Youth, Crime, and Cultural Space

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INSIDE THE CONTEMPORARY ARRANGEMENTS OF YOUTH, CULTURAL AND CRIMINAL processes collapse one into the other. Young people construct subcultural styles and practices that evolve in contradictory, overlapping spirals of contested meaning: as moments of self-identification and political resistance, as street-hip commodities appropriated for marketing to mass audiences, and as dangerous antecedents to and symbols of criminality. Media factories, political machines, and legal bureaucracies draw on these styles and practices to produce images of youthful crime and victimization, which in turn shape the actions and perceptions of criminal justice practitioners, criminals, victims-to-be, and other media consumers. Right-wing zealots and other publicity hustlers launch mediated attacks on the popular culture echoes of youthful style — rap songs, music videos, cartoons, and hip hop films — for their alleged promotion of delinquent behavior, and these media campaigns spin off still other distorted afterimages and amplified (mis)understandings of crime and delinquency. Television programmers mine the aggressive dynamic of street-level police work against inner-city kids and other populations to assemble repetitive and profitable "reality television" programming, and in so doing transform this work into the unreality of an endlessly staged morality play. Time and again, a culture saturated by the image and reality of youthful crime projects its meaning out onto particular individuals and events, and back onto itself (Sanders and Lyon, 1995; Ferrell, 1998; Ferrell and Sanders, 1995).

Those caught up in this tangled process — street kids and youthful street artists, gang members, police officials, media executives — are busy making money, constructing identities, and acquiring political capital. Yet they are also busy negotiating and contesting style. Subtleties of dress and comportment, stylized images of young criminals and their victims, symbols of threat and security — all constitute the connecting epistemic tissue between cultural and criminal practices, the collective pool of meaning in which cultural and criminal dynamics come to

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be confounded. Political consultants paid to create campaign ads around particularly troublesome portrayals of youthful criminals and youth crime understand the subtle politics of style. Gangbangers and graffiti writers operating within complex codes of street symbolism understand the consequences of style for status and power, as do the police departments that devote more and more of their time to cataloguing these codes as a method of legal control. Urban developers and upscale merchants marketing environments of leisure and consumption to aging baby boomers also understand the importance of subtle stylistic touches — touches that signify personal comfort and safety within a world sanitized of seemingly dangerous kids and the sorts of crime they allegedly commit.

As kids, cops, and cultural workers construct and contest the meaning of style, they also battle over the size and shape of their day-to-day existence. Stylistic choices and symbolic strategies operate not only at the level of individual and intragroup meaning, but collectively, in tension with other styles and strategies. In constructing stylistic references — and more importantly, working to control the meanings that these references carry for others — people and groups begin to set the boundaries of their own identities and those of others as well. When cultural and criminal processes come together and when style and meaning are negotiated, essential issues of power, status, and control come into question. In whose interest will systems of urban authority operate, and by what standards will young city residents be judged desirable or undesirable, criminal or noncriminal? In what ways do youth subcultures promote criminality and from what times, places, and cultural resources should young people be legally prohibited? Are the lives and actions of gang members and graffiti writers best understood as cultural alternatives or criminal enterprises to be confined within structures of legal control? Are channels of youthful communication appropriately the province of corporate profit, legal regulation, or unfettered creativity? These are indeed questions of style, meaning, power, and crime, and the spaces in which these social forces intersect. They are questions, that is, of cultural space.

Constellations of Youth and Cultural Space

> Little Sammy was a punk rocker, you know his mother never understand him. Went into his room and smashed his Billy Bragg record, didn't want him to hear that communist lecture.
>
> — Rancid, "The Wars End" (1995)

Cultural space denotes those arenas in which young people and others construct meaning, perception, and identity. Within relationships of power, inequality, and marginalization, the control of cultural space is contested: while powerful adults attempt to define and impose cultural space, less powerful young people attempt to unravel this imposition, to carve out their own spaces for shaping

identity and taking some control over everyday life. For kids who work to create cultural space within dominant arrangements, this space may indeed be physical — a teenager's bedroom, an inner-city street corner — but almost always physical space is constructed as a relatively independent zone of identity through symbolic displays, stylized details, and ritualized activities. Similarly, young people regularly demarcate and display cultural space on and around the body, through tattoos, scarification, clothing and hair styles, makeup, and other aesthetic accouterments (Ferrell, 1995b). In so doing, they construct "personal style" as a political force, a sartorial shove against imposed boundaries of individual and group identity.[1] Beyond their own bodies, young people also carve cultural space out of the airwaves and the clock. Against the tidal flow of prepackaged entertainment, they create parody, (re)invent art and music, and engage alternative media technologies. Against the enforced regularity of minimum-wage work hours and prescheduled drudgery, they find meaning and excitement, and a sense of themselves, in disrupting the pace of service lines and assembly lines (Thompson, 1983), in easing away from the workplace early, staying out on the town late, and otherwise accumulating an emerging lifetime of stolen moments.

All of this subversive space work is necessary, of course, because of the remarkable power of culture industries, political machines, and other structures of power to manufacture and enforce on youth and others their own models of cultural space. The precise, preplanned beauty of gentrified downtowns, the enclosed consumption of the shopping mall, the civics-lesson space of the school, the techno-aesthetic of the rationalized workplace, the stern order of the patriarchal household, the carefully marketed pleasure world of the media, and the many "official projects of order and tidiness" (Hermer and Hunt, 1996: 465) — all constitute cultural spaces in which relations of power and control are shaped and reproduced. In each case, authority operates by defining the boundaries of cultural space, by working to contain people and their identities within it, by shaping the meaning and practice of everyday life around agendas of consumption and obedience. The subtle and dangerous power of this dynamic, of course, lies in the fact that many of these dominant cultural spaces — the gentrified downtown, the shopping mall, the media swarm — are constructed as attractive "lifestyle" options; they are spaces that invite young people and others in, often by appropriating and repackaging youthful styles and alternative cultures. Not surprisingly, then, even when young people and other marginal groups do attempt to shake off the seduction and create (or re-create) alternative space, they often use the only cultural materials with which they have become comfortable. Gang members and street kids, for example, do not reject the mass marketed appeal of team sports clothing so much as they transform the meaning of this clothing by recontextualizing it within elaborate subcultural style codes. Young hip hop musicians and other illicit sound samplers reject dominant media forms less than they use these forms as raw material out of which to invent alternative sonic space.[2]

When the seductions of dominant cultural space fail, though, force is not far behind. Alternative cultural spaces that stray too far from zones of mainstream meaning, or that by their very existence breach the boundaries of accepted spaces, regularly elicit aggressive sanctions. Indeed, as will be seen, the passionate defense of mainstream space and the vitriolic attacks on youthful alternatives demonstrate the importance of cultural space for the beneficiaries of contemporary social arrangements. Increasingly, the corporate economy sells not primarily commodities, but cultural space and cultural style as commodities (Lyng and Bracey, 1995). Increasingly, political campaigns and political capital are based less on common good than on creating at least the myth of comfortable cultural spaces for the privileged. When these carefully constructed spaces are threatened by other, less manageable spaces, then, all manner of controls are brought forth — including the clout of civil and criminal law.

This is the focus of the following exploration: the criminalization of young people's alternative cultural spaces as a strategy of social and cultural control, as a defense of mainstream cultural space and its boundaries. As the following cases will show, the criminalization and control of cultural space consistently incorporate two themes already seen. First, in contemporary conflicts over youth and cultural space, cultural and criminal dynamics are regularly confused — and most often in the interests of those in power. Second, though, this criminalization and confusion do not incorporate a one-way exercise of authority; instead, it regularly emerges in response to prior cultural resistance and elicits new forms of resistance in return. Put differently, the creation and contestation of youth and cultural space occur both within a dynamics of domination and resistance to that domination. As will be seen, the creation of alternative cultural space and the battle over its criminalization ground the practice of politics and resistance squarely in the moments of young people's everyday lives — lives played out on the streets, in the neighborhoods, and over the airwaves.

Youth, Criminalization, and Cultural Space

Inequalities of age, class, and power are increasingly enforced up and down the mean streets of mainstream America. As insulated office complexes, truncated transit routes, and privatized parks and shopping districts fracture or destroy previously existing public space, a growing army of public and private police uses sophisticated technology to monitor and oversee the emerging spacial segregation (Davis, 1990, 1992; Sorkin, 1992; Vergara, 1995; Ferrell, 1995a). The caretakers of these newly segregated spaces contend that such spaces are essential to the economic vitality, interpersonal safety, and emerging identity of the city (Ellickson, 1996). Because of this, moreover, they readily bring down the full weight of the law on those who, by choice or chance, trespass on them.

Any discussion of the criminalization and control of young people's cultural space in this context must begin with the homeless — a population in which

children and young people constitute a significant and growing proportion. Young or old, the homeless today are hounded by a host of new or newly enforced laws regarding loitering, vagrancy, trespass, public lodging, panhandling, and existence as a "public nuisance" (Barak and Bohm, 1989; Barak, 1991; Kress, 1994; Howland, 1994). Such laws criminalize the presence of homeless persons on public sidewalks, in parking lots and public parks, and in business districts, and together with aggressive zoning ordinance enforcement aimed at closing homeless shelters, criminalize the spaces occupied by the homeless and those who seek to help them. These laws ensure that homeless populations are perpetually in the wrong place, unavoidably occupying space that has been legally defined as outside their rights and control. As Marin (in McDonogh, 1993: 14) has said of the homeless:

> We owe them, at least, a place to exist, a way to exist.... A society needs its margins as much as it needs art and literature. It needs holes and gaps, breathing spaces let us say, in which men and women can escape and live, when necessary in ways otherwise denied them.

For homeless kids and adults, the margins have been closed, the breathing space exhausted.

To be homeless, of course, is not only to exist as an individual without lodging, but often also to engage a set of largely involuntary symbolic codes (tattered clothing, weathered skin, shopping carts) and therefore to declare by one's individual and collective public presence the dirty scandal of inequality. Should doubt exist about whether this public presence, and its clash with carefully manufactured myths of proper and profitable urban space, lie behind the criminalization of the homeless, some recent cases can be noted. In San Francisco, police have set up undercover sting operations targeting beggars, regularly harass supporters of the homeless, and arrest "Food Not Bombs" activists for publicly distributing food to the homeless (Steinberg, 1994). Before "Super Bowl XXX," Tempe, Arizona, officials held a "brainstorming session" to consider strategies to "force homeless people out of sight," including a tent encampment outside city limits, restrictions on city parks, and "using sprinklers to chase homeless people from parks" (Petrie, 1995: A1). In Phoenix, officials close public parks and other public spaces to the homeless, allegedly as a crime-fighting measure; as a police sergeant tells the media, "any time you have a transient problem, you're going to have high crime" (Fiscus, 1996a: B1). In addition, the city council approved a "crackdown on panhandling and vending" (*Ibid.*) in the "revitalized" downtown area, and has focused aggressive enforcement strategies especially on those homeless persons who attempt to gain some measure of personal and economic control by selling the *Grapevine* newspaper on the streets (Fiscus, 1996c). Orchestrated by downtown business owners, the crackdown in reality revolves around cultural space. The director of the city's Community and Economic

Development Department argues publicly that panhandling and selling copies of the *Grapevine* are "dangerous" and have "a negative impact on the perception of Phoenix" (Fiscus, 1996b: B1). The executive director of the Downtown Phoenix Partnership — the group that "is leading the cleanup campaign" — adds: "It's part of an image issue for the city" (Wagner, 1996: B1). *Grapevine* representatives responded with suits against the city and the police (Fiscus, 1996d).

Similarly, pre-Olympic ceremonies in Atlanta included new nuisance ordinances, special park benches designed to inhibit loitering, a "special crime sweep" by the police, and other measures backed by "a major downtown business group" and developed as part of "a systematic effort to purge [the homeless] from the streets and other public places" (*The Arizona Republic*, 1996: A16; Associated Press, 1996a: C9). Activists resisting this plan note there is police harassment "if you look homeless" and point out that those going to jail are those "who look different." They add:

> the central business district has been working to push the poor from the city center as a way to get conventioneers, tourists, and suburban white people to come downtown and spend their money. To do that, the corporate sector has had an agenda for some time (in Chepesiuk, 1996: 35).[3]

As part of this broader campaign, business and political leaders especially target homeless kids and other street-smart young people. In New Orleans, tourism agencies and business associations call for stricter enforcement of existing laws and for new laws prohibiting public sleeping, as part of their attack on "gutter punks" — French Quarter residents with the audacity to be young, homeless, and stylistically adventuresome at the same time. With their "spiked leather bracelets, nose rings, close-cropped hair, and tattoos," the gutter punks foul the carefully orchestrated tourist appeal, the manufactured authenticity, of the Quarter; as the president of the convention and visitors bureau laments, "It [is] just a disgrace. This is what we're inviting our tourists to see?" (Associated Press, 1995: 9). Across the country, similar campaigns have successfully criminalized the activities of urban skateboarders and "skate punks," with ubiquitous "Skateboarding in This Area Prohibited by Law" signs now punctuating commercial district sidewalks, urban parks, and the perimeters of suburban malls.[4] Young (and old) street musicians also face growing restrictions and stricter permit requirements as they attempt to "busk" a living on the street. While some locales welcome (and regulate) the sort of sonic space that selected musicians create as an enhancement to leisure and consumption activities, others simply attempt to ban buskers and the sidewalk cacophony to which they contribute (Parks, 1990).[5]

More than the sidewalks are cracking under the weight of legal assaults on street kids, though; campaigns against gutter punks, skate punks, and buskers exist as part of a larger attempt to regulate kids and the cultural spaces that they create.

By 1995, 59 of the 77 largest cities in the United States enforced teen curfews, with 26 of these adopting curfews in just the previous five years (Ruefle and Reynolds, 1995). Enforcement agencies claim these curfews as preemptory crime-control strategies; as one police spokesperson says, "We're mindful of the fact that these steely-eyed 17-year-old killers started out as 14-year-old loiterers" (Beck, 1995: 53). President Clinton, in enthusiastically endorsing curfews nationwide, claims that curfews are "designed to help people be better parents" (Rankin, 1996: A10). However, a comment from an attorney in a small city that recently inaugurated a youth curfew perhaps best captures the logic behind this strategy and its relation to cultural space: "There's a mood among some people that if we make the town *look* like it doesn't have problems, then it doesn't have problems" (in Beck, 1995: 53). In Orlando, a protester against the city's teen curfew likewise notes:

> City officials want the ordinance because they think Orlando's image will be hurt by having black, Hispanic, punk, and Goth [Gothic] teenagers on the streets in late June and early July. This is when the city will host several World Cup soccer matches and thousands of foreign tourists (Markeson, 1994: 18).[6]

As a control strategy, youth curfews exist along a continuum of space, time, and culture; they protect symbolic constructions of adult authority by patrolling the cultural and temporal space of kids. Along with bans on after-hours youth dances, new teen curfews at shopping malls, restrictions on "unsupervised nighttime driving by teenagers" (*Rocky Mountain News*, 1994: 42A; see Associated Press, 1994; 1996b), and other measures, they also work to unravel the nocturnal cultures and the alternative spaces that kids have built around coffeehouses, raves, music, and style.[7]

Early and unsurprising evidence shows that this new round of curfew enforcement targets poor and ethnic minority kids disproportionately (see, for example, Daza, 1996). Other, more focused cultural space conflicts between young people and authorities carry the same class and ethnic tones. In Denver, Phoenix, and other cities, street cruising by Latino/a youth has been criminalized through a variety of ordinances and enforcement strategies. Denver's campaign incorporates street barricades, ticketing and arrests, and even an ordinance regulating car stereo volume (Ferrell, 1996: 193). A similar campaign in Phoenix is supplemented by aggressive enforcement of curfew and trespass laws, and by the banning of nonresident, "mostly Hispanic" teenagers from designated south Phoenix neighborhoods.[8] As this campaign unfolds, adult members of local Latino "car clubs" stage a mobile protest — the Cruisers Against Violence Caravan and March — and remind police and the public that cruising is a "deep source of entertainment and cultural expression" in their community, "because Hispanic culture is street culture" (Barker, 1996: B1). No arrests of caravan participants are reported.

As some Latino/a teenagers construct stylishly mobile street space out of rebuilt Monte Carlos, dropped frames, and polished chrome, other kids construct alternative street space out of gang affiliations and activities. When we move beyond media caricatures of gangs and gang members, we find that gang life is largely shaped around shared rituals and styles, around an ongoing attempt to create and defend collective cultural space within a claustrophobic circle of economic and political disenfranchisement. Gang members adopt subtly symbolic clothing styles and street names, build elaborate codes of colors, hand signs, and graffiti, and construct inclusionary rituals around weapons, beatings, and scar tissue. In so doing, they create around and among themselves a sense of aesthetic belonging, a collective and portable identity, and thus an expanded realm of cultural meaning (Ferrell, 1995b). Like street cruisers and homeless kids, they also find this cultural space criminalized. As Miller (1995) has shown, legal officials interpret gang styles as prima facie evidence of illegal gang activity, enforce court orders prohibiting gang clothing, confiscate gang "paraphernalia," and write up kids for probation violation based on their "gang-style" clothes, tattoos, and signs. Likewise, Immigration and Naturalization Service officials detain and deport Latino/a kids "simply because they were caught dressed like 'gang-bangers' and without proper identification" (Rodriguez, 1994: M2).[9] Larger police roundups of "known" gang members in inner-city neighborhoods further criminalize, and attempt to recapture, the cultural space that gangs occupy.

Perhaps the most striking contemporary war of cultural space is fought between the growing subculture of non-gang, "hip hop" graffiti writers and the growing army of control agents sent out to stop them (Ferrell, 1995a; 1996). In greatly increasing numbers since the 1970s, graffiti writers have organized a nationwide (and worldwide) subculture around complex codes of color, proportion, and design while painting both large graffiti murals (piecing) and smaller subcultural markers (tagging). During this time, the subculture has not only spawned thousands of often transethnic "crews" of writers, and provided writers with self-made measures of status and identity, but also generated an underground economy that provides many writers with a modicum of economic and artistic autonomy. In expanding the cultural space of writers, the subculture has also remade the visual and social space of the city. Writers gain status and pleasure from "going citywide" — that is, tagging or piecing as broadly as possible within their urban area — and from "going nationwide" by tagging or piecing on outbound railroad freight cars. They violate vertical boundaries by tagging the very tops of buildings and signs — "tagging the heavens" — and consistently violate both time and property boundaries with all-night forays through rail yards, down alleys, and across private lawns. As community artists, they are also increasingly asked to create "rest in peaces" — spray-painted street memorials to departed neighborhood residents (Cooper and Sciorra, 1994) — and to provide low-cost artwork for small neighborhood businesses. As Denver graffiti writer Eye Six says, "Your

average person is just subservient to whatever is thrown up. Whatever building is built, whatever billboard is put up — whatever. They just sit on their asses.... We go out and get paint" (in Ferrell, 1996: 176).

As graffiti writers have gone out and gotten paint, economic and political leaders determined to defend city space from them, to preserve their "well-groomed" communities (Clean Denver, 1988: 5), have gone out and gotten an army of police and citizen surveillance teams armed with home video cameras, remote-control infrared cameras, night-vision goggles, two-way radios, and cellular phones. They have supplemented these teams with razor wire, helicopter patrols, stakeouts, stings, and ongoing undercover operations; they have also put into play a plethora of harsh new civil and criminal sanctions against graffiti writers and their parents. Against this campaign — underwritten by corporate dollars and coordinated through business/political associations like the National Graffiti Information Network — writers counter with direct spray-paint attacks on city and corporate property, and with the indirect, insidious resistance of the "adrenaline rush." Emerging from the confluence of practiced artistry and dangerous illegality, the adrenaline rush defines for writers the wired excitement of writing graffiti. Grounded as it is in illegality and danger, the adrenaline rush grows in intensity and pleasure as aggressive anti-graffiti campaigns proliferate (Ferrell, 1995a, 1996). Thus do graffiti writers carve new spaces for pleasure and excitement out of the very attempt to suppress their activities. Ironically, the meaning of an act that resides in "the subversion of the authority of urban space...the transgression of official appearance" (Atlanta and Alexander, 1989: 166; see Ward, 1973) thus intensifies and expands as those in power work to reenforce this spatial authority.

Meanwhile, floating around and above the battles of homeless kids, street cruisers, gangbangers, and graffiti writers, and keeping watch over contestations of youth and cultural space while themselves creating and contesting new spaces, are emerging media of outlaw communication. Cyberspace forms a worldwide web of cultural conflict, with youthful hackers, cyberpunks, and activist networkers battling federal regulators, security experts, and growing commercialization. Graffiti writers and gang members have likewise created their own global cyber-networks for exchanging images and information — as have anti-graffiti organizations like the National Graffiti Information Network and various antigang task forces (Barrett, 1996). Locally, pirate or "rebel radio" stations are caught up in similar conflicts. In Denver, many of the young graffiti writers and alternative artists active in the graffiti underground also sporadically transmit illegal radio broadcasts, howling rap music and political rants out into the night. In Phoenix, unlicensed, 10-watt Arizona Free Radio, knocked off the air by a $17,500 FCC fine, has recently returned with feminist and environmental programming (Padgett, 1995; Dougan, 1995). In Springfield, Illinois, Black Liberation Radio has for years withstood FCC fines and local police harassment to broadcast reports of public

housing abuses and police brutality against young Blacks on the street. Along with the 10 or so other illegal radio stations in the Bay Area, Radio Free Berkeley broadcasts the COPWATCH report, live recordings from pro-bicycle street demonstrations, and news of homeless activism; it also distributes radio transmitter kits throughout north and central America (Ongerth and Radio Free Berkeley, 1995; Cockburn, 1995a, 1995b, 1996a). Such activities led the FCC to argue, in its federal court case against the station, that "chaos, anarchy on the airwaves, and irreparable harm" (Ongerth and Radio Free Berkeley 1995: 19) must follow. In counterpoint, the band Pearl Jam set up a pirate radio station at each stop of a recent tour — and broadcast selections from Noam Chomsky (*The Nation*, 1996).[10]

Dystopian Dreamin'

> They've got to realize this is a city. It's not Disneyland (Coral Cronin, 16-year-old "gutter punk," Associated Press, 1995: 9).

The widespread, aggressive criminalization of young people and their cultural spaces suggests a dynamic that transcends the particular venues in which it occurs. Although the attempts by legal, political, and economic authorities to criminalize the youthful populations just described do emerge within particular local and national political conflicts, the prevalence of these campaigns suggests an underlying agenda as well. If all homeless kids could be swept off city streets, all young people locked inside by 11:00 P.M., all cruisers, gangbangers, and graffiti writers erased from public view, all pirate radio stations silenced by FCC fines, what then? What would those in power have accomplished if they could systematically eliminate the presence, and overcome the resistance, of in-your-face gutter punks and adrenaline-charged graffiti writers?

A hint of the agenda has already been seen. Recall that Tempe, Arizona, officials hoped to "force the homeless out of sight," that Phoenix officials campaigned against the homeless because they constituted a "perception" and "image" issue for the city, and that Atlanta officials worked to "push the poor from the city center as a way to get conventioneers, tourists, and suburban white people to come downtown and spend their money." Recall that tourism officials in New Orleans worried that gutter punks were not "what we're inviting our tourists to see," that anti-graffiti campaigners worried over their "well-groomed" communities, and that curfews, anti-cruising ordinances, and gang sweeps have targeted the most visible symbols of youthful disobedience. Recall the FCC's concern that the spread of pirate radio will breed "chaos" and "anarchy." Together, these orientations suggest that their authors share a vision of an ideal(ized) world, a dystopian dream — a dream of sanitized communities mirroring visions of consensual conformity; of streets swept free of young, marginalized populations, of urban trash, and the uncomfortable reminders of social decay that they present; and of an urban environment made safe for suburban excursions and endless, effortless

consumption, for the "discovery" of urban charm and prepackaged urban adventure. They suggest spasms of "urban development" and white-bread gentrification unimpeded by the ugly realities of street survival, a ghettoization of social life such that the young, the disobedient, and the down and out remain sequestered within ghost towns of physical and cultural isolation. They suggest a silencing of youthful street rhythms, a certain conformity enforced through style and appearance, a mediated space vacant of all but centralized sounds and commercial images.

In pushing toward realization of this dream, the powerful and the privileged not only criminalize the cultural spaces of young people, but also create new cultural spaces of their own. As noted, the privatized, tightly controlled spaces of the shopping mall and the multiuse office park have in many locales supplanted the more open avenues of street life. In addition, four million Americans now live in gated communities designed to exclude graffiti writers and gang members, of course, but also nonresident children selling candy, federal census takers, and other outsiders (Ingley, 1996; Egan, 1995; *The Arizona Republic*, 1995). With their imposing guard houses and wrought-iron fences, such communities market themselves as secure enclaves, as homogeneous cultural spaces, as "places where traditional values still exist" (Handley, 1996: B7). Indeed, one real estate agent reports that "to sell a subdivision featuring custom homes, you need to have a gate" (Ingley, 1996: B5); another agent explains that "the melting pot is over. People of the same age and background feel comfortable living with each other" (Handley, 1996: B7); and a reporter notes that "a random encounter is the last thing people here want" (Egan, 1995: A10). Another 32 million Americans live in upscale communities protected not by gates and walls, but by the exclusionary, and often age-restrictive, codes and covenants of homeowners' associations — a pattern that McKenzie (in Vanderpool, 1995: 32) labels "secession by the successful."[11]

At the cutting edge of cleansed cultural space lies the Disney Corporation. Certainly, Disney's theme parks have long created sanitized universes of soft control, universes where "culture is construed as spirit, colonialism and entrepreneurial violence as exotic zaniness, and the Other as child" (Fjellman, 1992: 399). Now, though, Disney is constructing Celebration, a 5,000 acre, 20,000 resident planned community near Orlando. Designed to be "reminiscent of another time when life was simpler" (Doerfler, 1996: AH1), to present a "carefully marketed, private version of the small-town values the Republicans claim to represent" (Vanderbilt, 1995: 197), Celebration features nostalgic architecture, enforced design standards, daily flag-raising ceremonies by the town's children — and, by design, no housing inside the city limits that is affordable to young, minimum-wage workers (Shanklin, 1996: EV8). In addition, Disney's design strategies have influenced urban gentrification projects in Boston and San Francisco (Larsen, 1994), and Disney has recently taken on the renovation of New York City's 42nd Street district. Significantly, the project benefits from the strong support of Republican Mayor Rudolph Giuliani who, the press reports, has "tried cultivating

a Disney-like atmosphere" in the city through a legal clampdown on visible "quality of life" crimes like graffiti writing, panhandling, and car window washing by the homeless. As a Giuliani spokesperson notes, "Disney is great for New York. This will change the character of the city" (Kirby, 1995: E3).[12]

As it turns out, then, it is not far at all from the harsh (in)justice of inner-city gang roundups and anti-graffiti patrols to the guarded privacy of suburban planned communities. All are founded in an aesthetics of authority (Ferrell, 1996), a sense of ordered style intertwined with the control of cultural space. In the same way that this aesthetic drives the powerful and the privileged to wrest visual and perceptual control of the city from street kids and graffiti writers, it drives them to design suburban enclaves with barriers as much stylistic as physical. In each case, those in power attempt to remake the meaning of cultural space, to substitute symbols of safe homogeneity for those of diversity and threat. In each case, the politics of reaction — the illusory return to "traditional values" and "simpler times" when kids and other outsiders knew their place — are enforced through an aesthetics of authority, an aesthetic that seeks to remove from public view the untidy cultures of undesirable populations. The dystopian dream is certainly one of control, but of a particular kind: the control of cultural space, the construction of image as ideology.[13]

The Work of Control in the Age of Cultural Reproduction

In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin (1968) explored the ways in which emerging techniques of mass reproduction altered the meaning and practice of art. In exploring the criminalization of young people and their cultural spaces, we begin to glimpse the ways in which emerging modes of cultural reproduction alter the work of social control. As the meaning of crime and delinquency is increasingly constructed through mediated channels, as late capitalist economies move toward marketing (and appropriating) ways of life, and as systems of political authority perpetually reproduce themselves through image manipulation, social control increasingly takes on the dimensions of a cultural process. Under such systems, controlling marginalized young people and others' perceptions of them, policing the crisis (Hall et al., 1978) of youth and inequality necessitates cultural work; that is, it requires reshaping the identities that young people construct and recasting the meaning of these identities for others. This in turn means that legal battles over cultural space emerge as conflicts essential to powerful adults and marginalized kids alike. In different contexts, Platt (1974), Cohen (1979), Henry (1994), and others have documented the historical expansion of social control into areas previously untouched. Here we see, in an age of cultural reproduction, an expansion of social and legal control into corners of social and cultural life that once might have seemed unworthy of such aggressive attention: the urban art of graffiti writers, the nuanced styles of gang members, the defiant visibility of gutter punks and street kids.

The political economy of this expansion can hardly be overstated. We repeatedly see the essential role of downtown business owners, merchants' associations, economic development departments, tourism agencies, and upscale urban developers in orchestrating campaigns against street punks, graffiti writers, and others. Time and again, we see that such campaigns are designed to cleanse the cultural spaces of the city in the interest of promoting consumption and protecting property values. Similarly, we see city councils, local criminal justice agencies, and even federal bureaucracies enforcing such campaigns within a prefabricated ideology of public welfare and social order.

Thus, this complex political economy continues today on Tempe, Arizona's trendy Mill Avenue and in locales throughout the U.S. Suburban teenagers, homeless kids, and others hang out in and around the seductive spaces of coffee houses and stylish shops. A city council member publicly claims that "we're very concerned and we need to do something" about Mill Avenue's teenage population. Tempe police launch regular curfew sweeps and aggressively enforce the local anti-cruising ordinance. A local shop owner protests that "teens usually spend money. They're usually no trouble. It's the transients and panhandlers that are our concern." However, the executive director of the Mill Avenue Merchants Association responds, "We don't want to run the kids out. But there's not a whole lot to do but hang out. Twenty-one and older is definitely the target market down here" (in Cannella, 1996: A1, A10).[14]

From Mill Avenue to graffiti-covered back alleys, from gang turf to gated neighborhoods, the creation and contestation of cultural space shapes the experience of everyday life for young and old alike. As new styles of youthful display are invented, as new spaces are by turns carved out and criminalized, those involved stake out the symbolic turf on which matters of meaning, identity, and power are decided. In so doing, they trace the contours of contemporary social control, the emerging political economy of urban life, and the evolving connections of youth, crime, and cultural space.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Genet's symbolic construction of photographs, tubes of Vaseline, and other "mundane objects" on and around the person, as discussed in Hebdige (1979). See also de Certeau (1984) on resistance within the spaces of everyday life.

2. Here we see what Wallis and Malm (1984) and Garofalo (1992) have called a process of "transculturation" — that is, the interplay between dominant cultural forms and alternatives to them — or what Fiske (1991) would describe as the transformation of mass culture into popular culture. A similar political-economic interplay exists, of course, between the criminalization of alternative cultural space — the focus of this essay — and the ongoing co-optation of such space into mainstream markets.

3. The Georgia ACLU has filed a suit challenging the constitutionality of Atlanta's anti-homeless laws. Atlanta also displaced thousands of low-income residents from their homes as part of

Olympic Games preparation; see Chepesiuk (1996) and Scripps Howard (1996). See also Chambliss (1964) for a useful socio-historical analysis of these issues.

4. In response, skateboarders paste "Skateboarding Is Not a Crime" bumper stickers on their cars, their boards, and at times over "Skateboarding in This Area Prohibited by Law" signs.

5. In my many years as an occasional street musician, I have participated in situations where street busking was by turns encouraged, tolerated, regulated, and outlawed by legal and commercial authorities. From my own experience, the latter two approaches appear to be ascendant.

6. The ACLU and others have also mounted legal challenges to youth curfews across the country. Fine and Rojek (1991: G2) likewise refer to the goals of the Atlanta curfew as largely "symbolic."

7. Curfews are also increasingly enforced against the homeless in parks and other public areas. President Clinton's proposal that teenagers "should have to pass a drug test before receiving driver's licenses" (Mitchell, 1996: A1) would of course further encroach on young people's cultural spaces and cultural mobility.

8. Sounding a note of repressive tolerance, a city council member allows that ethnicity "will not be the single factor to keep people out of the community" (Kossan, 1996: B1, B2; see Fiscus and Kossan, 1996). Indeed.

9. Legal responses to the shared styles of gang members emerge in a larger context of police profiles, school dress codes, and other devices that link youth style, deviance and criminality, and legal and social control; see Ferrell (1995b).

10. See Strauss (1993) for a useful historical and political overview of pirate radio and Thomas (1993: 55–60) on the criminalization of the computer underground.

11. Similarly, "the eastern end of Long Island, which includes the exclusive Hamptons, is pressing to secede from its more suburbanized, low-rent neighbors to the west" (Associated Press, 1996c: B7). Oscar Newman's popular notion of creating "defensible space" and reclaiming "ownership" of residential space plays on similar themes.

12. These sorts of issues are also explored by Sorkin (1992); see also Vergara (1995) on the remaking of urban cultural space. Interestingly, development within the 42nd Street district must be devoted either directly to "entertainment or tourism," or to other retail ventures "only of the sort that would have appeal to tourists" (Kaplan, 1996: T2).

13. Similarly, President Clinton and others propose to solve the crisis of a decaying school system through the imposition of school uniforms. Ongoing controversies over the clothing styles, haircuts, and lipstick colors that students choose to display in school reveal a similar battle over image as ideology.

14. Cockburn (1996b: 8) likewise documents the degree to which commercial space has come to define "the public sphere," and as evidence notes the difficulty in finding "a place where people could sit and talk in a public space without spending money." Ferrell (1996: 185–186) discusses similar issues in the context of graffiti writing.

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