Terrorism and the Right to the Secure City: Safety vs. Security in Public Spaces

PETER MARCUSE

The threat of terrorism has been manipulated in the United States to achieve political results that reinforce the established power structure. This has been done by vastly expanding what is held out to be the threat, substituting false for legitimate responses, and making the issue one of ontological security rather than reasonable safety. The result has been a severe limitation on residents' right to the city, a limitation particularly visible in restrictions on their use of public spaces. The threat of terrorism has thus been used to restrict democracy in cities and across the nation.

The argument

A great deal is at issue in the manipulation of the threat of terrorism in the United States today. While various abuses of civil liberties and common sense have been involved in the governmental responses to the threat of terrorism, the most serious may be the sale of the threat as a threat to existential security, instead of one threat among others to public safety. The result after 9/11 has been to reinforce the positions of those in power and to limit further the freedom that is at the heart of the right to the city. The current treatment of public space illustrates the process.

The argument proceeds as follows: The threat of terrorism includes both legitimate and false responses generated by government. The most damaging of the false responses is the manipulation of the threat to present it as a risk to

existential security, rather than as a matter of public safety. The distinction between security and safety is crucial to understanding this situation.

False responses are damaging in three ways: they suppress analysis, inquiry, and criticism; they restrict and pervert the uses of public spaces, both directly limiting political uses and indirectly restricting popular functions. While the surveillance of public space is only a small part of what converts the threat of terrorism from an issue of safety to one of insecurity, it is part of an increasingly omnipresent imposition of awareness of the narrowing of the scope of the right to the city. But most pervasively, they limit fundamentally the right to the city, understood as the freedom of individuals to develop their capacities fully in a society of support and solidarity. Finally, I want to end with a somewhat tongue-in-cheek suggestion about a better way to handle the matter.

Two preliminary remarks:

The threat of terrorism is of course not unique historically in playing the role of legitimating existing power relations. Patriotism/chauvinism, at the extreme going to war; racism; responses to other catastrophes, including national disasters and individual tragedies, such as assassinations; fear of social unrest, have all been put to similar uses. As this is written, President Bush is calling for an expenditure of over $9 billion dollars to meet the threat of avian flu; political commentators see this as a public relations move to relegitimate a federal government whose standing has been severely damaged by its (failed) response to hurricane Katrina. But the threat of terrorism is not only the most current large case of this pattern, it also relies to an unusual degree on the replacement of concerns for public safety with a manipulation of causes of existential insecurity, a point taken up in detail below.

Further: aspects of what is described below as the response to terrorism seem unique to the United States: orange alerts, a Department of Homeland Security, and certainly the invasion of Iraq justified as a defense against terrorism. One notices the difference in daily conversations, in media reporting, in airport security, in reactions to the use of military force: for most Europeans, the risk of terrorism is a small risk and one risk among others, not a pervasive concern of government or political discourse.

There are several possible explanations for the difference: cultural ones that relate to attitudes towards violence; or prejudice against others (although the United States is a nation of immigrants and tolerance might be more expected here); racism, although terrorists are not African American or black—the traditional objects of racist prejudices; a higher level of insecurity in the

290

absence of welfare-state guarantees of a respectable safety net.[1] Or it may be that, because the attack on the World Trade Center was the first incursion of an outside power on the territory of the United States since 1810, while whole European countries have historically seen multiple invasions, that the response has been so disproportionate here. Or it may be (the explanation that seems to me most satisfactory) that in Europe the legitimacy of the state has been, in different forms, that it serves a welfare function, true of authoritarian as well a democratic regimes, while in the United States that function has been in severe decline for at least the last decade. Thus extensive state action is not legitimated in the United States, and meets sharp resistance. Yet extensive state action is required to protect and extend its economic prosperity and international power. The portrayal of terrorism as a life-threatening danger can thus play the role of legitimating extensive government action. Other threats to public safety, e.g. epidemics or extreme poverty, might require welfare-type actions which the regime does not desire; hence the threat of terrorism must be distinguished from these threats, and is made into a threat to "security" of an over-riding nature, rather than just another threat to safety. Or it may simply be another example of a complex American exceptionalism.

The legitimacy of the responses to the threat of terrorism

Security in the face of a declared threat of terrorism dominates much of the discussion about city life in the United States today, with frequent reference to the events of September 11, 2001 (9/11). Does the government, and do the dominant institutions in the United States, give appropriate weight to the threat of terrorism after 9/11? How are responses to the threat related to the events of 9/11?

The basic argument of this paper is that a great deal has changed in what is done purportedly in response to the threat of terrorism since 9/11. I argue that there have been both legitimate and false responses to the perceived threat. The impact of the legitimate response is almost trivial, representing more of a continuation of trends already in place before 9/11 rather than something new. In contrast, the impact of the false response has been substantial. The false response has used the threat of terrorism as a pretext to bring about changes that have nothing to do with physical safety or protection against terrorism, but implement quite unrelated agendas. In New York City, those agendas have sometimes had to do with changes in real-estate values in

---

1   I have argued elsewhere that this higher level of social insecurity explains the United States' preoccupation with crime generally, as well as with terrorism. (Marcuse, 2004).

lower Manhattan. In general, however, the implicit agenda has been to increase the political control of dissent, to limit debate about some general direction of policies, and to control the use of public space for democratic but dissident purposes. That implicit agenda has been advanced since 9/11 under the pretext of the threat of terrorism, not in legitimate response to it. I do not, however, claim that this political agenda and these limitations on the use of public space are new or solely related to 9/11; again, the pattern precedes 9/11, although it has intensified since then.

Let me begin by specifying what I mean by legitimate and false responses to terrorism:

	Type of Response	Impact	Examples
Legitimate	Targeted responses	Directed at grounded risks, regardless of costs	Efficient— metal detectors at airports Inefficient— shoe removal at airports
	Balanced responses	Attempting to balance risks against economic and civil rights costs	Surveillance cameras at entries to public buildings; inefficient targeted responses
False	Directly repressive responses	Curtailing activities or restricting individual rights unrelated to terrorism	Ethnic profiling, immigrant restrictions, "No Loitering" signs at train stations, Patriot Act
	Manipulated climate responses	Creating a pervasive atmosphere of fear about terrorism, substituting security for public safety as the goal	Orange alerts, election rhetoric, constrained assemblies, surveillance in public spaces, fortifying/ bunkering buildings

Table 1: False and legitimate responses to terrorism

Targeted responses are effective responses directed to eliminate grounded threats of terrorism. The goal of targeted responses is to eliminate essentially all risk from the targeted threat. Targeted responses share two characteristics: there is a substantial basis for the belief that the risks at which they are directed are real, and the measures aimed at guarding against those risks use the minimum resources and cause the minimum disruption needed to achieve their objectives. Metal detectors at airports fall into this category; other airport security measures (such as taking off one's shoes or having dogs sniff passengers or luggage) may be ineffective or inefficient. At the margin, some balancing (of what?) is also involved; a very complex security measure that reduces risk only to a trivial extent may not be appropriate. But the decision as to what measures are appropriate is, at least in the first instance, a technical one in which the capabilities of various technologies and the evaluation of

intelligence information are key, and on which I claim no expertise, even though some measures in effect today seem, to me, to defy common sense.

Balanced responses take into account the absolute costs of eliminating grounded threats, and attempt to strike a balance between physical safety and economic or social cost. The harm that could be done at a crowded subway station in New York City, for instance, might be great, but the disruption caused by any serious measure to avoid the risk of that harm would be tremendous. As a result, no action is taken. For example, posting signs that say "If You See Something, Say Something" in train stations is not likely to eliminate much risk. Yet the importance of large numbers of people getting to work without a huge waste of time outbalances the protection that any further measures might provide against the risks involved.

False responses are actions not reasonably related to the threat of terrorism, but put forward as justified by that threat. Some, those that are directly *repressive responses,* limit conventional civil rights. They include bans on demonstrations, or their restriction in manners calculated to limit their effectiveness in gross disproportion to the dangers they might cause; and, in disregard of alternative, less restrictive measures, provisions of the Patriot Act punishing speech posing no clear and present danger, arrests and incarcerations without the normal protections of due process. *Manipulated climate responses* are less directly repressive. They create a climate of fear and insecurity in which normal and peaceful activities that may be critical of existing policies or practices are inhibited, in which a pervasive awareness of a superordinate power is created. They include yellow, orange, and red alerts; the stationing of National Guard troops in public spaces, transport facilities, and important buildings; jersey barriers and bollards around buildings; warning signs and loudspeaker messages suggesting the dangers of unattended packages or unusual behavior; the replacement of glass with concrete on the lower floors of new buildings (up to 20 stories, in the case of the planned "Freedom Tower" at the World Trade Center site); constantly reiterated references to the "war against terrorism" in public speeches, news articles, and media presentations; restricting access to public buildings and public spaces; random searches of bags and packages, etc. Their effect is to put questioning of dominant state practices out of bounds, and to produce informal reactions within civil society that stultify free speech.

Private and public responses to the threat of terrorism thus range from legitimate to false, from balanced to manipulated. The line between them is not always clear, but the extreme cases are. The stereotyping of what a terrorist looks like, with all its racial and religious overtones, clearly is a false re-

sponse, as is stockpiling duct tape as a defense against biological terrorism.[2] And, it appears that individuals in suburban communities have been more likely to alter their habits in response to the threat of terrorism, to be suspicious of strangers, to post police in public spaces and at public events, and to guard their public buildings than individuals in far-denser urban centers, where presumably the threat is greater. Thus there is a subjective factor in the response, and one conditioned by characteristics of class, and likely of race, of gender, and of age. But our concern here is with the external and public aspects of the response, rather than variations in the subjective reactions to it.

And there are cross- and counter-currents to the manipulated response. On the one side, 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.[3] And at some point people simply ignore the proclaimed threats: subway ridership in New York City remains the same whatever level of "threat" may be announced by the authorities. At the same time, other measures are taken solely for the purpose of giving publicity to the threat, hammering home its dangers: the stationing of police or National Guard troops at very visible public locations, where in fact their function is not to be prepared to take action but simply to raise consciousness of danger, the random search of bags on mass transit, etc., are all calculated to manipulate awareness of the threat of terrorism.

Buttressing power: security vs. safety

At the heart of the effectiveness of manipulated responses is a basic shift in the perspective on the threat of terrorism, a transformation of a threat to public safety to a threat to existential security. Thus, the threat of terrorism is presented as an issue of security rather than of safety, and used politically not only in the narrow sense of partisan politics but more broadly to justify major infringements on not only the use of public space, but also the rights to the city.

So what is the difference between security and safety? And what difference does it make? There are key differences between threats to safety and to security:

---

2 I would go further and argue that the election of George W. Bush was in large part a result of a false response to the threat of terrorism, but that brings us outside the scope of this article.

3 Cf. the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Planning Agency's guidelines and citations in Vale (2005).

Existential insecurity
- Long-term unemployment
- Cancer
- Rejection in love

Acceptable unsafety—assessed risks
- Urban life
- Remote risks
- Involuntary risks
- Calculated hope of gain
- Gambling

Both involve risk, not in Beck's terms. In common usage, insecurity also describes uncertainty about minor details of everyday life: not knowing directions is referred to as being insecure when driving—which way to turn at an intersection, how not to get lost in a strange city—but that might simply be referred to as *unsureness,* and is not the concern here. Other examples of the difference between insecurity and unsafeness can be listed:

Other examples of insecurity
- Homelessness
- Generally uncertainty as to the availability of satisfaction of basic needs, including food, shelter, health care, old age support, and education (cf. Millennium list, UN Declaration of Human Rights)

Less dramatic examples
- Avoiding urban public spaces
- Retreating to gated communities in the suburbs
- Not leaving home after an extended youth
- Wanting to work behind Jersey barriers, fences, gates, and street setbacks to protect United States buildings
- Wanting to work in a tower with the elimination of windows up to the height of up to twenty stories. I proposed that Freedom Tower, planned for the World Trade Center site, be renamed the "high-rise bunker."

Examples of public actions positively increasing security
- Social security
- Anti-eviction legislation
- Universal free medical care
- An effective FEMA

295

Examples of activities involving safety and risk
- Generally understanding and acceptance of risk
- Jaywalking
- Driving normally
- Living in the city: no one expects to live in the city without risk, risk is accepted as part of the urban, part of what makes a city a city in the sense I impute to Lefebvre
- Courtship, perhaps love itself

Examples of unsafe activities
- Driving drunk
- Swimming with an unknown undertow

Examples of public actions increasing safety
- Warning signs
- Often, police presence
- Enforcement of traffic rules
- Some airport security measures (banning knives: yes, removing shoes: no).

A current example of the difference: In New Orleans, we know that the residents of low-lying areas were unsafe even before Katrina, but their experiences in the convention center and the Superdome and the mismanagement of the authorities produced, I would argue, a feeling of insecurity that was qualitatively different from the unsafety experienced before the storm.

Let me try a formal definition: Unsafety is the exposure to risk, but involves the recognition and acceptance of known risks and the decision to accept or avoid the risk remaining after it has been assessed and voluntarily chosen risk minimizations have been implemented. It assumes satisfaction that the risk and benefits of alternative courses of action are understood and taken into account, with confidence that the course of action decided on is right. Insecurity is existential. It involves doubt about risk, and fear of risk. It does not measure risk of harm or extent of benefit, but assumes risk is unknowable in its extent—it cannot be "assessed"—it is unavoidable in occurrence and beyond human control—there is no alternative to taking the risk and simply attempting to minimize its adverse consequences. It assumes that the understanding of risk is uncertain, both in probability and in scope, and involves no confidence that the course of action decided on is right, yet maintains that is must nevertheless be taken.

There is not an absolute division, and many cases are borderline, and there is certainly a subjective element involved. The responses of different indi-

viduals to different risks will vary. When the federal government declares an orange risk for the subways of New York City, the reaction of the New York City Police Department to put police very visibly, and with much publicity, on many (but a minority of) cars is calculated to increase insecurity, and will be seen by some as a reason to avoid the subway—but the overwhelming majority of New Yorkers will continue to use it. As indeed did the majority of train riders in Madrid and Underground riders in London—seeing the threat of further terrorism as simply another question of safety, assessing the risk, and riding.

The distinction between security and safety is key to understanding the true impact of the current manipulation of the threat of terrorism. Let me return to that argument.

The threat of terrorism as imposing insecurity

I argue, then, that the responses to terrorism of the character I have outlined earlier produce, and are manipulated to produce, an atmosphere of insecurity, one that goes far beyond a concern for public safety. And the threat is pushed as an issue of security for a specific political purpose: control. In a general discussion of the politics of fear—I take insecurity to be virtually synonymous with his usage—Frank Furedi says: "Today, the objective of the politics of fear is to gain consensus and to forge a measure of unity around an otherwise disconnected elite. […] its main effect is to enforce the idea that there is no alternative." (The New York Times, 2005).[4] No alternative to the continuing maintenance in office of the present administration, and more generally, no alternative to the continued rule of the existing elite. Furedi speaks of "fear entrepreneurs" as the actors promoting the politics of fear. In the United States today, those fear entrepreneurs, those selling insecurity, can be rather readily identified, and the directly political results of their efforts may be the key explanation for the victory of George W. Bush in the 2004 election.

In the broader sense, the use of the threat of terrorism to promote a sense of insecurity, its formulation as an issue of security rather than safety, not only undergirds a particular political agenda but also limits freedom and restricts the right to the city in general. And we can see this manifest in the way the threat of terrorism and the insecurity it promotes is used to affect the use of public space—as in the Republican National Convention case.

---

4   He is explicit: "The politics of fear is a manipulative project that aims to immobilise public 'dissent.'"

Public space as a case in point

City planning is concerned with the physical space of cities. City planners believe that public spaces should be adequate, open, usable, and accessible to all. We see public spaces, in a sense, as the symbols of a democratic and open city. New York City has some great public spaces, including Central Park, Union Square, and much of the waterfront. The debate over the protests surrounding the Republican National Convention demonstrates that the presence of physically adequate public space is not enough to achieve that openness, that democracy, that urban planners want to see in cities. The management and control of space in the city, as well as its physical aspects, are at stake. New York has become a city of control; the political authorities, rather than the people, determine how the city and its public spaces are used. In the controlled city, rights can best be exercised at home, in private, not in public.

The impact of the threat of terrorism on public spaces in cities has been substantial. Henri Lefebvre, the French Marxist intellectual, viewed public space as representative of the physical nexus of a humane and urban life, as a form of lived space in which the right to the city could be exercised (cf. Lefebvre 1996).

Condoleezza Rice has lately taken to quoting the definition of democracy advanced by Nathan Sharansky: Can an individual say what he or she wishes, standing in the middle of the largest public square in town, without fear of arrest or harassment? In this view, which harks back to a view that sees public space, the agora, the forum, as central to democracy, the openness of pubic spaces becomes the essence of democracy. It is collective action, not individual action, communicative action, not self-expression, that is at the core of the democratic use of public space (cf. Habermas 1984).

I use the phrase "public space" in the lived sense, not in the legal sense. This view implies a broader conception of public space than a formal, legal one that looks at ownership as the defining criteria for publicness. I mean 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.

I am concerned with those spaces that traditionally might be considered available or suitable for public discussion of common concerns, and specifically for the expression of political opinions. One might argue that these are spaces in which the rights to free speech and freedom of assembly under the United States Constitution are guaranteed.[5] The complexities of formal defini-

---

5   One might thus conceive of six legal forms of ownership of public space: public ownership, public function, public use (streets); public ownership, public function, administrative use (city halls); public ownership, private function, private use (space leased to commercial establishments); private ownership, public func-

tion and legal interpretation are substantial, but I want to raise the issues of the use of public space as they affect both city planning and the uses of public space in cities in the United States today as matters of policy and political concern, not as legal matters.

The following are classic examples of the kind of public spaces to which I refer:

- The agora of Athens, as to its (limited range of) citizens[6]
- The squares of Rome, as that in which Mark Anthony denounced Brutus in Shakespeare's play
- The Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires in which the mothers of the disappeared protested the dictatorship
- The Capital grounds in Washington, D.C. at which Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his famous "I Have a Dream" speech
- The streets of Leipzig where protesters marched and helped precipitate the events that ultimately led to the downfall of the East German regime
- The streets of Seattle, where protesters raised discussions of globalization to a new level of awareness
- Most recently, the square in front of Parliament in Kiev, where masses of people camped to bring down a falsely elected president
- Genoa
- Tiananmen Square
- Prague
- Caracas, in the struggle around Chavez' presidency.

Not only public space, but also spatial arrangements in general are affected.

The impact of Homeland Security measures on the directly political use of public space is well known: the restrictions placed on various protest marches and demonstrations in the nation's capital, and similar measures elsewhere around the country, as for instance in limiting demonstrations to cordoned-off and remote locations at the time of the Republican National Convention in New York City (Marcuse, 2005). But this type of restriction is only the tip of the iceberg. What is even more serious is the manipulation of the threat of terrorism to justify

---

tion, public use (airports, gated communities, zoning bonus private plazas, community benefit facilities); private ownership, private function, public use (cafes, places of public accommodations); private ownership, private use (homes) (cf. Marcuse, 2003).

6 Slaves were excluded from the discussions. While publicness is rarely absolute in practice, here it was very limited.

- A broad level of surveillance
- Invasions of privacy
- The gathering of information about persons and activities by central governmental agencies
- The constant publicity given to the threat of terrorism by government agencies
- The color-coding of states of danger
- The "If you see something, say something" signs
- The use of security against terrorism as a justification for mammoth budgetary expenditures for policing and behavior control measures
- The presence of armed National Guard troops on subways, train stations, and places of public assembly.

Public space issues are at the center of many responses, and afford direct examples of the way the false threat of terrorism and the selling of security have been used to restrict rights to the city:

- Restrictions on the everyday use of public space
- Restrictions on access to public buildings
- Restrictions on political expression and assembly for political purposes
- Restrictions on the freedom of immigrants to use public facilities and services in the city
- Promoting flight from the density and diversity of the central city, including its public spaces, resulting in
- Increased segregation, exclusion, and concentrated deconcentration of residences and economic activities
- Restrictions on privacy and freedom from surveillance.

What is the situation in regard to such spaces today in a city like New York after 9/11? "Securing public space" often means, in Larry Vale's words, securing space from the public rather than for it. One concluding example may suffice: the use of the streets of New York City, Union Square, and Central Park—by anyone's definition of public spaces—during the recent Republican Convention.[7]

There were approximately 400,000 protestors wanting to demonstrate their objections to the Bush agenda in a public place where they could be heard. After long negotiations, the organizers of the protest and city officials finally agreed on a march-route up Seventh Avenue, and a permit was secured. The organizers hoped to end the march with a rally at the Great Meadow in Central Park, where hundreds of thousands had gathered on previous occasions for everything from rock concerts to anti-war protests. But

---

7   I was a participant in the events described below.

the City said no, asserting that such a rally would endanger the grass on the Meadow. Court appeals, perhaps too late—the city strung out the "negotiations" before a lawsuit was filed out skillfully—failed. Ultimately, there was no rally at all.

As the march proceeded up Seventh Avenue, protesters chanted "Whose Streets? Our Streets! Whose Streets? Our Streets!" Thousands of voices claiming their right to the city. This was the people energized, democracy in action. It felt good, at the time.

But was it really democracy in action? Reflecting on the march, I realized that what was being demonstrated was precisely that the streets were not "our" streets, that no "right to the city" had been exercised. The Mayor and the police could dictate where assembly could take place, how and when and where and by whom the streets could be used, whether the public parks could be used for the collective expression of political opinion or not. Whose streets? City officials' complete domination over the use of public space in New York City clarified that these were their streets, not "our" streets—and there was nothing that could be done about it. Polls showed a substantial majority of New Yorkers favored allowing a rally on the Great Meadow, but that did not matter. The message was that parks are for harmless picnics, not protests.

Yet a democratic use of public spaces requires the ability to organize in advance, to procure loudspeakers, to erect a platform, to permit collective communication among large numbers of people. There needs to be a balance between the use of a city's parks for recreation and streets for traffic, and their use for democratic, collective purposes. That balance, however, was tipped far in the private direction, for the benefit of the attendees at the well-organized indoor Republican Convention; it did not favor those protesting that convention outside.

The issues around the use of public space for public purposes, and the appropriate response to the threat of terrorism in regulating their use, are not confined to New York City or the United States. Around the Reichstag in Berlin is a "Bannmeile," an officially signposted "mile" of space in which demonstrations are prohibited (cf. Eick 2005). The grounds are clearly public, and the restriction is enforced supposedly only when parliament is in session. But in reality, the police determine whether or not the restriction is enforced. Similarly, in Washington, D.C., arrangements for demonstrations and marches and assemblies are subject to ever increasing restrictions of time, place, and manner. Of course legitimate concerns demand a balance between rights of use and protection against terrorism. But, as New York City's response to the Republican National Convention demonstrated, the line between legitimate balance on the one side and, on the other side, false use to limit the impact of actions unfavorable to the administration is increasingly suspect. A panel of

301

the American Planning Association recently conceded that "[t]he fear of terrorism and the rush to protect against it has made the democracy of public space a victim" (quoted in Finucan 2005: 5). Good planners are doing what they can to make the restrictions on public space as inconspicuous and innocuous as possible. Planners, however, are told they must adhere to the guidelines provided by city officials. Those guidelines, if they come from the authorities in charge of security, are never open for discussion. Thus, the security authorities have unilateral authority to determine the balance of uses and rights.

And these limitations on public use are all legitimated in the name of "security." The term "security" has become a catch-all to be defined at the discretion of the police and the professionals in homeland security. Was anyone really at risk from terrorism in New York City while the Republican convention was there? Were the conventioneers, many of whom had not yet arrived, in any event ensconced within the fortress created around Madison Square Garden, with access to it and New York's second largest railroad station tightly controlled by police, dogs, metal detectors, cameras, helicopters? Hardly. Was there danger from a few anarchists? Certainly over-kill; there were not any on the march given to violence, and the extensive intelligence infiltration of protest groups would have shown that. But the word "security" has been cut off from its moorings in reality, and instead has become a mantra that citizens do not even think about questioning. In the controlled city, use is by permit, not by right. So much for public space.

But the Right to the City has been under siege since before 9/11, and the false use of the threat of terrorism is only an accentuation of already existing trends. The use of public authority to control the use of space in the city at the expense of its residents and the use of power to override the desires and needs of those with less power have a long history. Robert Moses ran roughshod over citizen opposition with his highway projects (cf. Caro 1974). Urban renewal displaced thousands against their will. Private urban renewal, gentrification, is supported by the city's leadership, despite its adverse impact on residents. Mega-projects, giant developments internalizing many aspects of city life (security, shopping, recreation facilities), are supported by the city as sources of tax revenue, regardless of the impact such projects have on the surrounding communities and the people they displace. The city uses taxes to subsidize global financial firms that will make the city "competitive," although such actions may help only a minority of the city's residents.

In broader terms, the situation is even worse. Not just the use of particular streets, or parks on particular days, is out of the control of the city's residents—city officials also control major changes in the city's form and structure, with only the most limited participation by the voters. One of the most recent examples is the rebuilding of lower Manhattan. The City is using bil-

lions of dollars allocated to it by the federal government to deal with the consequences of 9/11 to subsidize real estate in lower Manhattan and to build a "one-seat ride" direct rail link to lower Manhattan from JFK airport. But these funds would be better directed towards affordable housing, new schools, subway improvements, and job expansion. The majority of the city lives outside of Manhattan in the outer boroughs; they have crying development needs. If the matter were put to a vote, the money would likely be spent differently. But the issue is not put to a vote. Most recently, the state has moved jobs from state offices in Jamaica, Queens, where the residents had fought hard for investment, to lower Manhattan. These decisions are not made by the people of the city.

So, undemocratic political decisions have limited the use of public space, with the threat of terrorism being only the latest argument for a continuing narrowing of this aspect of the right to the city.

The ongoing shift from public to private sector control over, and provision of, "public" space is another piece of the same pattern.[8] In part, this is the simple privatization of existing public space: putting selected commercial uses in Bryant Park, giving Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) the right to police public spaces, selling air terminals to private corporations. Greater quantitative impact, however, is exerted by substituting private space to fulfill many of the functions of public space: the common areas of private shopping malls, for instance, have become the "streets" for passage and planned and random encounters, bookstore cafés have taken over some of the functions of public libraries, museums become private venues for weddings and fundraisers. In each of these cases, restriction on access is in private hands; there is no right to public use of these spaces.

The manipulation of the false threat of terrorism, one manifestation of which has been the events surrounding the Republican Convention protests, are perhaps only the most striking and the most directly political signs of the retreat from the right to the city. The cordoning off of large sections of central Washington, D.C. for the inauguration is another sign of this retreat. Even without massive arrests, the precautions taken in the name of security devalue the right to use public space in the city.

So, the threat of terrorism is used to limit the political use of public space, and is legitimated by the artificially induced insecurity that the present form of responses breeds.

---

8   Diane Davis of MIT has helped me see this point more clearly.

References

Caro, Robert A. (1974) *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York,* New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Eick, Volker (2001) "Städtische Politik zwischen Bürgergesellschaft und Polizeistaat". AK – Analyse & Kritik, Zeitung für linke Debatte und Praxis 453/20.

Finucan, Karen (2005) "Security that Works – Beautifully". Planning Magazine 71/3, pp. 4–5.

Habermas, Jürgen (1984/1981) *The Theory of Communicative Action*, McCarthy Boston: Beacon Press.

Lefebvre, Henri (1996/1967) "The Right to the City". In Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (eds.) *Writings on Cities*, London: Blackwell, pp. 63–184.

Marcuse, Peter (2003) "The Meaning of Public Space". Conference presentation, Conference on Public Space, University of Cottbus.

Marcuse, Peter (2004) "Die Manipulation der Kriminalitätsangst: Antiterrorismus als Verlagerung der Unsicherheit nach dem 11. September". In Sylke Nissen (ed.) *Kriminalität und Sicherheitspolitik: Analysen aus London, Paris, Berlin, und New York*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich, pp. 89–102.

Marcuse, Peter (2005b) "The 'Threat of Terrorism' and the Right to the City". Fordham Urban Law Journal XXXIII.

New York Times (2005) October 16, Section 4, p. 3. In http://www.spiked-online.com, October 18, 2005.

Vale, Lawrence (2005) "Securing Public Space". Typescript.