New Spaces of (Dis)engagement? Social Politics, Urban Technologies and the Rezoning of the City

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ABSTRACT *This paper discusses the changing nature of urban space and urban technologies, using various conceptions of engagement in social politics to illuminate contemporary understandings of cultural change and social exclusion and the role of housing within this. The progressive reorganisation of urban space, which is at least partly a result of global economic changes, is producing complex forms of social politics organised around newly emerging varieties and scales of engagement and disengagement. These are cross-cut by a number of cultural themes that play out differently in different spaces. Thus 'fear' is universally significant, but perceived 'differentially' according to space, culture and socio-economic status. 'Excitement' is also an important theme, though more for some groups than others. The capacity to use resources—material, cultural, technological—and particularly the reflexive utilisation of these resources, also affects the nature of social politics and the specific nature of proactive and defensive (dis)engagement. The paper argues that the social scientific analysis of housing would do well to take cognisance of these debates if it is to continue to produce nuanced analyses able to take account of the socio-spatial, cultural and political realities of informational capitalism.*

KEY WORDS: Social politics, socio-spatial change, urban technologies, zones, (dis)engagement, social exclusion

Introduction

In a recent special issue of this journal on the global spread of gated communities (*Housing Studies*, 2005) we were presented with a rich range of empirical studies that seem to be emblematic of a far broader range of issues than might be suggested by the (literally) circumscribed nature of the topic. This paper wishes to take some of the issues explored in that special issue as a starting point for a broader analytic discussion of the restructuring of urban space. It is argued that residential 'gating' practices and the consequences that follow are just one element of a far broader set of socio-spatial realignments implicated in

what some would view as a major 'rezoning' of neighbourhoods under conditions of informational capitalism.

Such processes of rezoning have significant implications for the social scientific analysis of housing, and the hope is that the literatures and analytic schemas summarised and developed here will be of interest to colleagues working in a range of otherwise disparate areas of housing studies. Our claim is that core topics within the housing studies *oeuvre*—gating and other forms of defensive home ownership, gentrification processes, feelings of belonging and ontological security in relation to home and neighbourhood, the residualisation and/or segregation of social housing, the relationship between social classes and housing classes and so on and so forth—need, increasingly, to be considered in relation to each other as complex assemblages of interconnected processes and practices. This task, it is argued, can be done by interrogating some highly suggestive literatures outwith traditional housing studies that focus not upon housing per se, but on the relationship between more general 'patterns of socio-spatial change', 'urban technologies' of various sorts and emergent forms of 'social politics'.

Rezoning?

What is meant by rezoning? This notion, as it is used here, derives from the symptomatic reading of Luke (1995) that the cultural theorist Scott Lash has recently offered. For Lash, our social geography is becoming increasingly fragmented as a result of the interplay between two main drivers, the variable density of 'information flows' and the prior nature of the 'identity spaces' that such flows envelop. Following Luke, Lash (2002, pp. 28–29) draws a distinction between what he calls 'live' zones and 'dead' zones in the fluid 'infoscapes' that are emerging across the globe. This language of 'scapes' is now commonplace within sociology to communicate the idea of fluid geographies and the opportunities for the flow and exchange of extraordinary amounts of information. Urry (2000), for example, writes that scapes "are the networks of machine technologies, organisations, texts and actors that constitute various interconnected nodes along which flows can be relayed" (p. 192).

Live zones are where such flows are at their most dense and dead zones are where the flows are lightest. However, for Lash (2002) this contemporary 'infoscape' intersects in variable ways with zones of another sort, what he terms 'tame' zones and 'wild' zones. He writes, "the live and dead zones of economic spaces refer to the presence (or relative absence) of the flows and the identity spaces refer to what social actors do with them" (pp. 28–29). These two sets of distinctions (live/dead and tame/wild) allow Lash to identify four different types of socio-spatial zone, the differences between them, he claims, representing the structural basis of much global socio-economic and cultural restructuring. The characterisation of these zones provided by Lash (2002, pp. 28–29) is summarised in Table 1.

This characterisation can, of course, be critiqued (Burrows & Ellison, 2004), not least because it conveys a rather rigid understanding of zoning, but it does at least allow us to begin to frame the relationship between patterns of socio-spatial change, urban technologies of various sorts and emergent forms of social politics. This paper takes forward this rather abstract notion of socio-spatial zoning by offering the authors' own symptomatic reading of a group of scholars whose collective contributions offer rather more concrete analyses of the relationship between these three increasingly important dimensions of contemporary social life. Of course, in some ways the selection of the authors subject to interrogation is an

Table 1. Where live/dead zones meet tame/wild zones

Live/Tame Zones	*Live/Wild Zones*
"Spaces of the advanced producer and consumer services of advanced-sector manufacturing, of upper and middle class suburbs, [they] are an economic space of live zones because of the ubiquity of the flows… [but] … in terms of identity space, [they are] tame zones in the sense that identities are relatively stable … [populated by] … one fraction of the 'new new middle class' … the post-industrial middle class, the 'informational bourgeoisie'…the new 'economic-capital' fraction of the bourgeoisie … the more utilitarian wing of the postmodern bourgeoisie" (Lash, 2002, p. 29).	"Often sited in areas around universities, art schools, alternative cinemas and restaurants, avant-garde pop music and dance venues and the like … the fibreoptic might be a bit thinner on the ground and buildings may be not quite as 'smart' but the flows—and especially ideas and images—are more fleeting, contingent, unpredictable, the population mix is more multi-ethnic and identity-formation is far less stable … [such zones tend to be the domains of] … 'new-media culture intellectuals … the '*cultural* capital' faction of the post-industrial middle class" (Lash, 2002, p. 29).
Dead/Tame Zones	*Dead/Wild Zones*
Found "in unfashionable suburbs, small towns and the countryside [and they] comprise farmers, midlevel white-collar workers and skilled manual workers, almost always the majority ethnic group. Ideologies here tend to be traditionalist, systematically the most conservative of our four post-industrial socio-spatial classes … identities … [are stable but] … feel *threatened* by … change" (Lash, 2002, p. 29).	"Comprise many of those made downwardly mobile by the flows … the industrial working class in the earlier manufacturing society, who are unemployed, underemployed or homeless in the global informational culture … they include both whites and blacks and other ethnic minorities … identities are fluid, disintegrated, social disorganization is the rule" (Lash, 2002, p. 29).

arbitrary one; they are simply the writers found to be the most useful in our own thinking about the matters at hand. However, there is also a sense that what unifies them is a profound sense of the need to foreground analytically the inherent relationality and recursivity of many contemporary housing and urban practices.

In particular the paper examines the recent work of Rowland Atkinson, Tim Butler, Steven Graham, Mike Savage, and their various colleagues, in order to interrogate what they have to say about the social and political consequences of urban restructuring, especially their readings of emergent forms of the social politics of (dis)engagement (see Ellison, 2000 for an elaboration). However, before this, and by way of context, it is necessary to explore briefly what are, by common consent, the main drivers of the socio-spatial restructuring of our cities.

The Drivers of the Socio-spatial Restructuring of Cities

Commentators hold different opinions as to the relative weight to be attached to the different factors contributing to urban change, but there is little disagreement about the existence of these factors themselves. Although causal relationships can be difficult to establish and causation is 'complex' rather than linear, economic changes associated with the increasing influence of neo-liberal economic policies at a global level have contributed heavily to dramatic socio-spatial changes (Davis, 2005). In essence, these shifts have

produced a 'middle class', the different fractions of which are, in different ways, progressively 'gentrifying' both the inner and outer areas of major conurbations. Patterns of socio-spatial 'divisioning' differ among North American, UK, Australasian, Latin American and European cities, and even within regions, whilst overall shifts are apparent differences obviously occur between cities related largely to the manner they are dis/connected into the new international divisions of labour. Nevertheless, the general point is that major cities have witnessed, and continue to witness, forms of colonisation that are seeing the reduction and displacement of older 'working class' populations in favour of new middle-class groups that are benefiting from highly paid employment in the upper echelons of the service economy.

Concentrating on the emergence of what has been labelled the 'new economy' (Reich, 2002), Sassen's (2001) view of urban polarisation focuses on the ways in which the ongoing information and communications technology (ICT) 'revolution' has led to the rapid rise of international business centres that have had a marked effect on urban socio-spatial divisions. This turn towards services, and financial services in particular, has either established or enhanced corporate operations in business districts and this increased activity has led to an influx of professionals and managers who can attract very high salaries. However, as Sassen (2001) points out of London:

> while the expansion in the number of jobs directly and indirectly associated with the growth of London as an international financial and producer services center affected a broad range of occupations, from unskilled service workers to highly specialized personnel, the upward pressure on salaries did not similarly affect all these occupations. As in New York, the overall outcome of these various trends has been the expansion of both a high-income stratum and a low-income stratum of workers. (p. 271)

What emerges is an image of large cities as economically polarised spaces. Financial and service sector activities produce marked inequalities as the new urban bourgeoisie capture areas that are adjacent to poorer spaces and the people living in them. In essence, new middle and upper-income groups increasingly live contiguously with members of the new, poorly paid service class, who are dependent on these employees of corporate financial capitalism for their employment and 'well-being'.

Many agree with this diagnosis. For Marcuse (1996), major cities are undergoing new forms of segmentation, the new global division of labour, and particularly the influence of mobile capital, producing 'quartered cities' in which social, residential and economic divisions mutually reinforce a hierarchy of power and wealth in which some decide and others are decided for. Marcuse (1996) argues that these divisions involve a change from:

> a Fordist to a post-Fordist city, from a manufacturing to a service economy, from a national to a global organisation of production, distribution and services, from a welfare to a post-welfare state, from modern to post-modern structures. (p. 198)

However, the main point is that the 'post-Fordist' city has certain features that exacerbate socio-spatial polarisation: the growth of gentrification, increasing ghettoisation and "the growth in the size of the abandoned city" (Marcuse, 1996, p. 198).

Of all of the commentators on this issue, it is Graham & Marvin (2001) who take contemporary understandings of the drivers of urban fragmentation the furthest. In what

they term a process of 'splintering urbanism', they argue that major cities are witnessing a retreat from the 'modern urban ideal' of the post-war period, which established a vision of the socially integrated, democratically planned city. In its place, they argue, has emerged the 'splintered' city in which various versions of 'unbundling' support and exacerbate processes of urban fragmentation. They suggest, for example, that:

> Financial constraints on governments, rapid population growth, the qualitative infrastructural demands of foreign investors and elite residents, the perceived 'inefficiencies' of state-owned enterprises and general dissatisfaction with the supposed inflexibilities of centralised infrastructure planning have all supported policies of privatising and liberalising infrastructure markets. (p. 99)

In essence, this means that 'customised, networked spaces' are beginning to emerge within cities, which can be accessed by well-off, elite groups able to afford the best privatised utilities, particularly perhaps communications networks. These sections of the population are also in a position to make premium use of, for instance, dedicated transport networks in addition to particular forms of housing and property ownership. Continued retreat from the modern urban ideal will exacerbate unbundling processes, which for Graham & Marvin will lead to increasing numbers of 'secessionary networked spaces' and ever more rigid forms of social and economic inequalities, and exclusion, as welfare services are progressively 'reorganised' and withdrawn. Because more deprived social groups have historically been more dependent upon public infrastructures including, but going beyond, what is commonly understood as 'public services', their withdrawal, privatisation or decay leaves marginal and excluded groups increasingly exposed. As Graham & Marvin (2001) comment:

> beyond the reach of [premium networked spaces] in the places abandoned by the modern infrastructural ideal, there are worlds of intense localisation and largely invisible confinement and exclusion, where participation in the benefits of modern networked urbanism is ever more problematic. (p. 301)

This increased fragmentation in urban social space is also recognised by the burgeoning development of various geodemographic systems, a sort of 'commercial sociology', utilised by the marketing industry in order to better understand the relationship between consumption patterns, tastes, values and preferences and "the patterns of neighbourhood segregation which characterise modern societies" (Webber, 2004, p. 20). This commercial wing of the sociological enterprise, although hitherto little acknowledged by the sociological mainstream (Burrows & Gane, 2006), comes to much the same set of conclusions as the authors noted above, albeit using a set of rather different rhetorical devices by way of explication. The belief then is that contemporary cities are being radically socio-spatially rezoned and, as argued here, this rezoning has far-reaching implications for how emergent forms of social politics are conceived and understood.

Social Politics in Urban Space

The notion of social politics means the primarily informal activities of social groups in local public arenas that impact, intentionally or unintentionally, upon structures of power and influence—economic, social, political and cultural—in ways that affect both

the interests of these groups themselves and those of others. 'Local' is of course a problematic term. It refers, of course, to a number of spatial categories such as 'community', 'neighbourhood' or 'area'. Here the term is used in two ways. First, it certainly refers to 'physical places' in the shape of neighbourhoods or local communities. Second, 'local' also needs to be understood 'virtually' to mean the organisation of 'communities of belonging' across time and space. The issue here is that certain social groups are able to maintain, consolidate or extend their power and interests by virtue of economic, social and cultural networks and connections, much enhanced by access to ICTs, that cross space, but which nevertheless can influence the nature of social politics in physical localities.

These two dimensions are incorporated to some extent in Savage *et al.*'s (2005) notion of 'elective belonging'. Certainly for 'middle-class' groups, elective belonging "embodies attachments that permit various kinds of global connections to be drawn" (Savage *et al.*, 2005, p. 53). In essence, physical 'locality', or 'fixed places' as Savage *et al.* refer to them, remains important, not least because it acts "as a marker of … home" (p. 12) in an increasingly motile, unstable world. However, "people's sense of feeling at home depends not on their attachment to … face-to-face community but to the way that they connect their location to other places that they prize". So, for example, "in a world with global connections, residents routinely associate the place that they live in with other places, sometimes places at a significant distance …" (Savage *et al.*, 2005, p. x). Conversely, for those lacking economic and/or cultural capital, physical locality and face-to-face community is arguably more significant: as Bourdieu acknowledged, "the lack of capital intensifies the feeling of finitude: it chains one to place" (quoted in Savage *et al.*, 2005, p. 70).

(Dis)engagement in Contiguous Spaces

Perhaps the most significant implication of urban segregation is the heightened potential it provides for 'withdrawal' for those social groups with the capacities and resources to remove themselves, physically and/or virtually, from the perceived threats posed by various 'others'. The perception of cities as splintered (Graham & Marvin, 2001), zoned (Lash, 2002), quartered (Marcuse, 1996) or otherwise geodemographically fractured (Burrows & Gane, 2006) carries within it the image of a socio-spatial continuum that runs from highly demarcated 'exclusive' areas inhabited by the wealthy, through a range of mixed localities marked by the physical contiguity of better off and low-income social groups, to 'excluded' areas that are also demarcated, albeit in very different ways to those of their exclusive counterparts.

Ironically, only the very rich and the very poor have the potential to be segregated in the strict sense that both the housing and the areas they inhabit can be physically bounded, by gates and walls, or less obvious signs of exclusivity such as parks, 'leafy lanes' and so on in the case of the former, and by certain urban technologies, particularly architectures, street designs, and the physical manifestations of poverty and deprivation in the case of the latter (Atkinson & Blandy, 2005, p. 178). Both cases are distinguished by specific forms of social politics, and these will be considered below. However, it is the mixed localities—the contiguous areas, in the majority in most cities—that are of more interest when considering how developing patterns of urban segregation may be impacting on the organisation of power and interest at local level. After all, these are the areas that new middle-class groups entering (or re-entering) the city occupy, and it is the distinct patterns of colonisation and

withdrawal in mixed-tenure localities of this kind, where "considerable poverty exists in the social housing, which often neighbours expensive owner occupied dwellings cheek by jowl" (Butler & Robson, 2003, p. 6) that make up an important dimension of the complex emergent forms of contemporary urban social politics.

Referring explicitly to London, Butler (2004) observes the desire of certain fractions of the urban middle classes to build forms of "'local community' within the global city that [map] onto an individualised set of values, backgrounds, aspirations and resources" (p. 269). The 'fractioning', or differential patterning, of gentrification processes is an important dimension because, as Butler argues, middle-class communities differ from one another according to different 'narratives of identification' in different areas of the city. For Robson & Butler (2001), "there are a variety of significantly different, patterned gentrification processes currently unfolding in London" (p. 71), the differences being attributable to 'social, occupational and spatial factors' and the differential accumulation and deployment of economic, social and cultural capital. Nevertheless, the common feature underpinning this apparent diversity is the tendency for middle-class groups to carve out space and create 'enclaves', which in one way or other demarcate them from poorer communities, it is the 'physicality' of these enclaves that varies.

Butler's (2004) general point, then, is that "we are now seeing a situation of polarisation operating across both economic markets and social fields, notably those of consumption, education, employment and housing" (p. 282). Significantly, in each case the urban middle classes have relatively little contact with local social and political life, instead creating segregated communities of their own based on shared conceptions of lifestyle. While such communities of course have *some* contact with proximate localities, this is conducted in ways that colonise particular spaces and services rather than share them on an equal footing with others. Colonisation of services is most obvious in education, although it is by no means restricted to this field. Spatial colonisation clearly differs according to the size and density of the middle-class fractions involved. It is extensive in economic capital-rich areas such as Battersea in London, for example, Robson & Butler (2001) suggesting that middle class liberal/welfare professionals create a particular habitus, an enclave or "'virtual urban village' from which forays are made into the wider city" (p. 79). In 'edgier' areas of London such as Brixton, inhabited by a range of social and ethnic groups, the smaller middle class, attracted by the excitement and risk associated with such spaces, has far less colonising capacity. Describing relations with other groups as 'tectonic' Robson & Butler (2001, p. 77; 2003, p. 19) argue that there is an awareness of others but not much in the way of actual interaction. More generally, operationalising economic, cultural and social capital, middle-class groups "move in entirely separate worlds" from their 'neighbours', an image "reinforced by … friendship [and leisure] patterns … which show them to be highly endogenous in social class terms" (Butler, 2004, pp. 281–282).

These characteristics of colonisation and withdrawal associated with the London middle classes are becoming increasingly common, to the point where it has become possible to talk in terms of emergent patterns of the urban middle class living in many cities. Atkinson (2006) suggests that the economic and social opportunities offered by 'the central city' have particular appeal for certain affluent social groups, "empty nesters, gay households and young professionals" (p. 821), who nevertheless display ambivalent attitudes towards 'the urban'. Here, for example, fear and insecurity compete with the potential excitement of city living in ways that impel these groups to create safe havens of (at least) relative seclusion. Certainly for Atkinson (2006):

this attempt to promote a sense of safety in the city is increasingly predicated on the construction of largely enclosed and enclave-like development that enables a social imaginary of urban fear and insecurity to be tempered by prospects of middle-class solidarity and relative withdrawal. (p. 821)

He characterises this behaviour, observed in cities such as Glasgow, Manchester and Bristol, with reference to three strategies of withdrawal—insulation, incubation and incarceration—describing them as 'three separable types of self-imposed disaffiliation' within emergent patterns of urban living. Briefly, 'insulation' is a process beginning with the expression of residential and neighbourhood preferences which is also "about a need for relative immunity from the negative externalities of such problems as crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour", while 'incubation' represents a further move towards "self-imposed disaffiliation as a means by which security can be achieved" (Atkinson, 2006, p. 822). In essence, those with the requisite resources first seek out 'appropriate' neighbourhoods and subsequently establish connections with other key elements of social reproduction—Atkinson mentions links to work, schools and leisure facilities. Insulation and incubation are closely related to gentrification, which is mentioned in more detail later. Finally, 'incarceration' represents a desire on the part of some groups for "a more total insulation and the maintenance of neighbourhood contexts as both fully predictable and secure" (Atkinson, 2006, p. 822). Incarcerated communities are likely to be socially homogeneous, with housing 'gated' or at the very least physically disconnected from proximate surroundings. Communities of this kind have become increasingly common in parts of the USA and Latin America (Davis, 1990; Low, 2004; Thuillier, 2005) but their numbers have also grown markedly in the UK in recent years (Atkinson & Flint, 2004).

What can be said about these strategies of social closure in terms of their implications for social politics and the nature of social exclusion in contiguous areas? The most important feature to note is their highly paradoxical nature. They comprise at least two complex continua of motivational mixes, fear/excitement, as intimated above, and engagement/disengagement. The balance within and between these mixes will vary depending on specific spatial (and by extension occupational and cultural) locations. Atkinson (2006) refers to the fact that "the constraint of fear is diminished by the excitement of the city and the perception of a wider herd flocking to invest financially and socially in the life of the central city" (p. 827), with a 'gentrification habitus', accompanied by a variety of insulation and incubation strategies, developing as a result. The balance of the fear/excitement continuum will vary according to a number of factors, including the age of inhabitants, with younger single people of different sexualities, in addition to childless couples, more likely to favour risk and excitement over security. In this way, in riskier spaces, such as Butler's globally connected areas or Lash's (2002) 'live/wild' zones, the stress on insulation will be less pronounced, though by no means absent. As Butler & Robson (2003) point out in this latter regard, those with children in such areas typically use education as an insulation strategy. While they may wish to live in exciting spaces, it appears that the Brixton 'middle class', to take one example, tends to educate its offspring largely outside the immediate area of residence in an effort to secure better educational outcomes and ensure the transmission of high levels of cultural capital.

Elsewhere, 'fear' and insecurity play a greater role in the decisions and lifestyles of older more settled middle-class fractions, these groups using insulation and incubation strategies to 'withdraw' in particular ways. Options here can involve physical gating and

this is clearly the case in parts of the USA where gated communities are by no means purely the preserve of the wealthy. However, in the UK, although 'gating' is increasing, significant ideological and material inhibitions remain to such strategies with the result that colonisation takes other forms, particularly the partial monopolisation of key services, transport and education again being prime examples.

The fear/excitement continuum cannot be properly understood without reference to the disengagement/engagement dimension. Unlike the most wealthy and exclusive groups, who are able to incarcerate themselves behind gates and walls in a manner characterised below as 'proactive disengagement', those living in contiguous areas are confronted by a more complex motivational sequence. They are also likely to take proactive steps to 'disengage' from proximate surroundings in certain ways, but simultaneously will need to 'engage' proactively in others. Disengagement is closely related to fear and can take the form of developing visible signs of territorial demarcation in the interests of 'security', such as neighbourhood watch schemes, or, with reference to personal security, sophisticated alarm and lighting systems, and, in a different way, the use of predominantly private modes of transport. However, it can also be 'virtual'. For example, the development of inter-spatial networks of communication with others who possess similar economic and cultural capital, increasingly facilitated by the dramatic expansion of ICTs, conjures an image of 'communities of the mind', where social interaction is as likely to be electronic as 'physical' or face-to-face. Indeed, where it *is* face-to-face, such proximity will be the result of individualised journeys using private transport, taking 'private' families from one spatial locality to another with similar socio-spatial and cultural characteristics. Atkinson & Flint (2004) write of "modes of travel which suggest the attempt to shield or to immunise against casual or dangerous encounters" (p. 26), for example, with the physical nature of the 'car' (increasingly frequently an SUV or jeep-style vehicle) itself becoming a symbol of insecurity and withdrawal.

However, disengagement in contiguous areas is unlikely to be total. It is in the very nature of contiguity that the activities of those in proximate surroundings will impact and spill over into the lives of their neighbours. For this reason 'engagement' will inevitably form a dimension of middle-class activity and, in the case of certain middle-class fractions, is likely to have a direct impact on local social politics. It is clear from work by Butler and others (see Vincent, 2001) that different fractions of the middle class engage selectively and proactively in ways that can impinge on the social politics of place. 'Proactivity' is at its most visible where education is concerned. Referring to Telegraph Hill in South London, Butler & Robson (2003) state that, although the local primary school is not a "'middle class' school" it has nevertheless "been 'made' by the middle class" in that

> the school performs a set of crucial functions for the middle class [being] the basis of the extensive social networks which follow their children through the education system and, in many cases, sustain the area long after the children leave school. (pp. 16–17)

At secondary level, following the development of a City Technology College with a wider catchment area, which made it less accessible purely to locals, Butler & Robson (2003) discovered that "there is now a fully fledged campaign to build a local secondary school in Telegraph Hill … which will in effect become a local middle class comprehensive school" (p. 16). Indeed, areas vary and dilemmas abound, particularly for those with

"high stocks of cultural capital" who live in socially diverse spaces (Savage *et al.*, 2005, p. 68). Nevertheless, in some places, for example, Savage *et al.* refer to Wilmslow in Manchester, dilemmas of 'fit' "can be overcome by parental intervention and involvement" (Savage *et al.*, 2005, p. 69), this often taking the form of participation in the local PTA. The further point is that "such a level of participation and the social capital it generates enables a fit between social and spatial location and so is another means to elect to belong" (Savage *et al.*, 2005, p. 73).

In terms of social politics, this form of proactive engagement and the elective belonging it helps to produce can be understood as a form of socially exclusive quasi-citizenship. The need for 'security', defined here as the need to ensure that public educational provision suits the requirements of groups wishing to protect high levels of cultural capital, dictates that certain middle-class groups, at least, have to become involved in the performance of 'their' schools. This activity is plainly an engagement in the public realm, and inevitably it will influence (in this case) the character of the schools as local social political processes are played out.

So, in contiguous areas middle-class groups are likely to adopt proactive strategies, some of which contribute to their disengagement and exclusivity, others of which contribute to forms of engagement capable of altering the nature of social politics in ways that also encourage social closure who now reads the classic account by Parkin (1979), public services being shaped both to particular perceptions of utility and to particular economically, socially and culturally defined preferences. There is obviously scope for a range of strategies here, groups at one extreme tending towards disengagement (arguably those with less formal education but with well paid, private sector jobs choosing private service alternatives), while those at the opposite extreme (better educated public sector professionals, high in cultural capital with an ostensible commitment to public services) will engage proactively with public services where they need 'specific performance' (see Vincent, 2001; Vincent & Martin, 2002). It is in the spaces, where these latter groups enjoy a sense of elective belonging, that forms of 'quasi-citizenship' are most visible. Concerned about the capacity of public services to deliver goods of a suitable quality, they make use of available institutions in the community to influence the nature and direction of service provision. Elsewhere, in areas where these groups are more thinly spread, they are much less able to influence social politics with the result that they either have to move location or, where resources permit, choose more individualised, privatised alternatives.

The possibility of having to move location raises a rather different and more speculative theme related to the (dis)engagement scale as this concerns middle-class groups in contiguous areas. It is increasingly the case that the burgeoning power of the Internet provides those with the requisite resources with detailed information about 'where to live'. As mentioned above, Butler, Savage and others refer to 'global connections' and the rapidly increasing power and spread of ICTs as they become ever more popular means of communication among those sharing a similar habitus. However, for present purposes it is important to recognise the potential capacity of 'software' to sort populations in ways that can enhance or mitigate the socio-spatial zoning and inequalities discussed in this paper. Indeed, the application and impact of software-sorting technologies is hugely complex and goes well beyond the present focus on socio-spatial inequalities and the nature of social politics. Nevertheless, they do have relevance. As Graham (2005, p. 2) has stated recently, "new technologies are intimately involved in the fine-grained and subtle transformations or 'remediations' of place- and space-based social worlds", and in his

view, "the coded worlds of the 'virtual' actually work to continually constitute structure and facilitate the place-based practices of the material world".

These urban technologies, particularly geodemographic systems, are important in two ways. First, as discussed previously, working on a range of different scales and being extremely flexible they have the capacity to 'splinter' infrastructural services and reconfigure them as packaged services "delivered through consumerist markets, sorted through the endless distinctions of geodemographic profiles, and linked closely to the surveillance of actual consumer behaviours, market potentials [and] desires" (Graham, 2005, p. 5). Second, and in relation, those with the resources—material and cultural—can increasingly harness elements of these technologies reflexively to inform decisions about where to live, which houses to live in and which services to consume (Burrows & Ellison, 2004; Burrows *et al.*, 2005). In this way, "privileged social actors … affect the social and political patterning and characteristics—and social politics—of their chosen neighbourhoods" (Burrows & Ellison, 2004, p. 334).

These nascent practices can be understood as a rather different kind of search for elective belonging. Arguably, reflexive individuals can utilise the geodemographic information contained in ACORN or MOSAIC in the UK and PRIZM in the USA to identify potential culturo-economic spaces that will reflect the degree of insulation, and thus the particular configuration of (dis)engagement that they desire and/or can afford. In short, software-sorting technologies are likely to have a significant, if indirect, effect on the local social politics of areas inhabited by the 'wired' classes. By facilitating property and neighbourhood choices that are likely subsequently to compound particular patterns of colonisation and insulation, these technologies could help to make areas 'more like themselves', changing or compounding the prevailing character of social politics in the process (Burrows & Ellison, 2004).

Disengagement in Exclusive Spaces

Thus far the paper has examined patterns of fear and excitement, disengagement and engagement in what the authors have termed 'contiguous areas'. However, in order to gain a full picture of changing patterns of urban socio-spatial rezoning, it is important to consider the nature of social politics in 'segregated' spaces, whether these be wealthy suburbs or deprived neighbourhoods. Fear, and the desire for security through seclusion, underpins the motivations of those with the resources to live in exclusive communities. While the poorest and most disadvantaged groups, because they lack the means to distance themselves from specific forms of (often drug-related) crime and associated violence, are virtually 'incarcerated' in deprived areas, the fear experienced consequently is of a more visceral quality. The nature of the disengagement continuum changes in these spaces, the character of social politics displaying different types of (dis)engagement, running from the proactive form (essentially a purer variant of the proactive disengagement found in contiguous areas) typical of wealthy spaces, to the 'defensive disengagement' associated with extreme deprivation. Between these two poles lies a variant of social politics that is best characterised as 'defensive engagement' (not an oxymoron), this occurring in poorer, although not abandoned, localities, which in the UK context at least, have become the focus of various types of government intervention.

Whether literally gated or bordered in other ways, wealthy and/or exclusive spaces represent two variants of 'enclavism', the social politics of which can best be characterised

in terms of 'proactive disengagement' (or, to relate this to the argot of Savage *et al.* (2005), a form of 'elected disengagement' if this term is preferred). Where these communities are concerned, inhabitants typically wish to maintain physical distance, a spatial disconnection, between their space and surrounding areas, and populations. As Davis (1990) makes clear in relation to Los Angeles, homeowners in wealthy suburbs resort to various types of direct protest, in addition to formal political participation and legal action, to resist developments that are perceived to encroach on bordering territory, threaten property values or bring new populations into 'their' areas.

Similar NIMBY-style behaviour can be observed in the UK and elsewhere. This is a proactive politics, but a form of politics that has the key objective of disengagement. The desire for exclusivity and disengagement is symbolised by the fact that wealthy groups want to maintain preferred connections in urban environments while simultaneously insulating themselves from other forms of contact that are believed to jeopardise their search for social closure. So physical and virtual "networked infrastructures that allow them to sustain their necessary or desired socioeconomic connections with spaces and people in more or less distant elsewheres" (Graham & Marvin, 2001, p. 228) may be developed and extended, as freely chosen 'routes out' of wealthy enclaves, while wider participation, say in local public services, is unlikely to be regarded as a priority. Of course, literal routes out will be private, with cars being the preferred means of physical transport, used on roads and motorways that often carry people over, rather than through, poorer spaces (see Caldeira, 2000, p. 315). Service usage will either be private, or, where public services are used, provision is likely to be so colonised and splintered that it effectively caters only to the needs and demands of an 'exclusive' population.

In other spaces, and by no means only wealthy ones, enclavism takes the physical form of 'gating'. As has already been noted, this tendency to withdraw behind walls is particularly pronounced in certain cities in the USA and Latin America and is a growing phenomenon in the UK (Atkinson & Flint, 2004; Davis, 1990; Low, 2004; McKenzie, 2005; Thuillier, 2005). Atkinson & Flint (2004, p. 24) comment, correctly, that "segregation and privatised modes of living are a relatively unremarkable feature of affluent communities" whether gated or not. However, gating is particularly symbolic because it brings together a number of phenomena that help to illustrate the nature of proactive (or elective) disengagement, and particularly its social politics, in segregated spaces. In motivational terms, fear of crime, but also insecurity about declining social status and property values, is perhaps the most significant factor in decisions to live in, or create, gated communities (Low, 2004). Beyond this dimension, there also exists a 'fuzzy desire' for 'community living', perhaps in the context of an enhanced capacity for self-government, each of these motifs arguably idealising life in a safe and secure neighbourhood. Ultimately, the point is to retreat from the feared 'other' into a socially sustainable space held to possess certain desirable features, however 'imagined' these might be.

In terms of social politics, then, the proactive (or elective) disengagement symbolised by gated communities has far-reaching implications, the most obvious of which is the splintering of local responses to issues of putative common interest. Taking crime as an example, a retreat into gatedness may not initially necessarily reduce fear and insecurity for those behind the gates, while, second, it could generate increased insecurity for those on the outside. On the first count, Low (2004) argues that "gates in fact may contribute to placing residents at increased risk by marking the community as a wealthy enclave where

burglary is lucrative" (p. 131). Thuillier (2005), too, writing of wealthy gated communities in Buenos Aires, comments that:

> the presence of these islands of wealth amongst a sea of popular neighbourhoods creates frustration and envy, and finally generates the insecurity and violence that gated communities were supposed to remove for their residents. (p. 264)

On the second count, while the presence of a gated community could attract criminal activity because of the association with affluence, it is equally likely that such activity could be displaced from these 'hard targets' onto softer ones in immediately surrounding non-gated spaces (see Atkinson *et al.*, 2003, p. 32). However, the general point is that gated communities, perhaps more than non-gated exclusive areas, risk fracturing local social politics between an internalised response to, most obviously, crime and security in gated spaces, and a notionally more democratic, but more diffused and less effective, public response 'without'.

It is in this way, as Atkinson & Flint (2004, p. 3) argue, that "the impacts of [gated communities] are far greater than the fact that the affluent might simply live apart from a wider 'mass'". For these observers, it is "the absence of these groups from most aspects of city living that creates a wider problem for those concerned with the quality of civic spaces and institutions". For the ability of exclusive communities to organise themselves internally (whatever the potential internal costs and benefits this might involve, see Glasze, 2005), involves *a retreat from the public sphere*, a preoccupation with intra-community politics and 'club goods' (Manzi & Smith-Bowers, 2005) making a reduction of interest in the governance of proximate spaces and the wider city beyond more likely. The consequence, as Caldeira (2000) notes, can be that public space merely becomes dangerous 'leftover space'.

On this reading, it is worth pointing out that there is little chance of realising some of the more optimistic visions of urban social and political possibility discussed, for example, by Amin & Thrift (2002). Fragmentation of the kind examined here clearly compromises the potential for socially inclusive participation and reduces prospects for the (utopian?) 'democratic city' envisaged by Amin & Thrift, while Lefebvre's notion of a 'right to the city', understood as the dual right of citizens to appropriate urban space and to participate in the 'production' of that space (see Purcell, 2003), is potentially fatally damaged by the various colonising and 'enclosing' tendencies discussed here (for an extended discussion see various of the contributions to Low & Smith (2005)).

(Dis)engagement in Deprived Communities

It should be clear from the above that, whether they live in communities that are bordered or gated, or indeed whether they live 'contiguously', close to the less affluent, "the local arena is just one of many arenas" (Forrest & Kearns, 2001, p. 2132) for high income and middle-class groups. For others, however, local space remains important because it cannot easily be escaped. Depending on the nature of the space involved, predominantly its cultural make-up, socio-economic configuration and housing mix, the character of social politics will vary from the defensive engagement typical of regeneration and community development areas, in the UK and beyond, to the defensive disengagement of those who are in effect 'sealed off' from mainstream society.

Turning to defensive engagement first, the focus is on those "deindustrialised neighbourhoods of deepening social and economic marginalisation" (Graham & Marvin, 2001, p. 287), which are nevertheless deemed to have potential for regeneration. Spaces of this kind are to be found in all large conurbations in economically developed countries. However, in the UK in recent years these areas have become the targets for a panoply of government initiatives, which first concentrated on economic regeneration but, since the early 1990s, have taken greater account of physical renewal and social welfare (Lupton, 2003, pp. 10–11). Certainly since the New Labour government has been in power, regeneration has become an increasingly serious business, with policies shifting from a preoccupation with the "short-life area-based spending programmes managed by multi-agency partnerships" introduced by Conservative administrations, to the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal with its "greater emphasis on establishing mainstream structures and funding mechanisms that would ensure a longer-term focus on the problems of poor areas, and reach a larger number of areas than area-based programmes could possibly target" (Lupton, 2003, p. 141). However, the interesting feature of these policies for the present study is the kind of defensive social politics to which they appear to have given rise, and these need to be examined in a little more detail.

An example of how local communities are virtually coerced into engaging defensively with regeneration initiatives can be seen in the efforts of some local councils in the UK to introduce mixed-tenure housing into low-income areas in the belief that greater 'social balance' would lead to a reduction in crime and the improvement of social and economic conditions. While fear of crime is as significant a factor in these areas as it is in others, local communities can be sceptical about solutions that threaten to alter their perception of 'home' and neighbourhood, in other words, their sense of elective belonging. In certain areas in the UK, for example, Lupton points to Newcastle upon Tyne and Newham in East London, people have been prepared to defend their neighbourhoods against the perceived encroachment that regeneration initiatives can represent. As Lupton (2003) writes:

> laying down plans for the vibrant urban neighbourhoods of the future, politicians and city officials had overlooked the strength of existing communities and their commitment to their homes and neighbourhoods, however run down. They spoke of realising land values and getting rid of social problems, whereas residents spoke of the social value of their existing communities and their rights to stay in their homes. (p. 195)

The resulting protests in both areas saw new residents' groups emerging to campaign for the future of their communities and a "real tension [developing] between resident aspirations for community-led regeneration, and strategic plans to create sustainable urban neighbourhoods, with mixed tenure and a balance between housing supply and demand" (Lupton, 2003, pp. 196–197).

This type of social politics is clearly a form of engagement that has its focus firmly upon the literal defence of space and houses by groups threatened by the exogenous pressures produced by government policies and their local application. Engagement of this kind can be understood as the logical underside of middle-class enclavism and gentrification. In contrast to those groups that possess the material, cultural and virtual resources to colonise and transform particular spaces, low-income groups, fearful about crime but also other insecurity-inducing problems such as unemployment and declining public services,

can only attempt to defend their neighbourhoods from policies that appear to them as imposed forms of fragmentation and splintering. However attractive these policies may be to those 'above' in terms of their potential for economic regeneration, local residents can experience them as 'intrusive'.

Defensive engagement is not disconnection, of course. While there is clearly a risk of a growing feeling of disillusionment where local people sense that there are no viable mechanisms of engagement to facilitate their participation in meaningful ways, regeneration spaces at least have the potential to be 'connected'. They are literally networked into spaces of governance and increasingly into virtual spaces as well, as the technological 'revolution' produces "grass-roots experiments and innovations which are attempting to harness ICTs to enable equitable and empowering models of development" (Graham, 2005, p. 53). While there is some way to go on both counts, because governance mechanisms are not always responsive and community experiments with ICTs are weak and under-funded (Keeble & Loader, 2001), such places do not suffer from the depth of deprivation that characterises Davis's (1998) 'containment districts', the habitats of Wilson's (1987) 'truly disadvantaged'. These are 'pure' zones of defensive disengagement where efforts to control the poorest, often minority ethnic, populations can lead to random, disorganised violence best understood as a defensive reaction to socio-economic ills ranging from crime, poverty and high unemployment, through poor housing and environmental conditions, to intrusive and insensitive policing (Wacquant, 1996).

This type of defensiveness has been witnessed at certain moments in UK cities over the past quarter century, for example, London, Liverpool, Bradford and Newcastle upon Tyne, as it has in Latin American, US and, more recently, French cities in the late autumn of 2005. If the quality of reaction is both defensive *and* disengaged this is because the most deprived groups rarely have the resources, or the faith in existing modes of governance, to pursue their interests through the medium of available democratic institutions. This is hardly a 'social politics' at all: the very poorest groups are too insecure and too disconnected, socially, culturally, economically and virtually, to be able to 'participate'.

Significantly, these groups are trapped both economically and spatially and there are few 'routes out', so this physical incarceration leads to other 'virtual' forms of disconnection. As Graham & Marvin (2001) point out, "marginalisation from the ability to use and configure networked infrastructures and technologies is as central to the experience of poverty as lack of food, money or formal employment" (p. 288) in contemporary societies. However, perhaps the greatest irony is that the most vulnerable groups in these abandoned spaces experience defensive disengagement through a rather different variant of 'gating'. Those unable, or unwilling, to take their frustration onto the streets such as the older poor and single parents, and aware of the potential for violence, retreat behind locked doors: houses becoming prisons in what must be the purest form of defensive disengagement.

An attempt to codify the main aspects of the above discussion is provided in Table 2.

Conclusion

The paper has argued that attempts to understand urban change in terms of various forms of splintering and fragmentation, as elaborated by the cluster of authors considered here, can also be articulated in terms of emergent forms of a social politics of (dis)engagement. In this way it becomes possible to understand how different social groups utilise particular

Table 2. Spaces of (dis)engagement?

Nature of social politics	*Proactive (or elective) disengagement*	*Proactive engagement*	*Defensive engagement*	*Defensive disengagement*
Type of Space?	Wealthy suburbs/ 'exclusive' and gated communities/ contiguous middle-class communities	Contiguous middle class communities/ spaces of colonisation	Regeneration areas/ deindustrialised spaces	Abandoned spaces. 'Containment districts'
Quality of Physical Connectedness?	Highly connected, mobile, private transport	Highly connected, mobile, private transport	Poorly connected, less mobile, private and public transport	Disconnected, low mobility, public transport
Quality of Virtual Connectedness?	High	High	Low	None

resources and technologies in efforts to defend 'their' space, and how their efforts impact upon the social politics of the 'public sphere'. Undoubtedly some groups can utilise space to suit their needs and interests better than others. This is not in itself surprising, but it should be noted that the effective utilisation of certain urban spaces and infrastructures by better-off groups through strategies of proactive (dis)engagement splinters not only service provision but, further, represents a retreat from collective understandings of citizenship and social belonging that were traditionally an integral part of 20th-century conceptions of the modern urban ideal. In view of the growing neo-liberalisation of the world economy perhaps this tendency towards fragmentation and social closure in large cities is to be expected, and the purpose of this paper has certainly not been to rehabilitate universalist/collectivist visions of social citizenship. However, it is legitimate to ask whether contemporary understandings of the 'democratic city' (Amin & Thrift, 2002) and the 'right to the city' (Purcell, 2003) take sufficient account of these exclusive and exclusionary tendencies in view of the emergence of these complex processes of zoning and (dis)engagement.

However, the concerns here have not just been substantive. It is hoped that the paper has indicated how a focus on the sociology of urban rezoning and the role of urban technologies and the relational and recursive character of the various forms of local social politics that results, might inform some of the more mundane realities of empirical housing studies research. There is a sense that we are at the cusp of a period where the conceptual role of housing and neighbourhoods in social research will again be foregrounded, but for this to be actualised a more thorough engagement with wider socio-political, cultural and urban research agendas than has hitherto occurred is required.

Rather than focusing on the more traditional housing studies literatures, the theoretical basis of this claim can be traced to the conceptual apparatus of Bourdieu and the work of some of the other authors discussed in this paper. Bourdieu's notion of habitus is an inherently spatial concept, Savage *et al.* (2005) commenting, for example, that:

> people are comfortable when there is a correspondence between habitus and field . . . otherwise people feel ill at ease and seek to move—socially and spatially— so that their discomfort is relieved. (p. 9)

Of particular significance is the argument advanced by Savage *et al.* (2005) that there is now a strong case to be made for replacing more traditional sociological conceptions of 'occupational social class' with a new agenda that emphases the 'spatialisation of class'. They state that:

> one's residence is a crucial, possibly *the* crucial identifier of who you are … Rather than seeing wider social identities as arising out of the field of employment it would be more promising to examine their relationship to residential location. (p. 207)

Certainly, in a rapidly changing, technologically sophisticated world, the economic, social, political and cultural dimensions of this search for 'socio-spatial fit' will become increasingly complex, demanding a rethinking of contemporary understandings of the sociology, social policy, politics and human geography of social divisions and social exclusion as they do so.

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