a disruption that is *more than minor* to the accessing of, any essential goods or any essential service (Public Order Act 2023—emphasis added).

When reading the legislation, it is striking how broad the provision against disruption is. It covers a vague yet comprehensive range of activities or services that must be allowed to proceed in an orderly manner from food deliveries (which are specifically mentioned as a time-sensitive product) to one’s daily commute. While all legal language is slippery and subject to differential interpretation by courts and lawyers, this provision where ‘serious’ is reinterpreted as anything ‘more than minor’ substantially decreases protesters’ right to disrupt to communicate their message.¹⁶³ As Margaret Kohn highlights in *Brave New Neighborhoods*, being forced to listen to protesters, no matter how much one does not want to, is vital for a functioning democracy (2004, 42-43; 63). Yet this new legislation has seen protesters arrested after marching on a road for less than two minutes (Umran & Marchant 2023). It severely limits the possibility of protest in the UK and restricts people’s right to represent themselves outside of the official, authorized channels provided by the state.

¹⁶³ This right is captured by the UK Supreme Court judgment in *DPP v Ziegler* (2021). This case established that protesters can legally disrupt public life so long as their disruption is not a disproportionate interference on the rights of others. It is not valid for any disruption however and only permissible in court for the charge of Wilful Obstruction of the Highway.

Further, it legislates that order, and the flow of ‘business as usual’, are more vital than free speech and association.

Public Order and Public Safety

In aiming to restrict the disruptive possibilities of protest, the Public Order Act 2023 conflates order with safety. However, this is a false equation as the anti-protest provisions do nothing to make people safe. Instead, the act simply limits the possibilities of the people to challenge the current societal order; this is all that is protected.

Despite criticisms, the government claims the Public Order Act 2023 was a necessary response to “the serious disruption caused by a small minority of protestors”, raising the need “to protect the public and businesses from these unacceptable actions” (Home Office 2023a). Drawing on language reminiscent of that used to write off disorderly people for engaging in antisocial behavior, the Home Office continues to claim that “guerrilla tactics used by a small minority of protesters have caused a disproportionate impact on the hardworking majority seeking to go about their everyday lives, cost millions in taxpayers’ money and put lives at risk” (2023a). This claim is patently ridiculous. Most of the country has not been impacted by disruptive protests, which mainly take place in city centers and London. Instead, the government has narrowed in on a group of people inconvenient for power and claimed that they are harming public wellbeing.

However, I want to focus on the slippage between disruption and people’s lives being at risk. This bizarre, fanciful claim is not justified through reference to any specific incidents and seems hyperbolic given an official government factsheet explaining the bill and why it is needed only lists nonviolent environmental protest groups¹⁶⁴ as those causing a ‘disproportionate impact’. Indeed, the government themselves note the main impacts of the

¹⁶⁴ It mentions Just Stop Oil, Insulate Britain and Extinction Rebellion.

protests they are seeking to stop are “halting public transport networks, disrupting fuel supplies and preventing hundreds of hard-working people from getting to their jobs” (Home Office 2023a). This reference to the impact of protests by nonviolent environmental groups is evidence of delay, disruption and disorder—*not* of threat to life.¹⁶⁵ Given this, it is my interpretation that the act is an attempt to sanctify the significance of public order and further legislate a right to be left alone and unaffected in the public realm. It is not about protecting the people from a serious threat to their lives or livelihoods. If people’s lives are not at risk from disruptive protest, what is? Why is the government so threatened by it that they needed to pass this legislation despite international condemnation?

I argue it is because disruption is a form of disordering. It is both disordering for those who participate in it as well as disordering the smooth flow of business as usual that the state and the capitalist order rely on. First, those participating in disruption are forced to negotiate conflict in engaging with one another and the broader public. Then, not only does it impede the flow of everyday life, but disruptive protest also threatens oppressive power by asserting the people’s right to dissent, to demand change and to challenge the order imposed on them. People are smashing petrol pumps and blocking traffic because they do not want a country where the interests of fossil fuel companies trump the interests of the people. Yet to better understand how disorder threatens power I turn back to Sendra and Sennett’s *Designing Disorder*.

Disobedience

¹⁶⁵ Some environmental protests in recent years in the UK have pushed the boundaries of safety, mainly for the participants. In particular, I am thinking of Just Stop Oil storming the Silverstone F1 track following a red flag (BBC 2023) and a series of tunneling protests by various groups (BBC 2021a; Gayle 2022). There is, however, no consensus on how dangerous such protests are; those who engage in them state that they are perfectly safe and well planned. However, to the state, and crucially to the Crown Prosecution Service who bring charges, they are severely dangerous and risks to life (BBC 2021a, 2023; Home Office 2022a).

Looking to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Sennett outlines how power, and the maintenance of a particular social order, rely on the obedience of the people (Sendra & Sennett 2020, 15-16). If one wants to be recognized by an authority figure, one will fight for acceptance. However, the acceptance they are fighting for is not on their own terms, but on the terms dictated by the hegemonic order.¹⁶⁶ An example of this would be a queer couple fighting for acceptance through adherence to the norms of the nuclear family¹⁶⁷ and its values or an immigrant seeking approval from the state for their loyalty and hard work. It is aiming to be seen as deserving based on the criteria established by oppressive power.

According to Sennett (via Hegel), to escape power and challenge the social order, if we want freedom and not just acceptance, we need more than just disorder understood as conflict and negotiation—we need disobedience. Building on Hegel's logic of civil society, Sennett argues people can “set themselves free ... by a show of indifference to the rules” (Sendra & Sennett 2020, 22). This freedom requires refusing to play by the rules set by an oppressive authority. It is not asserting that one is worthy based on the criteria established by that authority. Sennett also notes that a component of disobedience is speaking the language of the people rather than the language of oppressive power. He contends that “rather than debat(ing) planning regulations” people should speak in a language that reasserts “the need for face-to-face contact, or, more abstractly, invokes Lefebvre's right to the city” (Sendra & Sennett 2020, 22). Refusing to work within the confines set by the powerful through not speaking their language is just as vital an act of disobedience as explicitly disobeying rules.

¹⁶⁶ This is similar to what Brown calls ‘wounded attachments’ in *States of Injury*. Here, she describes subjects who seek freedom from oppression through asserting their difference as a wound and claiming rights based on it. However, in claiming redress based on a wound, they only recodify their own oppression and unfreedom (1995, 52-76). In seeking recognition based on a structure established by oppressive power, one cannot escape oppression.

¹⁶⁷ As discussed in Butler 2004b, 102-130.

Freedom emerges through defying the “terms of control” of authority (Sendra & Sennett 2020, 22).

For my purposes here, freedom is refusing to use spaces for the direct purposes they have been allocated. It is defying the structures that aim to informally control behavior and the signs, policies and informal rules that determine what can and what cannot happen in a space. It is, continuing to protest and gather, even if there may be ‘more than minor’ disruption. Freedom does not come from passively accepting the Public Order Act 2023 and the increasingly narrow frame of acceptable protest. Therefore, I argue the maintenance of order is not about the safety or wellbeing of the people, but about the continuation of the social order and the repression of those who seek to challenge it. While United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, stated that the Public Order Act 2023 “imposes unnecessary and disproportionate criminal sanctions on people organizing or taking part in peaceful protests” (quoted in OHCHR 2023), to the government and representatives of power, like oil executives who felt threatened by increasingly disruptive climate protests, the disordering inherent in disruptive protest is not peaceful or nonviolent; it is a threat—a threat to power. If people rise up in disobedience to forms of oppressive authority, the power of such authority wanes.

But I don’t want safety; I don’t want security¹⁶⁸

Mitchell makes the case for moving beyond an obsession with safety and security in ‘Against Safety, Against Security: Reinvigorating Urban Life’ (2009). In this thesis I have criticized protectionist measures that claim to be keeping people safe and secure, arguing that not only are such measures a means to displace the existential insecurity of neoliberal

¹⁶⁸ This is a reference to a quote from *Brave New World* that carries a similar message to the one I am conveying here: “But I don’t want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin” (Huxley 1932, 211).

capitalism, but they are damaging to the social fabric and fail to keep anyone safe. Therefore, I want to take this position seriously and outline why, paradoxically, if one is committed to survival and flourishing, it is worth abandoning safety and security as key values for structuring the governance of everyday life.

First, Mitchell equates “control over city space” to “practices of safety and security” (2009, 231). As I have also argued, maintaining order and control requires appeals to public safety and security to control behavior, limit movement and restrict association. In particular, I have been interested in how attempts to bolster oppressive power, like the Public Order Act 2023, entail assertions of the need to ‘protect’ the public from some imaginary and/ or exaggerated threat. Mitchell argues this control through appeals to safety and security “has never been stronger to the production of urban space; but in recent history (and not just since 9/11) certain practices of security (separating out ‘strangers,’ mechanical and human surveillance, defensive design), have become, in many ways, defining”. As a result, “discourses of safety have become dominant in discussions of ‘good’ urban space” (2009, 231). Safety and security are therefore the central values in determining what makes a ‘good’ public space and I would extend this argument to policy; protecting the public (from being annoyed by others) is dominant in discussions of ‘good’ policy.

Through an emphasis on fear of strangers, defensible design, the criminalization of antisocial behavior, PSPOs, POPs and anti-protest legislation, I have considered how policy, discourse and design structuring possibility in the public realm center protection, security and safety. I have also theorized that a feeling of security seems to come from feeling protected from other people—who are understood as irritants at best and potential threats at worst. Therefore, I echo Mitchell’s argument about the centrality of safety and security as values structuring engagement with the public realm.

Acknowledging the provocative nature of being against safety and security, there is nothing wrong with caring about the physical safety and wellbeing of those around you. Indeed, I will argue that being against safety and security actually corresponds with a politics of care. This is because, like the measures considered in this research, discourses of safety and practices of security do not make people safer. Instead, they reinforce the status quo and consolidate power. In particular, the Public Order Act 2023 is an example of how a policy promoted as protecting the public and keeping ‘hardworking’ people safe, is simply a means for the state to increase its capacity to control its citizens and limit their ability to engage in essential democratic rights. Therefore, it is not just that safety and security are profitable for some and reinforce a capitalist order (though they certainly do this); appealing to safety and security as a means to justify attacking the social and restricting rights and freedoms is about protecting power. As Mitchell puts it, the impetus for safety and security is the comfort inherent in “surrender(ing) to authority” (2009, 243). Consequently, to challenge safety and security as defining values is to refuse to surrender to authority.

Rather than outlining an argument against safety and security based on the sanctity of human life or the violence of a capitalist system that treats some as disposable, in this article, Mitchell outlines a positive argument based on Henri Lefebvre’s right to the city. He states, “This broader argument against safety and security is in fact a positive argument for a *right to the city* that begins by rejecting any induced fear of public space, even if, or perhaps because, some public spaces are, indeed, unsafe” (2009, 240-241). Just as Sennett roots his vision of a better society in accepting disorder and conflict, no matter how discomfoting it may be, Mitchell’s contention is rooted in learning to embrace a feeling, and even perhaps a reality, of being unsafe.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ This is a slightly different understanding of ‘safety’ than I have been using in this thesis and that I outlined in Chapter One. I have been using ‘safe’ to refer to a bodily reality of not being exposed to harm. Here, being ‘unsafe’ is more akin to feeling insecure.

The Right to the City

Lefebvre's right to the city is both a "cry and a demand" (1996, 158). As David Harvey puts it, it is "a response to the existential pain of a withering crisis of everyday life" and a demand "to look that crisis clearly in the eye and to create an alternative urban life that is less alienated, more meaningful and playful... conflictual and dialectical, open to becoming, to encounters (both fearful and pleasurable), and to the perpetual pursuit of unknown novelty" (2012, x). It is not an individual, normative right. Instead, in Harvey's interpretation, it "is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city" (2008). In this research I have looked at the public realm (primarily through policies that impact its use) and subjectification as, following Harvey, I do not believe these can be considered separately. Fear cannot be designed out and a better world cannot just be designed in. Who we are as people and how we experience and live everyday life are deeply interconnected. I will build on Harvey's understanding that the right to the city is about how we can change ourselves by making and remaking the world around us. Following Sennett, this also requires becoming active rather than passively accepting the control and order imposed upon us. Ultimately, rather than being a right in a classic sense, the right to the city is about the power of the people. As Mitchell puts it, it is "a form of *collective* empowerment" (2009, 241).

The right to the city as Mitchell understands it seems parallel to how Sennett understands the significance of disorder. It involves accepting the reality of conflict, change and negotiation that must happen through engagement and interaction with others. Mitchell even highlights the necessity of being able to handle disorder, describing the right to the city as "an ongoing project of difference in which *collective* use values predominate. It is therefore a conception of the city in which the possibility of *disorder*—the possibility for a certain *loss* of control, a certain *insecurity*—is always present and not necessarily entirely to

be feared” (2009, 241). However, whereas Sennett highlights the necessity of accepting conflict, and the messiness of action—Mitchell adds a need to accept insecurity itself.

Rather than safety and security, Mitchell appeals for the reassertion of “*urban* values of difference, strangeness, and danger” (2009, 247). He contends that “we must reinhabit not only the city, but city spaces, recognizing fear and danger not as something that can, or *even that should* be vanquished, but something that has to be *lived*” (2009, 247). We need to rethink whether the unknown and the possibility of risk are even so bad. As Sara Ahmed highlights in *The Promise of Happiness*, the root of the word happiness, ‘hap’ means chance. To be happy used to mean “to be lucky or fortunate” (2010, 22). In other words, happiness originally referred to an unexpected happening, something out of our control that brought joy unexpectedly. What would it mean to embrace this original understanding where risk, the unknown and the potentially dangerous are valuable, exciting even?

Finally, Mitchell argues for a world where securitized order “takes a backseat to inclusion and joy”, where the city as a space of “chance, serendipity, the unexpected” is embraced (2009, 247). He contends that, in imagining a form of urban life organized around joy and possibility, where dangers are acknowledged as inevitable, “new social, cultural, and political formations might arise” (2009, 231). In the rest of this chapter, I shall consider the possible formations that can arise through challenging authority rather than surrendering to it and embracing the joyful possibilities, along with the possible risks, of disorder.

*Dancing at the Revolution*¹⁷⁰

Sennett frames a desire for order and insulation from others as natural or inevitable, at least in a world of abundance, claiming compartmentalization “is not a process that is

¹⁷⁰ Here I reference the quote often attributed to Emma Goldman, but which she never actually said: “If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution”. While Goldman never uttered these words, her writings carry the sentiment expressed (Goldman 1931).

arbitrarily imposed on city people but one responsive to their human desires. The desires to hide from pain and disorder” (1970, 157).¹⁷¹ Ehrenreich has a different understanding. In tracing the history of the repression of disorderly rituals and festivities in *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy*, she frames order as something imposed by oppressive power to constitute and reconstitute hierarchal privilege (2006). I will focus on two aspects of this text: first I consider Ehrenreich’s claim that collective celebrations generate fear in authority figures. Then, I look at how this fear is rooted in a fear of the people.

Ehrenreich lays out a comprehensive history of what she calls collective joy events, from those practiced by indigenous peoples across Africa, the Americas and Australia, to those practiced by ancient Hebrews and Greeks to European carnivals in the Middle Ages. Rather than setting out a definitive definition of what constitutes a collective joy event, Ehrenreich rejects the anthropological separation between ritual and festivity, stating such differentiation is hardly meaningful to the participants (2006, 19). Instead, she focuses on collective gatherings of joyful revelry and celebration that include aspects of dancing, performance, feasting, costuming and a generalized reversal of standard codes of behavior and practice. Yet she also traces how such events have been repressed and institutionalized due to the revulsion and fear they sparked in the powerful.

As forms of power became more concentrated in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, Ehrenreich highlights a growing fear of festivities and a sense of suspicion in the powerful about those they ruled gathering to celebrate without the express permission of their leaders. This suspicion sparked a trend of repression and institutionalization from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. The forms this repression and institutionalization took differ from region to region, ranging from outright bans on festive activities, preventing public spaces

¹⁷¹ Also see Fromm 1941 for a similar argument that freedom is a burden people inevitably try to escape from.

from being used for public gatherings or creating their own public events for people to attend instead that were less riotous and disorderly in content (2006, 97-99). As to why this happened during this period, Ehrenreich argues the repression of festivities came due to the rise of early capitalism and a new economic order reliant on self-discipline, deferred gratification and restraint (2006, 100). Whereas less intensive economic forms allowed the possibility for periods of celebration and freedom between productive periods, capitalism demanded continual labor.

Fear of the Festival

Yet fear also played a role in the repression of festivities. As Ehrenreich puts it, the problem was not just with “what people were *not* doing—that is, working—but in what they *were* doing”—engaging in disorderly festivities (2006, 101). The suspicion of elites towards the disorderly behavior of the people led to the creation instead of events that did not come from the people themselves or their customary traditions but were organized by the state for the people (2006, 52-55). These festivities were more organized and indicative of the institutionalization of festivities. Ehrenreich gives the example of the Romans, desirous to maintain their rigid social order and disdainful of the festivals and celebrations of the Greeks, organizing circuses and gladiatorial games for the people. They hoped these events would fulfill the social role of festivals and pacify the citizens, so they no longer felt a need for more riotous, disorderly forms of festival (2006, 55). Therefore, Ehrenreich traces the early institutionalization of festivals to an attempt to control the unpredictable and uncontrollable impulses of the people.

She continues to trace the institutionalization of festivities and argues that, in addition to controlling the people, they also had an impact on social relations. Institutionalized festivities can be organized to orient relations and allegiances to the state, rather than fraternity among the people. As evidence of this type of festival Ehrenreich includes fascist

spectacles in Nazi Germany where people were gathered as passive spectators of the immense power of the Nazi party and only allowed a minute range of actions (cheers and salutes), military shows and processions that celebrate the power of the state as well as the various events and spectacles associated with the British Royal family from jubilees, public funerals, royal wedding and coronations (2006, 181-206); during these events, British subjects are encouraged to stop their lives to celebrate the power of these unelected figureheads and the aristocratic system they represent. Such events are distinctive from collective joy events because they do not emanate from the people and are instead “designed by a small group of leaders” for their own purposes (2006, 186). They are ultimately designed as forms of control and are marked by rigid order.¹⁷²

Further, in these events, people are not active participants in creating their own meaning. Instead, they are a passive audience meant to bolster and revere power. Ehrenreich compares the audience of an event organized by and for power and a crowd at a collective joy event stating, “An audience is very different from a crowd ... in a crowd, people are aware of one another’s presence, and ... sometimes emboldened by their numbers to do things they would never venture on their own”. However, “In an audience, by contrast, each individual is, ideally, unaware of other spectators ... he or she is caught up in the speech, the spectacle, the performance” (2006, 187). Therefore, while in a crowd, one becomes swept beyond the confines of their individual self and is moved by others to new possibilities of behavior and action; as an audience, one has only the most cursory relations with those around them.

¹⁷² Nonetheless even institutionalized events can be transformed into something more by an active people. Ehrenreich considers how this has happened in relation to music with the rock rebellion and sports through fans creating their own cultures (2006, 207-246). Though these spaces have largely been re-institutionalized, fans still find ways to resist this and create their own meanings. An example is Taylor Swift fans making and trading friendship bracelets with one another while attending her 2023-2024 tour (Wind 2024). These fans have found a way to connect and create their own experiences and meaning beyond the scripted event. While this is not revolutionary in itself, it is endemic of people’s resistance to entertainment that is scripted for them. It is also a form of sharing with and relating to strangers as part of a joyful experience rather than solely focusing on Swift as the spectacle.

Instead, all attention and respect are focused on the spectacle.¹⁷³ Institutionalized events, whether put on by authority figures or put on in the pursuit of profits and entertainment like festivals and contemporary music concerts, are not meant to unite the people but instead to encourage adoration and submission. In the case of events institutionalized by capital, they facilitate the orderly accumulation of capital. These events ultimately encourage passivity and/or allegiance to oppressive power rather than solidarity among the people and celebrate authority rather than mocking it. Thus, they quail the fears organized power has about collective festivities.

Fear of the People

I contend the fear of festivities, like the concern with public disorder, stems from a fear of the people. Drawing on Gustave Le Bon's *The Crowd* (1895), Ehrenreich notes the association between crowds and violence:

Individually, we may be reasonable and civilized people, but—the thinking goes—put us together and some primitive evil churns up. Nuremberg in 1934 and Paris in 1789, the Holocaust and the Reign of Terror—all merge with the war dances of the Mohawk and the initiation rites of Australian Aboriginals into a single category of wild and potentially homicidal behavior (2006, 184-185).

According to Ehrenreich, fearing disorderly or irrational behavior by crowds “readily masks a fear of the people” (2006, 176). This fear has bubbled out in the various historical instances she cites from the colonial encounter to the revolution to the rise of fascism. Fear of the people and their perceived lack of intelligence or irrationality is, after all, at the heart of

¹⁷³ Also see Debord 1967.

debates about the relevance of democracy and fear of it.¹⁷⁴ It is rooted in elite anxiety about losing power and privilege.

This is apparent in Britain's current anti-protest debates and policy. A fear of the people, their dissent and capacity for action is readily apparent in the Public Order Act 2023, which recasts nonviolent protest as dangerous and threatening to people's lives and wellbeing. In a Parliamentary debate on the Public Order Bill 2023, the Home Secretary stated she supported freedom of speech, even for groups she finds 'reprehensible'. However, she then moved to assert that this freedom only extends so far as the methods utilized are 'appropriate', legal and approved by the government. She claimed: "We live in a democracy in which freedom of speech must prevail. That means advocating and campaigning through *lawful methods* and *lawful means*, not breaking the law and causing misery and disruption to the law-abiding majority" (HC Debate 12 June 2023—emphasis added). Here, freedom of speech, association and even democracy are reduced to obedience to the state, a surrender to authority.¹⁷⁵ From this perspective, 'democracy' becomes an empty signifier that simply means the orderly continuation of the status quo, the consolidation of power and the continued drilling for fossil fuels.

Yet festivities represent a different form of democracy—a form of collective empowerment inherent in people coming together and resisting authority, throwing off the

¹⁷⁴ Fear of democracy based on the belief that the people are not informed enough to govern themselves has a long history from father of modern conservatism, Edmund Burke (1790) to Bryan Caplan arguing for the wisdom of the market against the wisdom of the people (2007) and Jason Brennan arguing in favor of epistocracy (2016). It also erupted among some liberal commentators in the backlash of the Brexit vote with commentators deriding those who voted for Brexit as ignorant "turkeys" (as in the expression 'turkeys voting for Christmas') (Penny 2016). See McKenzie 2018 for a discussion of this sneering, hateful and undemocratic attitude.

¹⁷⁵ This notion of 'appropriate' and 'legitimate' protest as that which engages with organized power played out in media coverage of the arrests at the coronation. Most outrage was directed at the arrests of Republican protesters who were arrested despite having a permit and liaising with the police. There was far less coverage and popular outrage at the arrests of animal rights and climate protesters, despite the fact they were also engaging in entirely legal activities. I see this stemming from a popular understanding that the protest with permission was more permissible or acceptable than the protest planned by Just Stop Oil which, while entirely legal, did not have permission.

shackles of hierarchy and dancing together in one teeming masse.¹⁷⁶ Ehrenreich goes as far as to argue they represent a threat to hierarchy. She contends that

The aspect of ‘civilization’ that is most hostile to festivity is not capitalism or industrialism—both of which are fairly recent innovations—but social hierarchy, which is far more ancient. When one class, or ethnic group or gender, rules over a population of subordinates, it comes to fear the empowering rituals of the subordinates as a threat to civil order (2006, 251).

Hierarchal relations underlie oppressive power. When one group places itself above another, it is animated by a sense of anxiety or fear about the loss of power, and the collective joy event or festival represents a rejection of order and an openness to blurring the boundaries between class, race, ethnicity and gender. From the intermixing and mingling of people from a variety of social classes, the ubiquity of cross dressing, masks that can make differences less apparent, to traditions like “ribald humor enacted by a man dressed up as a ‘king of fools’ or ‘lord of misrule’ that mocked real kings and other authorities” (2006, 88), to contemporary protests where people dress in caricatures of politicians and wear costumes, collective joy events carry a sense of playfulness that mocks or challenges hierarchy. In also asserting the significance of the festival by highlighting Lefebvre’s celebration of *La Fête* as central to the right to the city, Mitchell states “*La Fête* portends instead a world out of control, a world where the disempowered are empowered, and where safety and security take a back seat to joy and creativity” (2009, 242). The collective joy event is therefore a practice of the right to the city in its rejection of safety, security and hierarchy and its embrace of disorder.

Ultimately, one festival is unlikely to cause dramatic revolutionary change on its own. Ehrenreich states “you would have to be a fool, or a drug-addled hippie, to imagine that a

¹⁷⁶ See Bakhtin 1963; Lefebvre 1988; Vaneigem 1967 on the revolutionary festival.

restoration of festivity and ecstatic ritual would get us out of our current crisis ... No amount of hand-holding or choral dancing will bring world peace and environmental healing” (2006, 257). Yet Lynne Segal goes further in a defense of collective joy events and carnival. She argues there are “many examples of particular conjunctures in which carnival *did* sharpen political antagonism and serve ‘as *catalyst* and *site of action and symbolic struggle*” (2017, 69). She continues to assert that whether carnivals and collective celebrations lead to lasting, revolutionary change is not the point. Instead, she contends “whether or not carnival’s ecstatic moments of freedom tied in with more enduring social revolt, there is no doubt about its routine significance as a joyful affirmation of collective existence” (2017, 69). Therefore, in an era marked by intensive individualism and relations oriented by distrust, suspicion and paranoia, collective joy events are crucial for beginning the process of restoring the social and building a feeling of being part of a collective rather than an SUV subject. How else can revolutionary change start if not by rebuilding social relations?

Replacing Private Security with Public Care

I have begun outlining how disorder and festivities can help to rebuild social bonds and challenge oppressive power. Yet disorder and collective joy are not sufficient on their own. Here, I look beyond protectionism and towards a politics of care. In doing so, I consider Leslie Kern’s argument that “a care perspective is central to radically rethinking what safety means and what justice looks like” (2021a, 28) along with other feminist work on care and the family. Moving beyond safety and security will require rethinking how we care for one another and the earth beyond the confines of the traditional family and the limitations of antisocial, top-down protectionism.

With her emphasis on women’s safety and fear, Kern is primarily focused on challenging a carceral feminist position that increasing the power of the police improves women’s safety. Instead of “expanding one of the most violent and patriarchal institutions we

have” she urges investment in care (2021a, 29).¹⁷⁷ Throughout this thesis I have outlined how protectionist measures and the sense of security premised on insulation from others they provide fail to improve safety as the existential insecurity of the neoliberal social order is not addressed. Rather than investing in individualized comfort, Kern contends “we need to centre care by taking the enormous resources we’ve invested in systems of control and punishment and reinvesting in everything from child care to social housing to public transit to education to health care to social assistance to mental health and addiction services” (2021a, 29). Here, she is outlining a care-centered economy like that imagined by feminist economists (Ferber & Nelson 1993; Folbre 2001; Nelson 2006).¹⁷⁸ Like Mitchell, she is advocating for a move beyond safety and security and instead advocating for investment in infrastructures of care as the basis for a restoration of the social that goes well beyond what was offered by the welfare state.

Such an argument is also reflected in the *Care Manifesto* where the Care Collective states “careless communities focus on investing in policing and surveillance rather than in social provisions to promote human flourishing” (Chatzidakis *et al.* 2020, 36). The Care Collective also emphasizes how privatizing care and destroying the social is premised on the assumption the family will provide care. Sennett makes a similar point when he looks at how order relies on a reduction of social contact until it is primarily confined to the family, who is perceived to be a microcosm of society—though this is obviously not true (1970, 58-64). Therefore, to disinvest in safety and security and focus on care is also to simultaneously rethink the organizational structure of society. In *The Anti-Social Family*, Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh argue for a need to move beyond privatized intrafamily care to a broader societal structure of care (1982). I am interested in this idea of broader societal structures of

¹⁷⁷ See Day & McBean 2022; Davis 2003; Maher 2022; Vitale 2017 for an overview of police violence and prison abolitionism.

¹⁷⁸ Also see Fraser 1994.

care and see building formal and informal networks of care beyond the nuclear family as central to a politics of care. I now move to think about what this might look like.

Against the centrality of the nuclear family as the sole source of care, Kern highlights the critical role of other relationships in provisioning care. She states that “there’s great wisdom and forethought in setting up society so that many different kinds of social relationships are in place as safety nets that can sustain us through illness, job loss, aging, etc” (2021a, 201). While I have been discussing informal social contacts that may fall short of the friendships Kern is discussing here, many friendships or valuable, and supportive relationships are established through transitory social contact. Further, even temporary social contacts can still provide meaningful sources of care and support. Ultimately then, beyond just a restoration of the social safety net, at the core of a care-centered society is thinking about how to reorganize so people come into contact with one another more often *and* are integrated into broader networks of care outside the traditional family. As Rosa states, “Our relationships and kinship forms remake the world and, as such, are critical to our struggles for a better one” (2023, 8). Kern ultimately contends, “We may not know exactly what a safe city looks like, but we know that it won’t involve private safety measures” (2021a, 364). I would add to this that it may also not involve collective security measures. More privatization, securitization and surveillance do not make people safe and negatively impede people’s capacity to see one another as part of a collective interdependent whole. Therefore, while a politics of protection is individualizing and hostile to sociality, a caring politics centers social connection and building expansive networks of dependency and care.

New Anarchism in Practice

In *Uses of Disorder*, Sennett imagines a ‘new anarchism’ (1970, 107-198). Intrigued by his proposal, I will consider what the practice of new anarchism might look like. To do this, I will look at several groups who have challenged authority, occupied public spaces and

sought to make joy and care for one another and the planet central values rather than safety and security. In doing so, I cannot be comprehensive. Instead, I am merely focusing on groups that have been a personal inspiration of mine and that I see as emblematic of the theoretical framework for seizing the right to the city. In doing so, I also highlight the importance of protest that resists authority rather than accepting the ordering of the state as fundamental to the right to the city.¹⁷⁹

Sister's Uncut



Figure 13: Sisters Uncut occupy empty council flat on Link Road (Source: Alan Denney, licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0).

First, I turn to the intersectional feminist campaign and direct-action group Sisters Uncut. Consisting entirely of women and gender non-conforming people, Sisters Uncut

¹⁷⁹ See Marcuse 2005 for an account of how protest that works with oppressive authority is not a genuine expression of the right to the city.

began as a response to austerity cuts for domestic violence services in the early 2010s. Yet even as their headline demand is related to domestic violence services, they challenge the state violence inherent in the UK's hostile border regime, housing policy and prison system as well; they also organized resistance against the PCSC Bill. This approach stems from their goal of transforming society as they recognize that gendered violence does not exist in a vacuum and is instead part of and deepened by broader structures (Sisters Uncut).

While Sisters Uncut regularly engages with domestic violence services, assists women in their communities and runs regular trainings, they are also committed to direct action and the occupation of public space. Sisters Uncut has blocked bridges (BBC 2016) and occupied public buildings—from empty council flats to abandoned libraries and even a former women's prison—to assert their demands. In occupying former public buildings being sold off for luxury flats, Sister's Uncut peacefully takes over the empty buildings and, working closely with local groups, transforms them into spaces for the community. They host community festivals, run workshops, provide legal resources for those in the community facing eviction or needing support with applying for benefits and run morning breakfast clubs for children (Aisha & Hatel 2017; Cork 2017). In working with local people, they imagine what could be possible if people were at the center of determining how public buildings and public land are used. As one banner unfurled at the former women's prison said, "This is public land – our land. We don't want luxury flats and homeless spikes" (White 2017).

In their 'Feministo', Sisters Uncut states they are "fighting for our right to live in safety". However, like in Kern's work, this is not a safety that comes from more police and privatized security measures. Instead, it is a safety that is only possible by standing up to and resisting oppressive power. From their understanding, safety for women is only possible as part of broader, transformative societal change. Yet in the meantime, they care for one another and their communities, asserting "If the state is no longer providing sufficient public

services and spaces, we will ensure we can survive without them by any means necessary” (Sisters Uncut 2017). This is why, in addition to caring for one another and those facing violence and finding moments of joy, it is also necessary to challenge oppressive structures that have made livability a struggle for the most marginalized. Even if these transformative spaces are ultimately dismantled by the police, they not only envision but practice the people’s right to determine the use of public land.

Right to Roam



Figure 14: Landscapes of Freedom Mass Trespass on the Brighton Downs (Source: Dominic Alves, licensed under CC BY 2.0).

The Right to Roam campaign rallies against the privatization of England’s land and rivers, advocating for an expansion of the ‘right to roam’, a right recognized in Scotland, through an extension of the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000. Under this right in Scotland, even when land is privately owned, owners cannot exclude all members of the public; yet without this right, private landowners in England can. Advocating for a right to roam is about reinvigorating humans’ relationship with the natural world in a country where

the public is excluded from 92% of the land and 97% of waterways (Right to Roam). It is also about recognizing the mental and physical benefits of being in nature and asserting these as rights. With poor people and people of color least likely to have access to clean air and green spaces (Friends of the Earth 2022; Ramblers 2020), the Right to Roam campaign also challenges this inequality in access to the natural world.

The campaign, which began as an “alliance of ramblers, wild swimmers, paddle-boarders, kayakers, authors, artists and activists”, stages mass trespasses, trespassing on privately owned land that people are excluded from, to challenge England’s private property regime and assert the people’s right to experience the natural world (Right to Roam). These trespasses are joyful affairs that include music, singing, poetry, Morris dancing, swimming, shared meals, hot chocolate and even litter picking and opportunities to learn about the natural world from experts (Right to Roam; Spooner 2022); indeed, the trespasses are just as much about connecting with one another as they are about connecting with nature and restoring relationships of responsibility and interdependence.

Through breaking the law¹⁸⁰ and encouraging a joyful reconnection with the natural world, the Right to Roam campaign raises awareness of how privatization is harmful and challenges both literally and metaphorically the lines that are drawn to exclude people from the land and determine how it can be used. They enter spaces where they are not allowed and partake in activities that have been arbitrarily criminalized (supposedly) to preserve property values, such as wild camping and swimming. In doing so, the campaign refutes the notion that being in nature could or should ever be against the law. Further, they imagine a world where nature is not a passive resource but recognized as something we are dependent on and

¹⁸⁰ Most trespass in the UK is a matter of civil law. However, trespassing and attempting to stop or disrupt lawful activity taking place or intimidating anyone taking part in a lawful activity becomes the criminal offense of aggravated trespass (*Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994*).

must respect and care for—where the poor are not excluded from access to fresh air and green spaces and where we prioritize stargazing over excess development.

Reclaim the Streets



Figure 15: Participatory street theater at Reclaim the Streets Manchester, 1996 (Source: Ian Pattinson, licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0).



Figure 16: Reclaim the Streets New York City, 1999 (Source: Times Up! Environmental Organization, licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0).

“A street party is in full swing. 1000s of people have reclaimed a major road and declared it a ‘street now open’. Music laughter and song have replaced the roar of engines. Road rage becomes road rave, as tarmac grey is smothered by the living colour of a festival...

Single issue? Just against the car? For all of the mainstream media’s attempt to define it as such, for those involved it expresses much more ... For the city, the streets are the commons, but in the hands of industry and power brokers the streets have become mere conduits for commerce and consumption - the economic hero of which is, of course, the car. A symbol and a symptom of the social and ecological nightmare that state and capitalism create”.

— Reclaim the Streets leaflet, 1998

Finally, in the 1990s, Reclaim the Streets began in the UK by taking over streets and transforming them into collective celebrations. This sparked a wave of similar public dance parties across the world that challenged globalization and capitalism (Klein 1999, 314-316).

While the movement is often misunderstood as simply challenging the centrality of car culture, the car, and its dominance over city life is simply a symbol “of the capitalist disciplining of urban life” (Hamm 2002) and “the loss of communal space, walkable streets and sites of free expression” (Klein 1999, 316). Therefore, the group, emerging from

England's anti-road expansion protests and Earth First!, brought together anarchists, ravers, environmentalists, artists, socialists and trade unionists to reclaim the streets from cars¹⁸¹ and transform them into commons for the people by the people.

These events, which could attract thousands of people, included free food, music—typically acid house or techno, couches, wading pools, volleyball nets, frisbees, temporary structures for children to play in or on and theatrical performances (Jordan 1998, 142; Klein 1999, 313). Rather than streets being smoggy spaces where drivers sit annoyed in their private vehicles, they became spaces of laughter and celebration. Care and joy were practiced in public, and participants were not passive observers but part of the entertainment.

It is their philosophy that blocking off streets is not disrupting anyone but instead opening up space that cars are blocking. As an early flyer iterated, “The point is to reconquer the streets as a public, inclusive space and liberate them from the private, ‘enclosed’ use by cars” (Fourier 2003, 54). Hence in disordering space, it is opened up for life rather than capital accumulation. Reclaim the Streets was fundamentally about disorganizing the orderly flow of capitalist business as usual and creating “propaganda of the possible” (Jordan 1998, 146). The parties represented a rupture of the linearity, order and speed represented by cars; instead, they provided leisurely disorder. As Naomi Klein puts it, they created “an alternative vision of what society might look like” while directly defying the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 which sought to increase legislation against trespass and unauthorized collective events (1999, 313). Reclaim the Streets also reintroduced joy to radical politics. As an organizer stated, “We want to fire an arrow of hope and life into the heart of our dying city” (Fourier 2003, 51).

Trespass as Moving Beyond the Master's Tools

¹⁸¹ It is also to reclaim the street party from Royal jubilees and other state celebrations (Jordan 1998, 139).

All the aforementioned groups combine aspects of joy, celebration and care for one another with disorder and unauthorized interventions in the public realm. They act outside of traditional forms of politics and authority. They do not play by the rules established by power. After all, as Audre Lorde reminds us “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change” (1984, 105). I argue that order, in the context of this chapter, is a tool of the master and to disorder is to try to bring about genuine change.

While the Right to Roam campaign is the only group from my mini case studies that literally frames their actions as trespass, I consider the other groups as also partaking in forms of trespass. Following Mitchell, trespass is not just a literal crime against property. It is also not just “an act of disobedience” to the authority that aims to control and maintain order in space (though it certainly is an act of disobedience). However, Mitchell focuses on how trespassing is to “make an unwarranted claim, intrude, encroach”¹⁸² “not just upon a person’s time or attention, their patience or their property (as the dictionary would have it), but especially upon the authority of the state and capital” (2009, 246). To trespass is therefore to push back against oppressive authority, to refuse to adhere to its rules and to refuse to use the master’s tools—to attempt to bring down his house in other ways. It is seizing the right to the city.

Mitchell argues the only way to challenge a world riddled with fear is to imagine and fight for “a world in which trespass is foundational to governance” (2009, 246) and to refuse to settle for the comfort inherent in the illusion of security and surrendering to authority. I have outlined some examples of groups who have done just this to illustrate how collective activity that not only engages in trespass but does so in a way that centers joy and care

¹⁸² As defined in the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary.

beyond the confines of the family can be a practice of the right to the city. This is because, following Ehrenreich, Segal, Kern and the Care Collective, I see joy, care and rethinking forms of association beyond the family as fundamental to the project of disordering. Even as the Public Order Act 2023 aims to prevent people from being able to come together and challenge oppressive power, it is vital to continue trespassing, disordering and disrupting.

After all, according to Mitchell, the only way to challenge the violent capitalist order is “to continue to take space, make it public, and do social things (sleep, protest, hang out, speak) in it—to refuse the idea we must somehow give up on ‘our principal stance concerning the equality of human beings’” (2020, 453). I have made a similar contention here. However, I also have added to this; we must not only take space, make it public and do social (and joyful!) things, but, in maintaining a recognition of our interdependency, we must seek to care for one another and re-envision ways to do this beyond the restrictive confines of the traditional nuclear family. In making this point, I have drawn on feminist work on the importance of joy. While challenging neoliberal capitalism and the traditional hierarchies it relies on is quite literally a life or death matter, this must not be a somber affair.

Freedom through Creating Space for Social Bonds

In highlighting the exhausting work of activism in *Radical Happiness: Moments of Collective Joy*, Segal repeats the oft-mentioned claim that one of the biggest victories of neoliberal rationality is that it has quashed hope (2017, 199). Such a notion, captured by the quote “It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism”,¹⁸³ is a bit cliché. Nonetheless, there are indeed few options for resisting neoliberalism in the Global North through traditional means, with a generalized neoliberal consensus dominating formal politics.¹⁸⁴ Instead of accepting this, Segal focuses on the powerful and productive legacy of

¹⁸³ Mark Fisher attributes this quote to Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek (2009, 2).

¹⁸⁴ See Fraser 2019 on the rise of ‘progressive neoliberalism’.

utopic thought and practice in imagining and creating “spaces of resistance and ways of keeping hope alive” (2017, 200). In outlining this position, Segal is critical of those who condemn utopic thought and practice as fanciful, romantic or naïve (Eagleton 1981, 1997).¹⁸⁵ Focusing on utopic action as practiced through collective festivities, she argues that the point of these events is not to immediately create revolutionary, material change. Instead, the power of collective joy events in the public realm is through the bonds that are formed and how people are changed; they serve as spaces to challenge dominant narratives of power. They are bulwarks against fear—particularly fear of other people in public spaces. They generate hope that alternatives are only possible if people continue fighting for them. They are also a rejection of the droll, ritualized nature of much contemporary protest that has fallen into “a fairly unimaginative grid of repetitive chants and scripted police confrontation” (Klein 1999, 316) and fails to significantly assert the power of the people to determine how they want to live.¹⁸⁶ This is the right to the city; it is not just about changing the world around us but becoming different people.

According to Segal, “what matters most for those stressing the significance of a politics of hope over one of resignation or despair is primarily the consciousness acquired through the exhilarating joy of resistance itself, the sense of shared agency expressed in helping to build any alternative, autonomous spaces” (2017, 206). Therefore, the significance of such events is that, through creating alternative spaces, even if they are temporary, people can claim their right to the city—and in doing so, change themselves. In this thesis, I have focused on subjects as I believe who we are as a people is key to imagining and creating a

¹⁸⁵ While Segal primarily focuses on Eagleton’s account against utopia, this position is more typically seen in political discourse about needing to be ‘pragmatic’ and ‘practical’ when it comes to issues of state spending. This common sense notion that allocating state resources to care is impractical or unreasonable and that those who support more radical political formations are child-like or naïve has animated traditional politics in the UK and the US since the rise of the New Left at the turn of the twenty-first century.

¹⁸⁶ This also applies to overly controlled, excessively branded protest movements like Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil.

better world. Here, I argue that participating in joyful, caring protest that assert the people's right to determine the collective use of space is central to becoming new subjects. The impact of this on subjects and their relationships cannot be reduced to the singular moment in time of the festival.

In changing themselves through claiming their right to the city, people are claiming their right to be free. This is not freedom from fear, freedom from interference by other people or even freedom to determine how they spend their time; instead, this freedom is a practice—it is a practice of shaping one's own life while depending on others and of resisting the “ruling rationality” that “individualize(s) every moment of our existence” (Segal 2017, 259). It is freedom to shape one's own life and is “more closely identified with personal autonomy than with affluence, with empowerment over life than with empowerment over things, with the emotional security that derives from a nourishing community life than with a material security that derives from the myth of a nature dominated by an all-mastering technology” (Bookchin 1982, 261). It is freedom gained through facing one's fear of other people head-on, recognizing the reality that other people cannot be controlled and celebrating this dependence on one another rather than refuting it. Finally, it is freedom rooted in recognizing other people as a potential source of security in the care they can offer us, rather than a threat.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this chapter has woven together threads from the preceding chapters to make a provocative argument against safety and security. Survival and flourishing require accepting risk; we cannot go through life bubble wrapped. We need to be able to cope with unfamiliarity and change. We need to learn to work together despite the inevitability of conflict. Indeed, the climate crisis is already demanding radical changes to how we live,

work, play and care for one another. We cannot cling to the order of the present and, indeed, given the violence of the neoliberal order, why would we want to?

I have ultimately argued for the importance of disordering daily life through practicing public care and public joy. Whether or not such expressions are framed as protests, trespassing or street parties is beside the point. Instead, I contend we must pursue disorder and create spaces for others to experience the joy and power inherent in the breakdown of order and resisting oppressive authority. In this thesis, my focus has been on social bonds and relationships and how these can be extended and deepened so that networks of care extend well beyond the poverty of the traditional family. Even the most loving family in the world would not be adequate on its own to provide all the care one could possibly need. Yet I also outlined how it is in the interests of the established social order to keep people apart, fearful and suspicious of one another—seeing others as potential nuisances or adversaries. Through reinvigorating joy and care in public spaces, spaces are opened up for rebuilding social bonds and, not just recognizing one's dependency on others and the world but embracing it. In making this case, I addressed my second research question. Even temporary spaces of freedom where people can come together and practice rebuilding the world around them provide a way for us to become different people through seizing the right to the city—even temporarily.

In outlining this position, I have considered how embracing interdependency and practicing public joy and care can also open spaces to begin imagining and practicing more expansive networks of care beyond the limitations of the family. Rather than a source of fear or anxiety, such a position reinforces the idea that other people can be a source of joy and comfort—even a source of safety. Could broader networks of care—including both formal and informal relationships—close and more casual relationships—be a progressive form of bubble-wrapping subjects, nourishing and sustaining them in a harsh, difficult world?

I do not yet have all the answers. Though I aim to continue probing this in future research. Broadening networks of care will inevitably require changes in the built environment, including a loosening of the boundary between the public and the private sphere. For inspiration, we can look to radical twentieth-century feminists who imagined removing kitchens from private homes and placing the responsibilities for providing sustenance within the broader community (Hayden 1978; Wills 2023). They also instituted collective forms of childcare and experimented with more expansive family structures (hooks 1984; Dinner 2010; Williams 2009). To revisit such experiments in the context of providing the conditions for building broader networks of care would represent a dramatic change from what is taken to be 'safe' and comfortable. Yet I hold that it is only by accepting the fear that comes from having to rely on others and reinvigorating the sociality of the public realm that we can begin the messy process of building the solidarities necessary to start imagining radical new forms of politics and being which are vital to resist the tremendous global challenges we face as a result of capitalism's wanton disregard for the conditions that create livable life.

Conclusion

“I want a civilization in which 'progress' is not definable as making the world safe for little fat men.”

— George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*

“Any real change implies the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, the end of safety. And at such a moment, unable to see and not daring to imagine what the future will now bring forth, one clings to what one knew, or dreamed that one possessed. Yet, it is only when a man is able, without bitterness or self-pity, to surrender a dream he has long cherished or a privilege he has long possessed that he is set free — he has set himself free — for higher dreams, for greater privileges.”

— James Baldwin, ‘Faulkner and Desegregation’

Welcome to the United Kingdom in 2025. Police vans with facial recognition cameras sit on street corners looking for known shoplifters and other petty criminals (Boffey 2023b; Warren 2024). Here, “there is no such thing as minor crime” (Cleverly 2024). The streets are strangely empty, other than delivery drivers, as people rush through. Yet they are perfectly in order.

Part of this emptiness comes from the fact there are no unhoused people to be seen. It is not that homelessness has been eradicated; instead, the homeless have been driven out of sight—pushed to the margins of existence. Should they become too visible and be found “sleeping rough, or intending to sleep rough”, or even give the appearance that they may be intending to sleep rough, they will be moved on, fined or arrested under new ‘nuisance rough sleeping’ guidance. This is because their very existence is understood as a nuisance, “capable of causing damage, disruption, harassment or distress” and/or creating “a health, safety or security risk”. Just smelling bad is enough to constitute a nuisance (Basran 2024; *Criminal Justice Bill 2024*, 66-67).

Panhandling has also essentially been banned due to the creation of a ‘nuisance begging’ offense. This makes it illegal to beg “on public transport, in a station for any form of public transport, or at an entrance to or exit from any such station, at a bus stop, tram stop or

other place where members of the public get on to, or alight from”. It is also illegal to beg near any business where food or drink is served or consumed, close to any retail premises or within ten meters of any kind of ATM, ticket machine, vending machine or other kind of service where goods can be obtained. If one can manage to find a space that is not included in this list to sit with a cup or a sign asking for help, this behavior is still considered illegal if it causes disorder or distress (*Criminal Justice Bill 2024*, 76). Like with nuisance rough sleeping, this vague definition of nuisance begging focused on the affective response of others gives police and local authorities a carte blanche to sanitize the streets and sidewalks by removing those they see fit.

Here, police no longer need warrants to enter the homes of suspected burglars, and can break into properties, search them and seize items without the need to wait and prove due cause before a court (*Criminal Justice Bill*, 2024, 26-27). Indeed, police in 2025 have expanded powers. Notably, they are also allowed greater controls over public space and can create PSPOs, limiting what behaviors are permissible in the public realm in cities and towns, without any need for engagement with citizens, users of space or local councilors (*Criminal Justice Bill 2024*, 165-172). Ten-year-old children misbehaving and having fun with their friends—creating street art, graffiti or littering—rather than being given a talking to or directed towards community programs, are subject to criminalization. They can now be served with a Community Protection Notice (CPN) and be liable for fines and convictions (*Criminal Justice Bill*, 2024, 81). With ‘no minor crimes’, the cycle of criminality begins far earlier.

Protest is increasingly difficult to engage in unless heavily regulated and controlled to ensure the messages of protesters cannot effectively be communicated to others. Those who do participate in disruptive or disorderly protest are sent to prison—sometimes for a year,

sometimes for several.¹⁸⁷ In particular, the common practice of marching with smoke flares or other pyrotechnics has been banned. If someone wears a face mask to a protest, whether for concerns about their health or to hide from the facial recognition cameras also used to search for known protesters or those with protest-related convictions, they can face up to a month in prison and a £1,000 fine because face masks “intimidate the law-abiding majority”. Climbing a war memorial, or otherwise disrespecting a symbol of the British state, will incur stringent prosecution—up to a £1,000 fine and potentially three months in prison (Home Office 2024). To avoid fines and imprisonment, protest must be deferential, nondisruptive and orderly.

Despite a declining crime rate, particularly violent crime (ONS 2024b), this increasingly punitive and vengeful approach to justice means that British prisons are desperately overcrowded. Consequently, those convicted of imprisonable offenses in the UK are sent abroad to foreign jails (*Criminal Justice Bill 2024*, 38-41), despite concerns raised about standards for accountability in ensuring their basic rights are upheld (Finer 2023). Others are concerned about the “isolation and trauma” these prisoners will face in being far from family and friends and in a location where they potentially lack familiarity with the language and/or culture (Stacey, quoted in Richards 2023).

I am conscious that this description may sound fanciful, like the beginning of a dystopian novel; however, it is likely to be reality should the Criminal Justice Bill 2024 pass in full. While I have potentially presented the measures in an exaggerated tone, suggesting

¹⁸⁷ While I am listing proposed aspects of the Criminal Justice Bill 2024 here, including the possibility of jail sentences for climbing war memorials or wearing face masks, lengthy sentences for nonviolent, disruptive protest have already been given in the UK under changes to sentencing guidelines that were established in the PCSC Act 2022. Most notable are the sentences given in 2023 to Morgan Trowland and Marcus Decker after being found guilty of committing a Public Nuisance for a protest with campaign group Just Stop Oil. They had climbed the Queen Elizabeth II Bridge and stayed suspended by cables for thirty-seven hours, causing minor to substantial delays to traffic (though the judge calculated that, on average, each vehicle was delayed for six minutes and six seconds). Trowland was sentenced to three years and Decker to two years and seven months; these were by far the longest sentences ever for nonviolent protest in the UK (*R v. Trowland and Decker*). To add to this, there remains controversy over some of the convictions and lengthy sentences for riot and affray given to those who attended the Kill the Bill protests in Bristol that turned violent in 2021 (Wall 2022, 2024).

what will happen if they are all strictly enforced and not watered down by Parliament, all the provisions above are measures that are being considered as part of the bill. I have also left out other aspects of the bill due to space and relevance. However, here I have aimed to sketch out an account of the kind of society that the bill is aiming to construct. To me, this sounds like a terrifying dystopia. Yet I am aware that to others, this may seem like a utopia of order, control and peace.

I wanted to end my doctoral research by highlighting this Bill as it brings together many of the issues I have examined in this thesis—from antisocial behavior, PSPO powers, anti-homeless legislation and further restrictions on protest. It is also a policy that is framed as vital to protect the public. According to the government, the main aims of the bill are to “protect the public, give the police the powers they need to cut crime and anti-social behaviour, improve public confidence in the police, introduce tougher sentencing for sexual and violent criminals and strengthen the supervision of offenders on release from prison” (Lipscombe *et al.* 2023). This protection, as I have suggested above, is primarily through restrictions on rights and freedoms and the reassertion of public order.

Yet, like the other measures I have analyzed in this thesis, the Criminal Justice Bill 2024 is not actually about keeping people safe; it is not responding to any actual need. While one could rely on declining crime statistics,¹⁸⁸ I do not believe this is necessary as the way this Bill frames the relationship between disorder and public safety is patently ridiculous. As a member of the public, I am not in danger if someone climbs a war memorial, sets up a tent near a cash point or begs on my train. I am not in danger if a ten-year-old litters in my

¹⁸⁸ These were even cited by PM Rishi Sunak and Home Secretary James Cleverly in speeches seeking to justify the need for the Bill despite crime declining. They focused on fear of crime remaining high despite actual crime declining and suggested people lacked pride in communities and that this is somehow harmful (Cleverly 2024; Sunak 2023a).

neighborhood or engages in unruly behavior.¹⁸⁹ Finally, someone sleeping rough is never a danger or a threat. How can someone be a danger while asleep? While I would argue that the very reality of rough sleeping is itself a violent harm created by the neoliberal capitalist system (Mitchell 2020; Madden & Marcuse 2016, 10), rough sleepers are also far likelier to be victims of violence and harm than perpetrators of it (Sanders & Albanese 2016). This is not a bill that will protect the people of the UK in any meaningful way.

With the new categories of nuisance rough sleeping and nuisance begging, which see the homeless as both annoying irritants and potentially dangerous to health and safety,¹⁹⁰ the bill also deepens the right to not be affected that I have been theorizing in this thesis. It does so by protecting the comfortable from the discomfort of having to apprehend and acknowledge the implications of decades of neoliberal policies and, more recently, the state's refusal to tackle intersecting crises from the housing crisis, cost-of-living crisis and mental health crisis. Hence comfort is maintained through hiding the violence of neoliberal policy and recasting the marginalized into agents of societal harm.

The Criminal Justice Bill 2024 can be seen as a last-ditch attempt by a floundering political party to bolster their power by appealing to their 'law and order' supporting base, achieve ideologically desired change and appease donors before they are likely to be voted out of office. Yet, beyond this more straightforward understanding, the Bill is also one that relies on rhetoric of public protection to bolster the power of the state and the social order. Indeed, JUSTICE see it as seeking "to inappropriately treat legislation as a panacea for a range of socio-economic issues, rather than address(ing) their underlying causes" (2023a). In

¹⁸⁹ I am not saying ten-year-olds can never be dangerous. However, I am referring to the behaviors that would make one liable for a CPN (which includes things like repeatedly littering, vandalism and graffiti), rather than cause one to be charged with a more serious offense.

¹⁹⁰ According to a Home Office and Ministry of Justice policy paper, some examples of how rough sleeping can cause a health, safety or security risk are when "an individual (is) rough sleeping in a way which blocks a fire exit or prevents wheelchair access on a walkway" (2024b).

my understanding, it aims to distract from the structural causes of socioeconomic inequality and strife by instead pushing the idea that existential insecurity, and the various intersecting crises I outlined in the Introduction to this work, are due to problematic individuals who must be punished. Yet this will not make anyone safer or improve people's lives. Instead, it serves as a veil to obscure how the bill increases the power of the state to continue deepening its damaging policies. This reading connecting the bill to an attempt to maintain and secure power seems obvious given the bill even protects symbols of power, particularly those symbolic of Britain's imperial legacy like war memorials.

As this Bill that contains threads of the issues I am working on continues to move through Parliament, this research is taking place at a critical moment; I am aiming to understand a logic of governance that is currently unfolding and will have serious consequences for people's safety and wellbeing. When I began this research, I had no idea how many crucial policies would be introduced that would touch on the themes I was looking at. Therefore, in concluding my thesis, I will first review how the project has developed and how particular texts I encountered and events happening around me shifted its overall direction. I will then review the argument I have made and outline the key contributions I am aiming to make with this research, before considering spaces for further research, including those that have been opened up by this work and those that I plan to pursue. I end with a provocation I aim to develop in future work—we must embrace the right to be annoying.



Figure 17: Smoke flares being used at a November 2023 Palestine solidarity march in London (Source: Julian Stallabrass, licensed under CC BY 2.0).

Research Development

This research was prompted by a concern with the life and death consequences of socioeconomic disparities in the UK. I was also interested in social rights (including education, food, water, healthcare, housing and labor rights), though not in a literal sense as legal entitlements; instead, I was interested in claiming them as rights to challenge and resist their commodification and privatization under neoliberalism, which has made livability a privilege rather than a right. These interests stemmed from frustrations that arose during my Master's in 'Gender, Development and Globalisation'. Also, following an engagement with her work in my master's dissertation, I was interested in Wendy Brown's understanding of neoliberalism as both a project and a rationality constituting a hegemonic way of understanding the world riddled with paradox and contradiction (2000, 2015, 2019). Consequently, bringing all this together, the initial question I started my research wanting to

address was how neoliberal capitalism maintains its hegemonic dominance despite its obvious failings and the profound harm that it causes.

While these concerns still underlie the project, in its inception, the research was a more normative political philosophy/political theory-based project. Yet as it developed, I found that the research area was far too broad. So, I decided to focus on housing as a specific area to explore my interests in relation to. I began researching Britain's 'right to buy' policy and focused on how, beyond its undeniable role in the contemporary housing crisis in the UK (Boughton 2018; Cooper, Hubbard & Lees 2020; Robertson 2016),¹⁹¹ it radically reoriented subjects by giving them a stake in the new neoliberal capitalist order. At the time, I was examining housing and lack of access to it as a way to understand the deadly consequences of policy. I was looking at issues like defensive home ownership (Atkinson 2006; Atkinson & Blandy 2007; Davis 1990, 151-219),¹⁹² exclusionary definitions of affordable housing, gentrification and social cleansing and the ideological construct of a house versus a home (Madden & Marcuse 2016).

Given the project was still rooted in social rights and the idea of a right to housing, after a conference presentation of this early research, it was suggested I look into work on 'the right to the city'. While I had come across this topic previously in David Harvey's *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (2012), I was intrigued by how it seemed to encapsulate a lot of the ideas that I was interested in. So, I selected several texts on the topic and began reading. One of these was the edited collection entitled *The Right to the City: A Verso Report* (2017), which included Don Mitchell's 'Against Safety, Against Security: Reinvigorating Urban Life'.¹⁹³ This intervention, and the idea of social agoraphobia it introduced, really stood out to me. Living in London at the time, the text not only

¹⁹¹ Also see the documentary film *Dispossession: The Great Social Housing Swindle* (2017).

¹⁹² Also see Atkinson & Flint 2004.

¹⁹³ Originally published in *Fleeing the City: Studies in the Culture and Politics of Antiurbanism* (Mitchell 2009).

corresponded to my academic interests but also with my frustrations at the increasing sanitization and securitization of the city. The concept of social agoraphobia corresponded to what I was seeing in the public spaces I regularly used or passed through, and hearing from those I knew, but had not been able to articulate.¹⁹⁴

Coming from a feminist background, the study of emotion and affect has always animated my work. Consequently, I also was interested in this chapter's use of fear as a central idea; I wanted to understand more about the role of fear in neoliberal governance and decided to center the concept of social agoraphobia in the thesis. Therefore, I continued reading in and around this area, eventually switching to focus on public space rather than housing. While I am still passionate about housing and the housing crisis, and the divide between public space and the private family is still integral to the research, I wanted to take up Mitchell's provocation against safety and security in my research and focus more on the political potential of public space.

The final aspect of the project that came into place was the inclusion of policy relating to protest. This came partially from the experience of living in the UK as the PCSC Bill passed and being tangentially involved in protests against this Bill with the Kill the Bill campaign. I was also then involved in the much smaller protests against the Public Order Bill (as there was no popular campaign against this Bill). While I initially saw my interest in protecting the right to protest as separate from my research, as I continued protesting, reading about the policies and explaining my motivations for challenging them, I noticed parallels

¹⁹⁴ It may be worth adding that the time I encountered this text was one where there was an extreme sense of collective fear associated with women being in public spaces following the murder of Sarah Everard, who was abducted and murdered by a serving police officer, and the murder of Sabina Nessa several months later. In both cases, much was made of the women waking through public green spaces shortly before they encountered their killers (BBC 2021c; Drummond 2022; Kindred 2022; Porterfield 2021). Yet around the same time, it was being forced to stay at home in the private sphere due to COVID-19 lockdowns that led to increased domestic violence and harm for women, children, young LGBTQ+ people and other marginalized groups (Dawsey-Hewitt 2021; The End Violence Against Women Coalition 2020). Nonetheless, this more pervasive private harm received far less notice.

between my work and the anti-protest legislation. More fully, I realized how public safety seemed to be equated to public order in a way that was clearly about bolstering power rather than keeping anyone safe. Further, I saw how the restrictions on protest aimed to restrict and control appropriate behavior in public spaces in a similar way to issues I was looking at, like defensible design or antisocial behavior police powers. The links became more obvious as the government continued to use the same language to describe protesters as they used to describe antisocial behavior: ‘a small minority making life difficult for the hardworking/law-abiding majority’. Moreover, it was my experiences and observations in protest spaces during this thesis that led to my final contention that there is a real change in subjectification that happens upon taking part in protest, specifically protests that are not regimented and controlled by the state.

All this to say that, while this has been a complex journey with the overall research changing substantially throughout, it has always been rooted in understanding the paradox of neoliberalism and my concerns with the harms that it creates. Concerns I had at the start of my research, such as how comfort functions to reinforce the status quo, could be articulated and explored more clearly as the project shifted. Many of the same key texts, namely Brown’s (1995, 2000, 2019) and Butler’s (2009, 2020), have anchored the thesis and my understanding throughout these shifts. In particular, I have always been inspired by the thread of freedom (and attempts to define and understand its multiple meanings) that runs throughout Brown’s work.¹⁹⁵

However, rather than looking at neoliberalism and its relationship to socioeconomic inequality and life chances directly, or in relation to housing politics, I have moved to looking at how the logic of ‘protecting the public’ appears as neoliberalism should be in its death

¹⁹⁵ Here I mainly refer to Brown 1995, 2000, 2015, 2018, 2019.

throes—having completely dismantled anything that could allow people a decent life. Yet it clings on. Nonetheless, I am still concerned with the life and death consequences of extreme inequality and the continuation of the neoliberal social order. I still want to advocate for equal livability and think about how an active, engaged demos can come about.

Trajectory of Research

As the research developed and a puzzle formed based on a series of contradictions I found in the research and saw in the world around me, I moved to address the paradox of public protection, focusing on subjects and their relationships with one another. I was interested in how policies promising to protect the public did not make anyone safer and instead only seemed to stir up more fear—particularly in those least vulnerable to harm. I was also interested in how this rising fear seemed to be directed toward other people as potential sources of harm. My decision to focus on subjects and relationships was due to a belief that, as Sophie K. Rosa puts it in *Radical Intimacy*, “our relationship and kinship forms remake the world and, as such, are critical to our struggles for a better one” (2023, 8).

Therefore, I first sought to contextualize my discussion within Brown’s account of neoliberalism as both a rationality and a political project that reinforces the social order (2019, 2020). I see protectionist policies both as a means of reinforcing neoliberal hegemony and deepening the power of the project by securing support even as neoliberalism generates existential security. I then examined the idea of protecting the public as it appeared in defensible design and public safety announcements encouraging surveillance of others and fear of strangers (Chapter Two) and in the invention of antisocial behavior as a problem generating fear and destroying communities (Chapter Three). Having outlined the logics and ideas my research relies on, I then moved to address the research question more directly by looking at the constitution of subjects who emerge from ‘public protection’ measures by looking at PSPOs and the right to not be affected (Chapter Four). I then look at how the

increasing privatization and sanitization of public spaces encourages passivity and discourages engagement (Chapter Five). Finally, I tackled the problem of challenging oppressive power, looking at the Public Order Act 2023 and how it equates public order, as in the smooth flow of business as usual, with public safety; yet I found that all this does is bolster the power of the state and the social order (Chapter Six). Further, the imperative to maintain order keeps people passive and apart.

I ultimately found that protectionist policies constitute hyper-individualized subjects who find freedom in their disengagement from the collective social whole; these subjects are encouraged to view others only as annoyances, intrusions or threats. They value safety and comfort and do not recognize their fundamental reliance on one another and the world for survival. Therefore, they will not come together to resist pressing harms. In my view, sketching out these claims is not just a theoretical musing; on the contrary, I have aimed to understand the de-democratization in the UK and the failure of any kind of mass collective resistance to materialize. Despite facing colossal harms, protest and organized dissent, at least that which takes place offline, is increasingly viewed with disdain (Morris 2023; Shrimpton & Skinner 2024). Hence my research has aimed to understand how protectionist policies factor into this de-democratization and apathy through their impact on subjects and relationships—though I acknowledge that other factors outside the scope of my research also are needed to fully explain why the UK devalues protest.

Yet due to this concern with de-democratization and apathy, or people's inability to come together and challenge oppressive power, I also aimed to consider practices or modes of resistance that could generate subjects more capable of working with one another to resist harm and challenge structural violence. While I looked at shared space as a mode of design that mandates interaction and engagement as useful for highlighting the importance of regular social interaction for generating more active subjects with an awareness of their personal and

collective responsibilities, just increasing people's interactions with one another is insufficient to challenge oppressive power. This alone will not dismantle structural violence. Therefore, I turned to Pablo Sendra and Richard Sennett's work on disorder, and the importance of conflict and conflictual relations (2020). I saw this as a meaningful alternative to the prioritization of comfort. I was particularly interested in how their account connected disorder with disobedience to authority and seeking to work outside the framework established by oppressive power. This perspective aligns with my belief that, following Audre Lorde, the master's tools cannot dismantle the master's house (1984, 103-106). Change can only happen by establishing ways of thinking, being and working beyond the limitations established by oppressive power.

In examining the Public Order Act's attempt to further limit 'appropriate' protest and thus further confine the framework that dissent is permissible within, I argued for the need to seize the right to the city through protest that is not submissive to power's dictates. You cannot create radical change by following the rules put in place by those who do not want radical change. Further, building on work on the importance of care, joy and spontaneity as alternatives to safety, comfort and not being affected (Chatzidakis *et al.* 2020; Ehrenreich 2006; Segal 2017),¹⁹⁶ I argued that protest is also most effective when it is a practice of public joy and public care for one another and the world. Taking part in such actions is a practice of the right to the city. Whereas one may not change structures or permanently alter the world around them, the subjective¹⁹⁷ and intersubjective consequences of disobedient, caring and joyful protest can begin the process of generating more engaged and active subjects who recognize not only their power but also their connection and dependence on others and the world around them. By temporarily creating alternative spaces to relate

¹⁹⁶ Also see Kern 2021a; Mitchell 2009.

¹⁹⁷ As in pertaining to subjectification; not the literal meaning of 'subjective'.

differently to the world and one another, we can change ourselves and begin building new relationships.

Key Contributions

I will specify what I see as the four main contributions of this research. This includes a substantive contribution primarily to critical urban studies and critical geography, as well as work on the politics of safety; a methodological contribution that will be useful for theoretical scholars working across a range of disciplines but interested in social reality and policy implications and a normative contribution to policy debates. I also hope the normative contribution will be useful for organizers, activists and those interested in social movements more broadly.

Substantive

The first of my contributions is the introduction of ‘public protection’ as an analytical lens. This can be applied to policy or discourse or used in work looking at the governance of public space more broadly. I see it as particularly useful for those studying privatization and securitization in critical urban studies and critical geography.

While I considered using other lenses, such as privatization or securitization, to draw together the issues I looked at in this research, I found that ‘public protection’ was most suitable for my aims. Whereas privatization draws too much attention to the idea of ownership, something I was not interested in focusing on, securitization seemed more appropriate for looking at the specter of terrorism as a threat. Instead, the policies and issues I was interested in looking at seemed to pose the ‘problem’ as other people and interaction, engagement and sociality. Further, given I was interested in the embodied harms of neoliberal capitalism and socioeconomic inequality, this lens allowed me to contrast the issues that

particular policies and discourses posed as threats to public safety with the structurally produced harms that I see as threats to public safety and wellbeing.

In ‘Security or Safety in Cities? The Threat of Terrorism after 9/11’, Peter Marcuse outlines how the existential insecurity produced by neoliberal capitalism is displaced so that it instead becomes attached to anxieties about terrorism (2006a). Consequently, his analysis uses the threat of terrorism as an analytical lens to explore how the insecurity generated by capitalism is hidden through the introduction of an alternative ‘nightmare’ that is framed as the primary source of insecurity. I have aimed to make a similar argument. In highlighting how the notion of protecting the public relies on hiding the existential insecurity of neoliberal capitalism by instead framing sociality, strangers and contact with others as sources of risk and unsafety, this lens can contribute to work looking at how the social order is reinforced through the introduction of non-terrorist ‘threats’ the public supposedly needs protection from. While I see my contribution then as similar to Marcuse’s, and therefore most useful for critical urban scholars and geographers, this lens may also be useful for those looking more generally at social politics and the politics of safety.

At first glance, ‘public protection’ may seem similar to paternalism. Generally, theories of the ethics of paternalism justify interventions in people’s free choice and rights to assist them in some way (Dworkin 2020; Whitworth 2016). These interventions may violate one’s will or consent, but they are considered justifiable because they are ultimately for one’s own good or the greater good. I do not wish to get into an in-depth discussion of various forms of paternalism. Instead, to differentiate my discussion and the lens of ‘public protection’ from paternalism, I want to highlight how ‘public protection’ is specifically framed against an external enemy. In all the measures and discourses I have looked at, intervention or restrictions are posed as necessary to protect from an external, human threat—whether this be unknown strangers, disorderly people, annoying people or protesters.

Paternalism, however, does not require this same kind of threat. For example, a state intervening to stop people from smoking is still intervening in the name of protection, but from the lung damage caused by smoking rather than against a specific person or category of persons.

In tracing Butler’s work on the zero-sum game logics that underlie my understanding of ‘public protection’ (2009, 2020), I outlined how protecting the public ultimately ends up justifying harm to those with less social power. Consequently, this lens is useful for understanding the rhetoric commonly employed by successive governments across both of Britain’s main political parties that ‘a small minority’ is threatening ‘the hard-working/law-abiding majority’.¹⁹⁸ This rhetoric transforms minority groups into agents of harm. Given the relevance of this lens to understanding this rhetoric—how and why it is used and the logics inherent in it—it may also prove useful for those studying politics and policies using discourse analysis.

Methodological

Rather than intervening in an existing debate, this research began with some frustrations and contradictions that I wanted to better understand. To do this, I read extensively across a range of disciplines. In doing so, I noticed a few key themes, such as fear, freedom, the risk of other people and the idea of needing to protect the public. This led me to formulate my research questions and construct a collage style methodological approach. While my method is inspired by other collage-like work—such as films and

¹⁹⁸ As evidenced in this thesis, this phrasing is used by politicians to refer to a variety of actions that are considered antisocial behavior and disruptive or annoying protests. Yet, it has also been used to negatively frame other behaviors, notably going on strike. Conservative MP Dominic Raab argued for increasing the voter turnout threshold for strikes, arguing in *The Telegraph* “These reckless and damaging strikes strengthen the case for a voting threshold, so the militant minority can’t hold the hard-working majority to ransom” (quoted in Hope 2012).

programs by director Adam Curtis,¹⁹⁹ and research that explicitly calls itself a collage, particularly Cordelia Freeman's accounts of collage (2020)—it differs in that my use of the term collage refers to the disciplines I draw from rather than the methods employed. The method is theoretical, though it does draw on some insights from political theory and critical social theory.

This methodological approach, and a refusal to couch the research in any one discipline and its existing debates allowed me to formulate novel research questions and better understand the issues I was interested in. In arranging the work, due to collage's emphasis on presentation and juxtaposition, I have been able to highlight the absurd contradictions of 'public protection'. I therefore see the methodological contributions of this research as reinforcing the relevance of collage for interdisciplinary theoretical research and for creating new fields of understanding that span disciplines. This is necessary as complex social issues, and the relevance and implications of policy and political decisions, cannot be confined within the stringent boxes of the disciplinary system. To understand the complexity of reality and the reverberations of politics, it is vital to have a fluid, flexible and creative method that allows for the formulation of new areas of research. I therefore see this method as useful for qualitative research looking at social issues and politics from an interdisciplinary perspective. Most specifically, it will be useful for those who, like me, are interested in understanding and presenting material on paradox and contradiction.

Concerning the specific issues I drew together in this thesis, while some texts mention them together through intersecting lenses of privatization, securitization and/or sanitization (Davis 1990; Minton 2009; Mitchell 2009),²⁰⁰ I could not find any texts that sought to see all the phenomena I have drawn together here as interconnected in the same way. The closest I

¹⁹⁹ See *Century of the Self* 2002; *Power of Nightmares: The Rise of the Politics of Fear* 2004; *HyperNormalization* 2016.

²⁰⁰ Also see Davis 1998, 2002.

found was a recent Coda written by Anna Minton and published in *Urban Geography* that sought to think through how the same forces of privatization and control that underlie PSPOs and POPs are also present in Britain's anti-protest legislation (2022a). This piece therefore suggests that there is some burgeoning interest in a method that allows these issues to be thought through together in this field. Yet, being a Coda, Minton's piece is only six pages long. Therefore, the relationship between these issues is not explored in detail as I do here. Nonetheless, as this method allows me to explore the interconnections between PSPOs, POPs, anti-protest legislation along with other privatization and securitization measures adopted in the name of public protection, it may also be useful for critical urban studies aiming to better understand the overarching rationalities and logics that thread between these issues.

Normative

Finally, I see this research as having two interconnected normative contributions. The first is highlighting the danger of policy based solely on feelings—particularly fear—in the absence of empirical need. Whereas Martha Nussbaum highlights the ethical failing of law and policy reactive to disgust and shame, I have aimed to make a similar contribution here in relation to fear (2009).

Drawing on Zygmunt Bauman (2005, 2006) and Marcuse (2005, 2006a, 2006b), I have highlighted how neoliberal capitalism generates a sense of existential insecurity that is experienced as a free-floating fear. I have continued to outline how this sense of vulnerability and fear can be manipulated so that it becomes attached to phenomena that have nothing to do with harm or insecurity. Whereas people feel unsafe due to structural realities, I have highlighted how politicians can instead sell the belief that people are unsafe due to other issues that do not present genuine risks. While there is a plethora of work on the politics of fear and fear as a technique of governance (as discussed in Chapter Two), my normative

contribution is in relation specifically to recent policies in the UK that aim to, or claim to, respond to fear.²⁰¹

For example, in a speech justifying the Criminal Justice Bill 2024, discussed at the start of this chapter, the Home Secretary, James Cleverly, claimed that a key component of the Bill was people's feeling of safety. He stated: "It is really important that we ensure not only that people are safe, but that they also *feel safe*" (2024—emphasis added).²⁰² In highlighting how feelings of safety are disconnected from actual threats, I hope to have contributed to normative understandings of why this justification is problematic. While it would be easy to state that the government is only claiming to be responding to fear as justification for policies that serve their interests, I think this would be an oversimplification given it is true that people in the UK are increasingly afraid of crime (ONS 2021), see it as one of the biggest threats in their local area (Home Office 2023b) and broadly support an increasingly authoritarian state (Silver & Fetterolf 2024).

While I would never say that emotions are irrelevant, frame them as irrational or say that policy should be based only on quantifiable realities, it is vital to highlight the politicization of emotion and insecurity—particularly fear. This is because public fear as a justification for increased restrictions on essential rights and freedoms is causing the UK to become increasingly authoritarian (Amnesty International 2024b; CIVICUS 2023) and is deepening the neoliberal politics that are generating harm. Consequently, in looking at data that may seem to justify policy by stating that people are afraid of something, the contribution of this research is to cast suspicion on the oversimplification of such approaches and instead

²⁰¹ Of course, there are other relevant fears I have not been able to consider here due to the limited scope (focusing on policies structuring interaction in the public realm), such as the constructed fear of migrants and policies responding to this.

²⁰² In Chapter Three I also highlighted how David Blunkett used similar reasoning to justify the need for policies targeting antisocial behavior (pg. 99).

urge more complex analyses that focus more on differentials in livability and exposure to harm.

Just because people are afraid of something does not mean it should be banned or restricted. After all, the kinds of radical change that would lead to a more just, equitable and sustainable world may be terrifying as they will entail complete breaks with what we know and are familiar with. Yet this is not sufficient reasoning to stand against them.

The second normative contribution is small, as it is an issue I could not expand upon greatly in this work. Nonetheless, I also hope to contribute to understandings of protest for organizers, activists and those working on and with social movements through the notion that the subjectifying potential of protest is, if not equal to the relevance of the actual outcome, still a substantial component. This is why I have sought to highlight the importance of joyful and caring protest over excessively controlled and austere protest or protest that fails to challenge oppressive power adequately. I see the latter protests as continuations of the master's tools as they replicate the kind of individualized, passive subject orientation that is also constituted by the neoliberal project.

In 'The 'Threat of Terrorism' and the Right to the City', Marcuse muses about his participation in a recent protest against the Republican National Committee. He contends that there was a feeling of power and strength in marching and chanting 'Whose Streets? Our Streets!'. Yet, afterward, he reflects on how, given the protest followed a route approved by the police that did not pass by the intended target, and was prevented from being able to hold a rally due to the permit being pulled at the last minute, the protest was not a meaningful expression of the right to the city; the streets did not belong to the people. Instead, it proved that they belonged to the state as they were able to control how the streets were used, thus organizing and limiting dissent (2005).

Consequently, I have highlighted how the right to the city can be practiced through protest that refuses to obey the confines established by authority. Whereas Marcuse is left disheartened at the end of his more controlled protest, I am aiming to suggest that there is a far more radical and empowering feeling that comes from participation in a protest where the people control how space is used rather than obeying authority's dictates of appropriate dissent. I looked at actions by Sister's Uncut, the Right to Roam campaign and Reclaim the Streets that did just this. Therefore, I hope to contribute to understandings of effective protest as they are understood by activists, organizers and those interested in social movements as well as the right to the city literature more broadly.

Further, I aim to challenge what the late Mark Fisher describes as a leftist "romantic attachment to the politics of failure" and finding comfort in being "a defeated marginality" (2009, 78). Here, Fisher is describing a concern that the left is attached to being morally correct and good, yet never able to break through. I see this attachment to the politics of failure in a leftist inability to embrace the conflict, messiness and moral uncertainty that is required for building solidarities across different ideologies and understandings in fighting for a better world.²⁰³ In my experience with left organizing in the UK, I have noticed an intolerance of conflict and messiness play out in the increasingly fragmentary nature of activist groups. There is a sense that some groups cannot work together and negotiate when they hold excessively different positions on certain issues. A case in point is the breakdown of the Kill the Bill Movement against the PCSC Act 2022 as two of the primary organizing groups, Extinction Rebellion and Black Lives Matter, could not work out their conflicting views and attitudes towards police (as described in Brown 2021). These views not only informed the kind of events they wanted to organize, but their preferred strategies and tactics more generally. In a rally I attended shortly before the bill passed, these two groups were on

²⁰³ This is similar to Brown's account of left melancholy (1999).

opposite sides of a park in London, not working with or speaking to one another at all; they effectively organized entirely separate events happening at the same time.

My contribution is not just that activism must challenge the confines established by oppressive power rather than working within them. I am also aiming to contribute to understandings of the importance of learning to see conflict as a positive challenge rather than retreating from it. As Fisher highlights, there is a comfort in avoiding conflict and, as Sennett reinforces, in being passive and attempting to stay pure by not taking action (1970). Yet we must learn to become comfortable with discomfort to begin building a better world. In my understanding, this world starts with new, active and engaged subjects who recognize their dependency on the world and one another and seek to work with one another, embracing the inevitable conflicts that arise. Total agreement is never possible, but increased solidarities are needed to make change. As the Criminal Justice Bill moves through Parliament, I particularly hope to make normative contributions both to the debate and to organizing collectively to resist this Bill—despite conflicts and fundamental differences between many of the groups who will be most affected by the bill.

Limitations and Opportunities

There are, of course, limitations to this research and gaps opened up that I have not been able to fully address. These gaps however provide opportunities for future research to gain better insights into some of the ideas presented here or to explore them from different perspectives.

Concerning the approach I have taken in this research, while I aimed to provide a comprehensive account of each of the various issues explored in the chapters of this project and engage with a broad range of existing literature on each topic, these issues are weighty. Each could easily be explored in more depth across an entire thesis; one could do an entire thesis on antisocial behavior or stranger danger, for example. While I have chosen breadth in

the formation of the puzzle and research questions here to gain insight into the paradoxes and contradictions I saw underlying the idea of public protection, I acknowledge this trade-off between going into depth on a narrower issue and breadth in understanding a broader area. Following Freeman (2020), I see this trade-off as inevitable in a collage style methodology. It was therefore my intention. Nonetheless, it is a key limitation to acknowledge. In the future, now that I have sketched out this broad field of understanding, I may dedicate more time to exploring some of the issues here in more depth. I am particularly interested in better understanding the history of protest restrictions and the idea of public order in the UK.

Further, I acknowledge that the method and approach I have taken means I am not able to concretely state how people feel about these policies and measures and how they are experienced. I have argued that there are impacts on how subjects are created inherent in these measures, primarily through the promotion of the right not to be affected, by relying on a more critical theoretical way of discussing subjects and subjectification. Yet a different methodological approach could glean further insights into how discourses and policies of public protection impact how people relate to others and the world around them. Observation-based research and interviews, considering how people experience space, order and disruption and asking about people's perceptions of risk and safety would meaningfully complement the insights made in this work, and may even challenge them.

In doing this research, I noticed a lack of work on some of these topics outside of London. There is very little work on POPs and other privatization and securitization measures meant to 'revitalize' smaller towns and cities across the UK. It is possible I too have replicated this imbalance in drawing too much on examples coming from London. More narrowly confined work, looking at privatization and securitization in medium and small towns would be interesting for improving the existing field of work on these topics. Smaller

towns and cities likely have vastly different experiences from the nation's capital and largest city.

Finally, while I made the conscious decision to focus on the UK due to my belief that theoretical work is strongest when underpinned by an understanding of a particular culture and history to avoid misunderstandings or making overly general claims, the insights here may not be relevant for describing other national contexts. Protectionist policies and discourses all uniquely correspond to locally contingent political histories and trends. Though I feel the lens of 'public protection' and the method employed here can be used to study similar trends in other national contexts, the understandings and conclusions that come from such work are likely to differ—possibly substantially.

Future Work

Finally, while I have outlined my understanding of how the right to the city can be claimed through protests that challenge oppressive power and fill public spaces with care and joy in Chapter Six, I hope to continue advancing and refining these ideas in future work. A connected idea I would like to develop further that relates to this work, yet that I was not able to incorporate into it, is on annoyingness. I want to think about a provocation of 'the right to be annoying'. This would be, in a way, a positive response to Mitchell's challenge to be 'against safety and against security' (2009).

In my research, I was struck by how many policies and measures claiming to protect the public seemed instead to be about preventing people from being annoyed—whether they are annoyed by the existence of panhandlers, protesters or young people hanging out in groups. I also noticed a lack of existing literature on annoyingness,²⁰⁴ save for a popular nonfiction text (Palca & Lichtman 2011) and a subfield in psychology looking at annoying

²⁰⁴ Annoyance is also not considered in broader texts on emotion and politics, like Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*—which looks at pain, hate, fear, disgust, shame and love (2004).

noises.²⁰⁵ I could not find anything on the politics of annoyance, such as exists on the politics of fear²⁰⁶ or the politics of anger.²⁰⁷ Indeed, when searching for this, all that comes up is people discussing how they find politics itself annoying! Yet I cannot find anything that would meaningfully explain why that is. Annoyance, or the idea that others are a nuisance we need to be protected from, threads many of the issues explored here together. I am interested in exploring the politics of annoyance further and its connection to power and governance.

This idea is also inspired by an aspect of the PCSC Bill that was rejected in the House of Lords.²⁰⁸ This would have banned protests if they were too annoying (Clements 2021; Westwater 2022). In response to this proposal, a ‘Very Annoying’ protest was organized in London to reassert the people’s right to frustrate those in power (Smoke 2022). This reinforced the importance of confrontation and making others uncomfortable in a functional democracy (Kohn 2009). However, even as this proposal did not pass, annoying others is still banned as part of various Behavioral Control Orders to respond to antisocial behavior (JUSTICE 2023b), “serious annoyance” is considered “serious harm” as part of the legal definition of a Public Nuisance offense—which is often applied to disruptive protests (PCSC Act 2022)—and annoyance is, of course, underlying the proposed concepts of nuisance rough sleeping and nuisance begging (*Criminal Justice Bill* 2024). Not being able to annoy others is fundamental to understanding the right to not be affected; others annoy us with their existence, their poverty or their assertions of rights and calls for change that may require changes from us. This is why I want to develop work that outlines the problematic way not

²⁰⁵ For example, see Guski, Felscher-Suhr & Schuemer 1999; Stallen 1999; Västfjäll 2002.

²⁰⁶ There is a substantial range of work that draws on the politics of fear, drawing on this literal phrasing or otherwise. Many of these have been referenced throughout this thesis; however, also see Ahmed 2003; Furedi 2005.

²⁰⁷ See an indicative range of work supporting this claim in Brumlik 2023; Cherry 2022; Cox & Durham 2000, Holmes 2004; Lyman 2004; Milburn & Conrad 2016; Thompson 2006.

²⁰⁸ It was rejected due to concerns that the government was going too far in restricting protest. As Lord Bishop of Bristol stated, “protests can be annoying, and often they are disruptive—but that is the point” (HL Debate 17 January 2022).

annoying others has been developed through policy. I also want to introduce a provocation of the right to annoy others, building on existing literature on the importance of disorder and conflict.

The concept of annoyingness is also deeply relational and sheds light on how we are interconnected and inevitably affect others. Questions about how annoying we can or should be, and where the line between annoyance and harm lies are vital to political life. It is surprising there does not exist substantial research on this matter. To bother someone or annoy them must be differentiated from outright harassing others and targeting already marginalized groups; attempts by minority groups to assert their rights or challenge harm against them cannot be framed as annoying to dismiss them. Bans against annoyingness should not be used to bolster the comfort of the comfortable, further marginalize the oppressed and prevent dissent. In thinking through this, I want to outline a position where being annoying is to provoke, to challenge oppressive power and to discomfort the comfortable.

In Closing

As the UK continues to deflect the harm of its neoliberal capitalist project onto individuals, promising to ‘protect the public’ and keep them safe through reliance on carceral ‘law and order’ measures and discourses, this project joins with feminist work on rethinking safety and wellbeing beyond coercive power and punitive measures (Davis 2003; Day & McBean 2022; Olufemi 2020). While I did not get to explore feminist abolitionism in any detail here due to issues of space and relevance, such thinking has informed my analysis and overall argument. More security infrastructure, punitive policies and measures that keep people apart and suspicious of others will not keep people safe; instead, such responses reinforce passivity and apathy in subjects.

Yet with the Criminal Justice Bill 2024, indicative of a securitized view of public and social life, moving through Parliament, and the lack of an organized mass campaign challenging it, resisting harm that calls itself public protection will require coalescing around a rejection of security of protection. However, this is inherently uncomfortable. It requires learning to negotiate differences and deal with confrontation. It requires recognizing that one cannot fully know the outcomes and implications of actions in advance, and still acting. Given what a frightening and difficult place the world is at the current historical juncture, pursuing discomfort is not particularly appealing.

However, I have also emphasized how there are alternatives to protection to be found in a joyful, caring politics rooted in an embrace of interdependency; the difficulty of life under capitalism need not be faced alone. Nor should the amount of care and nurturing one receives be subject to luck as to whether or not they are born into a caring family or have sufficient capital to purchase it. Instead, as I have argued, in rejecting comfort premised on protectionism, bubble-wrapping, and pushing away from others, we can begin imagining and practicing new forms of care rooted in the social and expanding care into the public realm and beyond the family. I believe that these broader networks of care can provide a more stable, and less anxiety-ridden source of comfort than that provided by protectionism.

It is as the great writer James Baldwin said in the epigraph I began this conclusion with: “Any real change implies the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, *the end of safety*” (1961, 117—emphasis added). However, it is at the end of safety where freedom and unthinkable new possibilities lie.

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Appendix 1:

Evidentiary Strategy by Chapter

Chapter 1

This chapter is largely theoretical as it outlines the conceptual framework on which my research relies. However, I have one key example from the vignette I use as a refrain throughout the section—Rishi Sunak’s pro-car rhetoric and politics. This example has somewhat been cherry-picked as a seemingly nonsensical (in keeping with the thesis’ focus on contradiction), topical issue that embodies the themes discussed here. It is not particularly vital to my overall argument in the chapter; however, I found that including it serves to clarify the discussion by providing an example of what I mean when making more abstract and theoretical points.

Chapter 2

This chapter is complex and multifaceted. The way I selected the material for it is as follows: the chapter began with my desire to focus on Mitchell’s concept of social agoraphobia. Initially, I felt that this theory would work well alongside the concept of ‘defensible design’, which I felt was vital to include in this thesis due to its prominence in key texts I have used in this thesis (Minton 2009; Sendra & Sennett 2020; Sorkin 2008) as well as in relation to the issue of securitizing the public realm more broadly. However, as I edited the chapter, I felt I was overfocusing on ‘defensible design’ and that social agoraphobia could be related more directly to sociality and relationships. I realized that, in my understanding, the fear of public space cannot be separated from the fear of the strangers who inhabit it. Therefore, I decided that the concept of stranger danger might work well in the chapter. I already had been thinking about strangers and had notes and thoughts on Ahmed and Kern’s work on this concept which I added in. After further research, I came

across, and eventually integrated, Renfro's work on the matter. Finally, the chapter still felt a bit disjointed until I decided that an example at the end would allow me to pull all the threads together. I ended up selecting a British public transport safety campaign by chance; while they are a key example in Peter Marcuse's work on existential insecurity (2005, 2006a), I had not yet come across this. Instead, the idea to select this example came from my own thinking about an example of a defensive design feature that encouraged distrust of others. This certainly was the most prominent example I could think of—and a further search did not find anything else more suitable.

Chapter 3

This chapter relies on a lot of discursive evidence and examples to support my points drawn from policy documents, political discourse and popular media. I also look at several reports drawing on interviews and surveys with the general public about their experiences of and attitudes towards antisocial behavior. This is because I am interested in how antisocial behavior is represented and framed, as well as how it is understood—and what it is understood to be by regular people.

I have not cherry-picked any of this evidence; it is all broadly indicative of the normative way that these issues are discussed. While I approached the research with my initial suspicion that antisocial behavior as a category aims to restrict and even criminalize the social behavior of some, in order to select the evidence I ultimately used, I read broadly across UK policy, political documents, political speeches and forms of popular media looking at antisocial behavior. In doing so, I noticed similar phrases and tropes that were used to describe the issue and grouped material by general patterns/use of the same language. I focused on New Labour politicians due to their introduction of the concept to the UK, Theresa May due to changes to the policing to antisocial behavior policing under her

premiership and current PM Rishi Sunak. Former PMs, David Cameron and Gordon Brown are a noticeable absence; this is because their coalition government was marked by a softening of attitudes, rhetoric and even policing towards antisocial behavior.²⁰⁹

I knew I would be using Butler's work as a theoretical lens to unpack the topic and my particular argument here. So, in addition to looking for patterns in how antisocial behavior was represented in political and popular discourse and understood and experienced by the public, keeping my initial suspicion in the back of my mind, I also looked for examples where antisocial behavior was framed as a violation needing to be addressed with urgency to 'protect' the presumably 'social' population. I found this framing to be the most common way antisocial behavior was represented in popular media and speeches/articles by politicians. Specifically, the notion antisocial behavior is the work of a 'small minority making things difficult for the 'hard-working majority' came up repeatedly. This framing is endemic, yet I include an indicative range of sources here as evidence of it.

Chapter 4

This chapter is largely formed around Mitchell's work on the SUV subject in the beginning and Brown's depiction of a new neoliberal subject at the end. The first third then largely draws on Mitchell's work, coupled with some analysis from Kohn on the same matter. Then, I move to consider PSPOs as an example that I find illuminates this concept. I wanted to include PSPOs in this thesis not only because I believe they are the policy response to antisocial behavior that most impacts possibility in the public realm, but also because their literal title embodies the key themes of this thesis. I felt that they were best suited for the themes of this chapter given how the large bulk of PSPOs seem to legislate annoyance and

²⁰⁹ See Cameron's infamous 'hug a hoodie' position as described in Hinsliff 2006.

irritation rather than serious harm, as well as the possibility of affecting others against their consent.

In relation to the particular PSPOs I look at in the middle third, I looked for general patterns about the most common PSPOs to include as well as evidence of strange and bizarre ones. Finally, I also obviously looked for councils who framed their PSPOs using subjective language about annoyance and quality of life. I also ensured to include a range of PSPOs from across the UK rather than overfocusing on one region.

Finally, in the final third of the chapter, I look at SUVs and the colossal harm they cause, equating this to a hyperindividualistic form of subjectivity. The evidence here is primarily empirical articles regarding the harm caused by SUVs and other large vehicles. This was sourced largely through searches of relevant databases and journals. I sought to include multiple sources whenever possible to support my points and ensure that it was clear that the claims I am making are reliant on well-supported, repeated findings rather than a single outlier study.

Chapter 5

This chapter is largely theoretical, first looking at the concept idea of ‘themeparking’ in urban design before then moving to look at POPs generally in the UK. It ends with a discussion of shared space as a philosophy, detailing what I see as its benefits and its shortcomings for the issues I am concerned with in this work. As a result, there is not a great deal of what could be called ‘evidence’. In the POP section I provide some evidence from various POPs in the UK. This is mainly in relation to London as, not only is Granary Square in London the UK’s largest POP, the large majority of work on this design form is focused on London. Some of these examples are simply to provide some color to the account, such as

detailing particular features, whereas others, like the information about Liverpool ONE, have been selected due to their alignment with the general themes of the section.

I selected shared space as an example of an alternative to POPs based on my reading about the scheme in Anna Minton's *Ground Control* (2009) and being fascinated by it. Initially I thought I could use it as an example of an protectionism due to its emphasis on forcing engagement. However, the more I thought about it, I felt that it was inadequate in this regard due to its failure to challenge power. Therefore, I decided to use it as an example of the limitations of top-down modes of design.

Finally, in relation to the evidence regarding shared space schemes, this was difficult to find. I sought both clear, quantifiable data about their success rate as well as emotional accounts of how people felt using the schemes. This was because the contrast between these two forms of evidence is central to the argument in this section.

Chapter 6

Once again, this chapter is largely theoretical. Therefore, there is not a great deal of evidence. However, I decided to focus on the Public Order Act here as it brings together the themes from across this thesis and is therefore a useful piece of legislation to tie together the theoretical threads and ideas of the work. I also wanted to look at anti-protest legislation and was interested in how opposition to protest was framed in the same way as opposition to antisocial behavior and wanted to further explore this. I included evidence of political discourse regarding the Act from my expansive research, focusing on policy documents, political debates and political speeches, in order to support the arguments I am making here.

Concerning the final case studies, these are selected for their support of the overall argument I am trying to make. In addition, these are groups that I find particularly interesting

and inspiring and wanted to examine in greater detail. I am certain that other groups could have been examined, with the same argument still being made—however, due to space, I was only able to select three and so chose those that I personally had the most positive feelings about.

Conclusion

While there is not much evidence in the conclusion, I decided to focus on the Criminal Justice Bill 2024 due to the fact that it brought together the diverse themes and topics in the thesis. I thought that using it as a vignette would be an interesting way to reflect on the interconnections between the various themes and chapters at the end of the work.

