

The Visibility of (In)security: The Aesthetics of Planning Urban Defences Against Terrorism

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Abstract

Urban defences against terrorism have traditionally been based on territorial interventions that sought to seal off and surveil certain public and private spaces considered targets. Lately, though, a much wider range of crowded and public spaces have been viewed as potential targets and thus have been identified as requiring additional security. This has immense implications for the experience of the 'everyday' urban landscape. Drawing on contemporary notions that incorporate the study of aesthetics and emotions within critical security and terrorism studies, this article discusses the visual impact of counter-terrorism security measures. It analyses the 'transmission' of symbolic messages, as well as the variety of ways in which security might be 'received' by various stakeholders. The analysis takes place against the backdrop of concern that obtrusive security measures have the capacity to radically alter public experiences of space and in some cases lead to (intended and unintended) exclusionary practices or a range of negative emotional responses. The article concludes by outlining a 'spectrum of visible security' ranging between traditional obtrusive fortified approaches and approaches that embed security features seamlessly or even 'invisibly' into the urban fabric.

Keywords counter-terrorism; security; visibility; urban planning; 'War on Terror'

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Introduction

Recently, the UK government identified the range of risks confronting the nation in its first ever National Security Strategy. The Strategy noted that ‘providing security for the nation and for its citizens remains the most important responsibility of government’ (Cabinet Office, 2008: para. 1.1). As a result, recent security policy has been pursued through anticipatory, precautionary and preparatory security measures that aim to fuse risk-management policymaking agendas across a range of scales and stakeholders (Coaffee & Murakami Wood, 2006). Turning specifically to the threat of terrorism, it is argued that in the UK the targets of terrorist attack have been expanded to encompass a range of ‘crowded places’, such as shopping centres, nightclubs and sports stadiums, with the express aim of inflicting mass casualties.¹ Adopting a less overtly hierarchical response – focusing more on *governance* interaction than on *governmental* interventions – the task of countering the threat against such ‘everyday’ urban spaces is subsequently embracing and ‘responsibilizing’ a range of non-state and civil society actors.²

Against this backdrop, the changing nature of the terror threat facing many Western cities and the subsequent responses require analysis through different frames of reference. With this in mind, the article is divided into two main sections. First, further context regarding the study of space, politics and aesthetics is provided through a discussion of the often so-called literary and aesthetic turn in the study of terrorism (Moore, Cerwyn, 2006). Here we are particularly concerned not only with the role of the urban landscape in mirroring security and counter-terror policies, but also with how such visual symbolism is perceived by different audiences and how emotional reactions might be further considered within security policy. Second, we relate these ideas to an analysis of contemporary urban planning and national security policy in the UK and the USA after 9/11.³ These policies, we contend, comprise a dual strategy: while security features at some sites are expected to be obtrusive, at other sites inconspicuous security is required to help such defensive measures become acceptable to the public. We discuss this idea of ‘acceptability’ through the development of a ‘paradox of visible security’. The policy implications of this are unpacked through the analysis of a continuum of visible security. This reflects upon recent attempts to embed counter-terrorism features into the contemporary urban landscape, providing tentative lessons for how future security and counter-terrorism policy may be pursued more sensitively at the urban scale.

Rethinking Space, Landscape and Aesthetics in the Post-9/11 World

In the post-9/11 era, international security studies and associated policies have increasingly embraced notions of human security that place people, rather than the state, at the centre of security policy (Krause & Williams, 1997; Paris, 2001; McDonald, 2002). One observable outcome of this shift in emphasis has been that the onus and responsibility for preventing and preparing for emergencies, or

¹ This is in addition to ‘conventional’ terrorist *modi operandi* directed against, in most part, economic, military and symbolic targets, with the primary aim of inflicting disruption and winning media coverage rather than causing large numbers of casualties. That said, in the past, crowded places have been targeted. Now, however, they are perceived to be primary targets.

² For a more detailed elaboration of statist and non-statist approaches to security within international relations, see Coward (2006).

³ As a counterpoint to this, it is clear that the type of counter-terrorist intervention varies according to context; see, for example, the 2007 special edition of the Cambridge Review of International Affairs (vol. 20, no. 2).

for enhancing security, has been increasingly transferred to other actors, such as a range of built-environment professions, the private sector, and communities and individuals (Rose, 2000; Coaffee & O'Hare, 2008). Such 'co-option' of non-statutory actors for assistance in state security agendas challenges traditional security studies orthodoxy.

At the same time, some scholars have argued for the increased consideration of aesthetics in relation to terrorism and security studies. This arises from the realization that 'whilst security threats are becoming increasingly complex and transnational, our means of understanding and responding to them have remained largely unchanged' (Bleiker, 2006: 77). The 'turn' towards such interpretative approaches can be seen as an attempt to understand how texts, art, architecture and other visual phenomena might reflect dominant political ideologies, and the role of particular agencies (not just the state) in the conduct of war and in pursuing national security (Campbell, 2003). For example, it has been suggested that the agents of normalizing and disciplinary power may extend beyond the usual suspects of social scientists, psychologists and teachers to include other professionals, such as urban planners.⁴ Similarly, theories of aesthetics reveal how art and other forms of culture can act as 'sites' of complex identity construction, potentially applicable to the visual realm of security and violence (Moore, Cerwyn, 2006; Bleiker, 2000, 2006).

Other approaches illuminate how emotional insights, including the fear of attack, may arise from policy responses to (in)security concerns. Work by Massumi (1993: viii) in the 1990s noted that this is by no means a new phenomenon and that, particularly after World War II, the 'social landscape of fear' has been intensified. Furthermore, Massumi argued that a low level 'ambient' fear has now infiltrated everyday life and highlights how the materiality of the body and associated emotions are ultimately objects of 'technologies of fear' or of policy responses to perceived threats. Likewise, in his ground-breaking essay 'Society of Control', Giles Deleuze (1992) argued that since the end of World War II a new society – the society of control – has replaced the prewar disciplinary society in which 'enclosures' maintained order through the management of wages and discipline or other regulatory networks. In a society of control, everyday control is more pervasive but hidden, and is, according to Hardt & Negri (2002: 23), 'ever more immanent to the social field [and] distributed throughout the brains and bodies of the citizens'. Moreover, this means that the society of control is 'characterized by an intensification and generalization of the normalizing apparatuses of disciplinarity that internally animate our common and daily practices'.⁵ As Foucault (1977: 173) noted in *Discipline and Punish*, mechanisms of everyday control (of people's movement or behaviour) are viewed as unimportant by citizens when the role of such instrumentation is forgotten or masked.

Such everyday emotions, as part of a broader biopolitics,⁶ have been largely ignored in traditional scholarship in the international relations field.⁷ Rather, a number of authors in the immediate post-9/11 era have articulated how policy discourses of security and crisis have been written in ways that privilege the worldviews of political leaders at the expense of the experiences of ordinary citizens (Jackson, 2005; Croft, 2006). More specifically, Paul Saurette (2006) has questioned

⁴ See Richardson (1996: 281) for an overview of this particularly Foucauldian approach.

⁵ Cited in Campbell (2005: 950).

⁶ 'Biopolitics' is a term derived from Foucault's work analysing a type of political control. It concerns the regulation and control of populations through, for example, apparatuses of security like police forces and the exercise of power through micromechanisms of exclusion and surveillance; see Hawkesworth (2002).

⁷ See Fierke (2007) for an exception.

whether an understanding of new fears associated with the 9/11 attacks can be adequately conceptualized unless the role of emotions – for example the feeling of humiliation and the self-perceptions it can shape – is theorized in political policy.

More recently, some scholars have highlighted how the ‘aesthetic domains’ of literature, visual art, music and – critically for the present article – architecture might offer further insights into the symbolic and emotional impact of terrorism and the relationship between aesthetics and politics (Bleiker, 2006: 82; see also Moore, Cerwyn, 2006). Similarly, Martin Coward (2006: 60) has noted how, particularly among British international relations scholars, there exists a ‘tendency towards qualitative, hermeneutic inquiry (as opposed to the quantitative methods that dominate American political science’s analysis of global order) [that] seems well placed to investigate the conceptual contours of the discipline’.

Although such interpretive approaches have, to date, been neglected by many scholars in international relations and political science, they have been embraced to a much larger extent within the social sciences. Bleiker & Hutchinson (2008: 115), for instance, make a number of ‘propositions’ that, they argue, might help facilitate increased synergy between these fields of study:

- 1 The need to accept that research can be insightful and valid even if it engages unobservable phenomena, and even if the results of such inquiries can neither be measured nor validated empirically;
2. The importance of examining processes of representation, such as visual depictions of emotions and the manner in which they shape political perceptions and dynamics;
3. A willingness to consider alternative forms of insight, most notably those stemming from aesthetics sources, which, we argue, are particularly suited to capturing emotions.

With specific relation to this article, we would argue that architecture – and the built form more generally – has the capacity to transmit a range of dominant ideologies, potentially illustrating how a particular society is materially inscribed into space (Harvey, 1990; Ellin, 1997). Others too argue that architecture and urban design have the power to order society through environmental determinism, with such embodied experiences often serving to in/exclude particular groups from certain spaces of the city (see, for example, Sennett, 1994). Drawing upon such assertions, and from a security perspective, the built form potentially possesses the power to condition new forms of subjectivity with spatial performances of identity and (in)security becoming linked to how subjects internalize fear.

Moreover, other strands of work, particularly in cultural geography and architectural studies, portray urban landscapes as texts that can be ‘read’, revealing a range of interpretations of conflict, war and terrorism in a more culturally sensitive way. Drawing on postmodern and post-structural theories, landscape thus becomes ‘a medium in which social relations and processes are formed and reproduced’ (Daniels 1993: 1026). Landscapes are thus moulded by politics and may be read as texts that ‘reveal’ the symbolic importance of their constituent elements (Cosgrove & Daniels, 1988; Barnes & Duncan, 1991; Duncan, 1995).

These and similar such ‘textual’ modes of analysis were employed to analyse the upsurge in urban fear in the 1990s, recognizing how the latter’s visual aesthetic came to symbolize conflict, violence and terror. Mike Davis’s depiction of 1990s Los Angeles as an ‘ecology of fear’ and ‘city of

quartz', brutally divided into 'fortified cells' of affluence and 'places of terror', is a case in point (Davis, 1995: 356; see also Davis, 1990, 1998). Prior studies also highlighted how symbolic markers of territorial conflict – counter-terrorism features or memorials to conflicts – produce highly symbolic (and often contested) landscapes (Jarman, 1993; Johnson, 1995). More recently, it has been proposed that such spatiality, specifically memorials to conflict, may function as a 'radical space of communication' as well as being a fixed moment for generating healing and/or didactic purposes (McKim, 2008: 83). For instance, methods of countering terrorism have been critiqued using a cultural landscape approach. In light of an upsurge in urban terrorism in the 1990s, one architecture critic asserted that urban areas are now punctuated by an 'architecture of terror', dominated by the need for increased security (Pawley, 1998). More generally, Pawley warned, new building design could become deliberately inconspicuous given that 'anonymous' design can make places less iconic and therefore at less risk of being attacked (Pawley, 1998; see also Coaffee, 2003; Weizman, 2007).

Towards a Contemporary Urban Geopolitics?

As suggested, traditional conceptions regarding conflict and terrorism have evolved to take account of an increasingly complex, interdependent and (we are told) potentially more threatening security environment. At the city scale, such trends are perhaps most apparent when the 'meaning' of security landscapes is contested by citizens.

Today, the visible (and increasingly invisible) moulding of the built environment is conducted as a result of social and political priorities some of which are associated with security and insecurity. The 'War on Terror' is no exception, illustrating 'the inseparability of war, terror and modern urbanism' (Graham, 2004: 171), which have moved 'beyond an exclusive concern for nation states, international relations and international terror networks' (Graham, 2004: 170). In the light of this, increasing attention is now being paid to the complex and localized impact of defensive strategies upon social, political and economic life.

However, Frank Möller (2007) notes that, despite a limited discursive and linguistics turn in critical terrorism studies, the focus has been predominantly on speech and language, with little attention, until recently, being paid to visual images. That said, a special edition of *Security Dialogue* in 2007 focused specifically on how visual culture intersects with ideas of militarization and securitization in the post-9/11 world (see Campbell & Shapiro, 2007). Here it was argued that 'visual culture is implicated in new military strategies, at the same time as it enables critical practices contesting those military strategies'. In short, 'there can be no doubt specific visual artefacts and practices have been increasingly in contention in the wake of 9/11' (Campbell & Shapiro, 2007: 133). The respective articles in the 2007 volume highlighted how various elements of an increasingly visually dominated culture – from films (Dauphinée, 2007) and television dramas (Erickson, 2007), through to cartoons (Dodds, 2007), conventional art displays (Lisle, 2007) and even video games (Power, 2007) – have been employed by state security actors. This has been for a number of reasons: to legitimize their activities; to reinforce stereotypes of the terrorist as 'other'; and to reinforce a highly visual and technology driven 'watchful politics' or 'vigilant visualities' to keep the homeland safe (Amoore, 2007). It is further proposed that such uses have attempted to create dissent regarding state security policy (Erickson, 2007).

These and similar such observations have been articulated by the counter-terror response of many Western states post-9/11. In particular, we are interested in how the transmission and reception

of such impressions are projected through the insertion of overt and covert security features into the everyday cityscape as a method of countering emerging and anticipated terrorist modus operandi. The message from governments in many Western states is clear and is being disseminated widely: the defence of the city – of the places where people work, relax and live – is central to wider national security strategies. City builders – including architects, urban planners and designers – are increasingly expected to consume and, through practice, to rearticulate the risk-and-threat discourse in, often literally, ‘concrete’ forms. In essence, protective security is viewed as emblematic – a visual symbol of the ‘War on Terror’, or, perhaps more accurately, of defence from the ‘war on the West’.

A Changing Perception of Threat

UK security services have recently identified public places as being particularly at threat from international terrorism. In July 2007, shortly after failed car-bomb attacks against a London nightclub and Glasgow Airport, and two years after the July 2005 attack against London’s transport network, Prime Minister Gordon Brown (2007) noted that ‘the protection and resilience of our major infrastructure and crowded places requires continuous vigilance’. This reinforced prior warnings that, while specific targets such as embassies, military installations and key national infrastructure remain at high risk, a distinctive feature of current threats is that they ‘often deliberately strike at ordinary people going about their lives’ (H. M. Government, 2006: para. 35). As discussed earlier, such emerging trajectories of terrorist targeting, it was argued by the government, demand an expanded role for built-environment professionals, who would be encouraged to ‘design in’ protective security measures to new buildings, including safe areas, traffic-control measures and the use of blast-resistant materials.⁸ In a further statement, the Prime Minister’s spokesperson noted that the announcements would prepare ‘the public for the possibility that they may start to see some changes in the physical layout of buildings where people gather’ (H. M. Government, 2007).

In essence, we are told, international terrorism may visit a high street or public places in any town or city. A new front has therefore been opened in the global ‘War on Terror’ – the ‘home front’ – with a range of actors including the general public urged to help defend places from attack, or at least to take measures that will mitigate the effect of a successful strike. As argued, ‘security is becoming more civic, urban, domestic and personal: security is coming home’ (Coaffee & Murakami Wood, 2006: 504; see also Graham, 2001). It is to this intersection of concepts and practice that we now turn in order to illuminate the often paradoxical relationship(s) between state security policy and public perceptions of – and the emotions arising from – the ‘secure’ city.

The Aesthetic Paradox of Countering Terrorism

Security features, particularly those proclaimed to prevent, deflect or mitigate a terrorist attack, are ‘transacted’: they form part of a two-way process, being at once projected or transmitted (both intentionally and unintentionally) by the state and the security services, but critically also being consumed or received by the general public and other observers. We contend that such transactions – between the transmission and reception of messages – are marked by a series of paradoxes. ‘Messages’ inherent within security features may also be somewhat contradictory or confusing, particularly when analysed through the prism of their ‘visibility’ – or, alternatively, ‘invisibility’ – to their intended audience(s).

⁸ See comments by Gordon Brown in the UK House of Commons, HC Deb, 14 November 2007, col. 667.

These contradictions underline the subjective nature of interpretations of counter-terror interventions. For instance, secure landscapes are often constructed to convey the message to users that spaces are safe and impenetrable. Such strategies originate from a longer tradition of environmental interventions designed to help prevent crime. In the 1970s, for example, Oscar Newman (1972: 3) promoted 'defensible space': areas that were designed to deter criminal activities through both real and symbolic features. One element of defensible space particularly applicable to the counter-terrorism agenda is 'target hardening'. This is based on the premise that physical protection for a place or building can make it physically more difficult to commit a crime or attack, theoretically deterring would-be offenders. In many instances, such features are quite obvious (possibly being obtrusive) or are even 'advertised' in order to convey the message that a place or building is fortified. Two messages are sent. The public is 'told' that a place can be used in safety, while would-be perpetrators are 'told' that their malign intent is likely to be in vain or at least will require a significant degree of effort.

However, these assumptions contain a potential contradiction. While security regimes may attempt to 'transmit' feelings of safety and security through the built environment and to reassure the public, the 'reception' of these very same messages may be 'lost in translation'. Ironically, for example, security features can arouse feelings of fear and anxiety by drawing attention to the fact that one's safety and security is threatened. Boddy (2007: 279), for instance, highlights the difference between what he refers to as an 'architecture of reassurance' and the 'fear theming' of an 'architecture of dis-assurance', as exemplified by the plethora of counter-terror security features deployed in Washington DC and New York in the wake of 9/11.

This disassurance may be, on the one hand, intentional. Some counter-terror design features may in fact be a form of regulation of access and movement and a method of control over the use of physical spaces and buildings. Security measures such as barricading, surveillance, the imposition of stringent and overtly signposted rules, security announcements and access restricting security checkpoints could, in fact, intimidate the public. They may also promote other emotions – feelings of isolation, of being repressed or under constant watch or threat. For example, a recent report published by the UK Information Commissioner has highlighted how surveillance as a particular aspect of security exacerbates and institutionalizes class, race, gender, geography and citizenship (Murakami Wood, 2006: 3).⁹ As a result, people might only be able to use urban space in a particular way due to symbolic and psychological cues embedded in street design.

On the other hand, unintentional filtering of activities might occur where some groups do not feel comfortable or welcome. As the UK government informs us, contemporary terrorism aims to make crowded places 'empty'.¹⁰ As such, because of people's real or perceived fears, there may be a reticence to use public spaces. In extreme circumstances, this disassurance has been likened to a form of agoraphobia: an anxiety or mania of place (Janz, 2008: 193–194), particularly crowded places such as shopping centres (Predmore et al., 2007).

Others have also highlighted how general security infrastructure, now common in urban space to combat crime and antisocial behaviour, has wider implications. Illustrating this, Németh & Schmidt

⁹ See also House of Lords (2009: 8).

¹⁰ This claim permeates presentations given at current professional training events facilitated by the UK National Counter-Terrorism Security Office.

(2007: 285) identify developments in counter-terror spatial management techniques according to hard (or active) control and soft (passive) control features. Hard control features include electronic surveillance, private security guards, and the laws and rules of conduct that can restrict actions, influence behaviours or impede interaction. Such 'hardened' features may be both pervasive and unobtrusive, and often affect the behaviour even of those who do not aim to cause harm. Alternatively, interventions themselves may be open to abuse or even discriminate against certain sections of society or particular (racial) communities. For example, UK 'stop and search' laws have been criticized as being unfairly targeted against black and Asian people rather than white people (Ministry of Justice, 2008). Under such circumstances, while the general populace appears defended, it is under siege both from the terrorist threat and, perhaps more accurately, from the governmental response to this threat. In contrast, 'soft' strategies are rather more subtle and include aesthetic and 'streetscape' features discussed later.

To add another turn to the issue of visibility, it has also been suggested that visible security might in fact increase vulnerability to attack. Conspicuous security may identify some organizations as targets by highlighting their presence (and perceived vulnerabilities) to would-be terrorists (see, for example, Briggs, 2005). By extension, the need for the state to illustrate that it is taking the terrorist threat seriously further contributes to this paradox. For instance, the swamping of potential targets by armed police and in some cases military hardware¹¹ or the 'temporary' manipulation of spaces adjacent to sites through the placement of concrete 'Jersey' (crash) barriers to create an exclusion area for potentially hostile vehicles can be used to proclaim to the public that a threat is being heeded.

This paradox is based on the (entirely disputable) presumption that the state wants to transmit feelings of security. The state is, in many regards, symbolically weakened by terrorist attacks, and therefore counter-terrorism responses are attempts to be seen to be in control – to symbolically react to a threat in order to promote at least the illusion of resilience in the face of terrorism and to demonstrate the state's ability to afford protection to its citizens. Elsewhere, though, security policies have been critiqued as being deliberate attempts to heighten fear, based on the premise that a fearful population is easier to control (Mythen & Walklate, 2006). Brian Massumi's (2005) recent work on the USA's colour-coded public threat-assessment system is notable. Massumi argues that the alert system aims to 'calibrate the public's anxiety', to 'modulate' the fear of imminent attack and to 'trigger' the public into action. This system, noted Massumi (2005: 33), was 'designed to make visible the government's much advertised commitment to fighting the "war" on terror'.

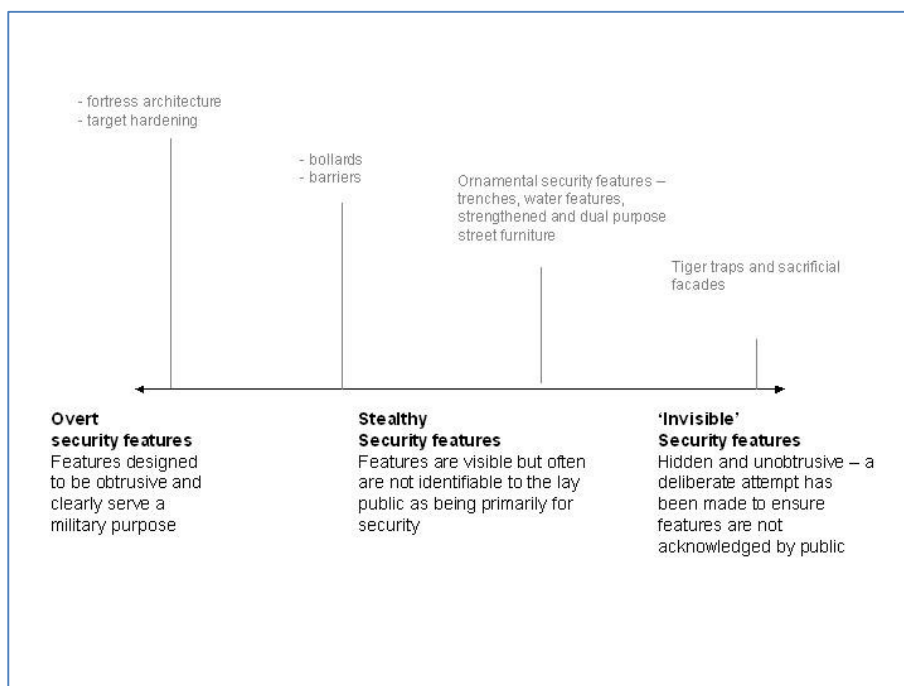
Elsewhere, questions have been raised as to whether the 'rise of invisible security' may in fact lead to more invasive technologies, bolstering rather than undermining the security apparatus of the state (Briggs, 2005)¹². This is an important point of current concern. Presently, there is a concerted effort on the part of many Western states to establish ever more unobtrusive or 'invisible' security features in the built environment. A range of pressures have converged to create such initiatives, many of which have been propagated by the state itself. First, as mentioned earlier, governments believe

¹¹ For example, the deployment of tanks at Heathrow Airport in February 2003.

¹² It is noted here that Briggs was discussing biometric and electronic surveillance technologies as being particularly invasive, but we might apply the same logic to the omnipresence of physical security features.

that the terrorist threat and the ‘War on Terror’ now have a degree of permanency, as well as a pervasiveness. Therefore, security interventions are increasingly required to consider concerns regarding public acceptability (Coaffee et al., 2008), increasing pressure to adopt design features that are both more aesthetically pleasing and less obtrusive (Coaffee & O’Hare, 2008). There have been technological and aesthetic innovations regarding the development of robust security features and an associated implication that professional expertise may be co-opted in order to secure the built environment. By consequence, security features are being increasingly ‘camouflaged’ – or covertly embedded within the urban landscape. These counter-terrorism features may be ‘invisible’ to the unaccustomed eye and do not obviously serve a counter-terrorism purpose. They include aesthetically landscaped barriers or street furniture and collapsible pavements.

Such interventions can serve to combat assertions that visible security features are in fact disassuring. However, in many respects, ‘invisible’ security features invert the contradictions that have been outlined thus far. They potentially present areas as being insecure, therefore, statutory institutions charged with protecting the public are rendered prone to allegations that threats are not being taken seriously enough. That said, it is important to reiterate that such ‘invisible’ security features are often ‘legible’ to those who wish to do harm to or attack an area. Research and post-attack analysis indicate that most attacks are conducted after a period of often quite intensive ‘hostile reconnaissance’, when would-be attackers survey, study and analyse (reconnoitre) potential targets.



. **Figure 1. An Indicative Spectrum of Visible Security**

Drawing upon these differing views, we can construct a continuum that identifies the visibility of security as being ‘overt’, ‘stealthy’ and ‘invisible’ (Figure 1). The following sections provide brief practical examples of security features, outlined to help populate this indicative spectrum of visible security. These pose a number of questions regarding the everyday impact and legitimation of the aesthetic securitization of urban spaces and places.

Visible and Reactionary Security in the Wake of 9/11

It has been asserted that many states, such as the USA, often disguise fear with pride, visually exaggerating interests of national security through the 'emblematic' architectures of overseas embassies (Boddy, 2007). It is recognized that such emotional and physical responses to safeguarding strategic public buildings are not unique to the current 'War on Terror'. For instance, the symbolism and security of embassies has, for a long time, transmitted a message of physical defence from attack (Boddy, 2007). Such narrative coding of urban space became far more important after 9/11 with the tightening of US embassy security designs linked to less reassuring messages, legitimizing the need for impregnability and impermeability. Against this context, which Boddy (2007: 287) calls 'a War on Terror without end', US embassies, even in the most liberal of cities, are subject to acute target hardening. Visually, this emblematic and obtrusive counter-terror architecture can create emotional dis-assurance, particularly 'for the neighbours' of an embassy.

As a case in point, mounting security concerns and public unease have led to a proposal to abandon the US embassy in Grosvenor Square, London. Reasons cited for relocation include the cost of the security retrofit in spite of the high fences, concrete barriers and crash-rated steel barriers that currently encircle the site (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. The US Embassy, Grosvenor Square, London (2006)

Widely described as 'the fortress in the square', the existing defences of the US London Embassy are said to have offended the 'aesthetic sensibilities' of local residents, some of whom have moved away rather than live near a perceived terrorist target. The spacious site for the proposed new embassy will, in contrast, 'provide room for the high walls and layers of security that have turned US embassies around the world into imposing fortresses over the past 10 years' (Borger, 2008: 40). By

extension, in a study of the enhancement of security at the US embassy in Ottawa, Canada, Jason Burke (2008: 1) has argued that 'planning has been co-opted in the name of security' through the construction of a multilayer counter-terror defence that has had significant physical, social and economic impacts. These often crude security measures, it is argued, 'detract from the aesthetic value of the street' and reduce public accessibility around the site, while increasing the perceived vulnerability of neighbouring residences and business (Burke, 2008: 17).

Critically, construction of emblematic security measures is not limited to fortified embassies. Often, in the wake of attacks, or in the face of a perceived imminent threat, security services, and even private institutions, have implemented initiatives and deployed security features with the principle goal of safeguarding particular spaces. As noted earlier, such interventions take place around sites of 'critical importance' (Sternberg & Lee, 2006), including administrative buildings and places with iconographic or symbolic significance, as well as commercial or industrial centres. There are many examples of occasions when such places were targeted, as well as the sometimes rather knee-jerk reaction to such events. In the United States, for instance, in the wake of the 1993 New York World Trade Center bomb attack and the bomb attack against the Federal building in Oklahoma in April 1995, efforts were stepped up to protect governmental and public buildings (see also Footnote 11). Again, such initiatives were not without critique. Referring to the erection of barriers around the White House in May 1995, one journalist referred to the streetscape as 'the architecture of paranoia' (Brown, 1995).

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, such interventions at potential 'target' sites typically took the form of concrete Jersey barriers and, later, steel bollards, as well as the implementation of regular security checks of building users. Such architectures of 'dis-assurance', argues Boddy, 'exploit the fears rather than the hopes of Americans', even though they are often 'just as effective' (Boddy, 2007: 181). Other cities and places were immediately subjected to similar interventions. At selected sites in London, 'rings of concrete' were constructed at key government and business sites in a drive to induce confidence in employees and investors (Coaffee, 2004). Some of these were later painted black in a (perhaps rather futile) attempt to make them more aesthetically pleasing. Such interventions, though crude and spatially specific, are (at least superficially) effective, in that they prohibit the penetration of targets through the limitation of the permeability of spaces by would-be perpetrators of attacks.

In summary, such intervention of the security services and the military has, with time, led to stark forms of visible and overt protection being retrofitted within the built environment. These were so widespread at times that heightened security was, in effect, normalized. Again, this is not without justifiable critique. For instance, it has been charged that the US-wide effort to secure 'key' buildings after 9/11 has, in its rather haphazard and makeshift manifestation, prioritized the safety of building occupants over regard for social, economic, aesthetic or transportation considerations (Hollander & Whitfield, 2005: 244). It has also been contended that the 'guns, guards, gates' posture adopted after 9/11 was inappropriate, owing to the way such measures 'actually intensify and reinforce public perceptions of siege or vulnerability, thus heightening the sense of imminent danger and anticipation of attack' (Grosskopf, 2006: 1). Initiatives in Washington DC were unpopular with visitors and planners, and it has been asserted that 'the nation's capital has become a fortress city peppered with bollards, bunkers, and barriers' owing both to a lack of funding for 'anything nicer' and a lack of strategic coordination between policymakers (Benton-Short, 2007: 432). It has also been recognized that such

features were perhaps implemented precisely because of their visibility to the public, which could potentially be 'calculated to manipulate awareness of the threat of terrorism' (Marcuse, 2006: 921).

With time, such interventions in many cities have been made permanent. This has led to further critiques surrounding the aesthetics of counter-terrorism design. As noted by Stephen Bayley (2007) in a recent newspaper article entitled 'From Car Bombs to Carbuncles', in the light of recent national security pronouncements in the UK regarding the permanency of counterterror features around key government buildings, security features must become acceptable from an aesthetic point of view: 'we might live in dangerous times, but they don't have to be ugly ones too'.

Camouflaging Counter-Terrorist Security

Over time, as the threats from terrorism become more acute, more pervasive, and achieve greater longevity (according to state assessments), and as responses become all the more widely adopted, significant effort has been invested to ensure that security features are installed on a more enduring basis. However, given the concerns and contradictions outlined thus far, there is an increasing reluctance to deploy the highly visible features that have been employed in the past. As Peter Marcuse (2006: 921) notes,

many people object to the intrusive character of many of the manipulated responses, and some planners and architects have devoted themselves to the search for forms that conceal the anti-terror aspects of some measures: making concrete barriers with flower planters on top, making bollards inconspicuous, finding social uses for extreme setbacks, etc.

Contemporary government policy promotes transparent security, 'invisible' to the public gaze through ever more subtle, softer design features. These often also serve a dual function and, for the most part, are not as overt or as conspicuous as other features. Such policies are reflected by the fact that, in the UK and elsewhere, the state, through its security apparatus, is 'recruiting' built-environment professionals to help combat terrorism (Coaffee & O'Hare, 2008). In Washington DC, to use a particular example, planning guidance has been issued in an attempt to create security that complements or even promotes vistas, open spaces, accessibility and the iconographic significance of the city (NCPC, n.d.: 1). The subsequent National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan (NCPC, 2004: A-8), entitled 'Designing and Testing of Perimeter Security Elements', details this tension:

The Commission has grown concerned that these escalating threat assessments and potentially extreme security responses undermine its objectives for a vibrant capital city that showcases democratic ideals of openness and accessibility.

In 2007, the United States Federal Emergency Management Authority (part of the Department of Homeland Security) outlined several core aspirations of better perimeter security design. These include:

- providing an appropriate balance between the need to accommodate perimeter security for sensitive buildings and ... *the vitality of the public realm*;
- providing security in the context of *streetscape enhancement* and *public realm beautification*, rather than as a separate or redundant system of components whose only purpose is security;

- expanding the palette of elements that can gracefully provide perimeter security in a manner that does not clutter the public realm, while avoiding the monotony of endless lines of jersey barriers or bollards, which only *evoke defensiveness*;
- producing a coherent strategy for deploying specific families of streetscape and security elements in which priority is given to achieving *aesthetic continuity* along streets;
- providing perimeter security in a manner that *does not impede the City's commerce and vitality*, excessively restrict or impede operational use of sidewalks or pedestrian and vehicular mobility, nor impact the health of existing trees (FEMA, 2007: 4-1/4-2; emphasis added).

In the United Kingdom, too, recent reviews of counter-terrorist protective security have led to pressures to make security features more aesthetically pleasing. For example, recent public-realm 'streetscape' improvements in the Government Security Zone in central London have seen (supposedly) more attractive and inconspicuous security features 'designed in' in the form of balustrades (see Figures 3 and 4).

Likewise, the new Emirates Stadium in North London has actively promoted its ornamental counter-terrorism features. These are held up as a model of best practice for designing in counter-terrorism features to new buildings. There, large fortified concrete letters spelling out 'Arsenal' have been deliberately situated to prevent vehicle access (see Figure 5), and have now become a favoured location for match-day fans to be photographed (BBC, 2007; Coaffee & Boshier, 2008).



Figure 3. Security Balustrade Along Whitehall, London (January 2009)



Fig 4 Figure 4. Sign Regarding Whitehall Streetscape Improvements (January 2009)



Figure 5. 'ARSENAL' – Ornamental Security Façade for the Emirates Stadium (July 2003)

Other counter-terror features may be even less obvious. For instance, expendable surfaces have been designed to dissipate when subjected to the pressure waves of a blast, and strengthened or toughened glass that can withstand even significant attacks is increasingly built into developments. In this respect, new design technology has become available to built-environment professionals to help integrate perimeter and building security less visibly and with more subtlety into the public realm. Another such feature, highly marketed as securing public areas in an almost invisible way, is a collapsible pedestrian pavement (promoted under the trademark 'Tiger Traps')¹³ that gives way under the weight of a vehicle, trapping it in a pit some distance from potential targets. However, such interventions have been reported in some press outlets (and now, of course, in academic publications), somewhat undermining their rather invisible premise:

Outside the New York Mercantile Exchange, where oil and gold are traded just west of Ground Zero, a long row of bollards will be replaced this fall by a sidewalk punctuated with benches that will conceal a security device called a Tiger Trap: Just below a layer of paving stones is a trench filled with low-density, compressible concrete that will collapse under a heavy weight.¹⁴

This form of protecting urban spaces is indicative of the increased importance of visual aesthetics in the 'War on Terror'. As Trevor Boddy (2007: 291) noted, it potentially 'represents the future of the hardening of public buildings and public space – soft on the outside, hard within, the iron hand inside the civic velvet glove'. Importantly, this particular approach also further illuminates the rise of fear (or, more accurately, the lack thereof) as a marketable issue. This is often exploited by the private sector, as was particularly obvious after 9/11. As Jennifer Light (2002: 612) noted, the fear of terrorism and the expansion of militarized urban space 'reminds us that many powerful economic and political interests are well served by the unbridled expansion of urban fear'.

It is also recognized that that while 'invisible' security brings many benefits, it also brings a range of challenges regarding who makes decisions and how decision makers and processes are monitored (Briggs, 2005: 69). In other words, concern has been raised that 'invisible' forms of security may risk becoming an uncontested element of political and public policy.

Conclusions

As has been reiterated throughout this article, public policy and political imperatives can be viewed in our streetscapes and cities at a range of spatial scales. The recent aesthetic turn in critical security and terrorism studies draws attention to the visual interpretation of counter-terrorism policies and their impact upon the use of everyday urban spaces. In short, security policy is more than words and ideas. Its manifestation within the built environment can transmit powerful messages, both intentionally and unintentionally, eliciting a range of subjective emotional responses. As such, security policy can have a tangible impact upon the spaces in which we live, work and socialize (and how we do so), and has the potential to have an immense impact on how citizens interact with each other.

We have unpacked the range of conflicting transactions and messages that are projected. Urban defences can be formidable but are also foreboding – and on occasion are designed to be so.

¹³ See <http://www.rogersmarvel.com/BatteryParkCityStreetscapes.html>.

¹⁴ See Moore, Martha (2006).

But, what is the overarching message that the state wishes to send in such circumstances? And, who receives it and in what fashion? Such policies are 'authored', predominantly by the state's security services. But, clearly, their 'readers' may assume different meanings from those intended – or at least from those projected by the state. This raises questions over how different spatial and aesthetic arrangements of security features condition a 'range' of responses and the possibility for the (re)production of different forms of subjectivity.

As illustrated, despite pronouncements that the main task of the state is to protect its population, devices and designs for safety can achieve quite the opposite effect – fearfulness, suspicion, paranoia, exclusion and ultimately insecurity. Such a critique is all the more powerful given the rise to prominence of the ethos of human security. In such instances, it is critical to note that in the face of attacks and the threat aura arising from them, the state's response may in itself serve to terrorize the very people supposedly protected. By extension, when the acceptability and effectiveness of security features are considered, it must be recognized that there is a degree of fluidity. The source and target of threats can change over time, and so too can people's tolerance of invasive security or, alternatively, their desire to feel more secure.

In summary, invisible security, though potentially more aesthetically pleasing, and offering a redress to the many drawbacks of more obvious and obtrusive security interventions in the built environment, must itself be treated with a healthy degree of scepticism. Given the potential future omnipresence of 'stealthy' security, we must remain vigilant of the risk that citizens will provide passive consent to the rise to dominance of pre-emptive planning for 'inevitable' worst-case terrorist scenarios.

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