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Boy racer culture and class conflict: urban regeneration, social exclusion and the rights of the road

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<https://www.routledge.com/Order-and-Conflict-in-Public-Space/De-Backer-Melgaco-Varna-Menichelli/p/book/9781138931183>

PUBLISHER

© Routledge

VERSION

AM (Accepted Manuscript)

PUBLISHER STATEMENT

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REPOSITORY RECORD

Lumsden, Karen. 2019. "Boy Racer Culture and Class Conflict: Urban Regeneration, Social Exclusion and the Rights of the Road". figshare. <https://hdl.handle.net/2134/21660>.

Boy Racer Culture and Class Conflict: Urban Regeneration, Social Exclusion and the Rights of the Road

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the contestation over boy racers' transgressive use of public space in the city of Aberdeen, Scotland during a period of significant urban regeneration. Schemes to attract the middle-class back to the inner city, as resident taxpayers and consumers, have long been central to urban redevelopment strategies. Moreover urban regeneration can result in the stigmatization and othering of minorities, individuals or groups whose cultural practices and behaviours depart from those deemed to be acceptable in the newly defined spaces, and which result in 'zones of contention' over rights to public space (Soja, 2010: 46). The area of Aberdeen discussed in this chapter which the boy racers occupied can be understood as a 'liminal space' (Turner, 1974) – one which was central to the creation and formation of individual and group (sub)cultural identity. As Hetherington (1998: 107) argues:

...such places have a social centrality such that they act like shrines for those who live outside of the conventions of a society – whether they be Chicago gang members, surrealists, or those, like travellers, who have chosen an expressive and alternative identity – because they come to symbolise another set of values and beliefs around which groups can order their identities and the way they want to be identified.

Therefore marginal or deviant groups can find themselves excluded from certain public spaces as they are redefined in line with corporate, neoliberal interests. As Mitchell (2003: 136) notes in his discussion of homelessness: 'those who are intent on "rationalizing" public space have necessarily sought to remove the homeless – to banish them to the interstices or margins of civic space, or to push them out altogether in order to make room for "legitimate" public activities.' However it is also important to recognize that conflicts in/on public space are not just the outcome of profit maximizing schemes of twenty-first century capitalisms, but are also fundamental to their success (Lefebvre, 1991; Harvey, 1973; Shepard and Smithsimon, 2011). The exclusion of various social groups from public space, including youths, is also coupled with an intensification of social control as evidenced in surveillance, policing and crime prevention measures.

Through consideration of the societal reaction to the boy racer culture in the city of Aberdeen, Scotland, and the related regeneration of the urban space they occupied, this chapter outlines the various surveillance, policing, and crime prevention measures employed by authorities and the local government in order to redefine the right to use of this public space in line with corporate and middle-class (residential, tourist, and consumerist) interests. It focuses on the complex set of relations which were in play between the corporate groups, authorities, and the young drivers themselves, in which rather than merely resist the efforts of various groups to 'oust' them from this public space, the drivers instead engaged in various acts of self-policing, self-purification and normification, in order to coexist with the local community in this part of the city. The discussion draws on literature in urban studies, geography, sociology, and criminology, which focuses on the production and construction of

(social) space, rights to public space, and spatial transgressions. It specifically draws on Henri Lefebvre's (1991, 1996) writings on the social production of space and rights to the city, utilizing his conceptual triad of 'spatial practice' (perceived space), 'representations of space' (conceived space), and 'spaces of representation' (lived space), to analyze the appropriation of this public space by various societal groups, the ways they each attempted to order and lay claim to this space, and also the transgressive and performative activities and behaviours engaged in by the young drivers. The empirical data is drawn from ethnographic fieldwork and semi-structured interviews conducted with boy racers in Aberdeen, Scotland, interviews with societal groups including local residents, police officers, politicians, and journalists, and content analysis of local and national press reports.

Aberdeen's Boy Racer Culture: the 'Bouley Bashers'

Historical Context

Home to a population of 217,120, the city of Aberdeen is situated on the northeast coast of Scotland and since the 1970s has earned its epithet as the 'Oil Capital of Europe'. Despite Aberdeen's economic success linked to the oil industry, it has been identified as one of the most polarized cities in the United Kingdom, divided between high levels of affluence and poverty. Since the late 1960s, the Beach Boulevard road in the city of Aberdeen has been home to drivers who wish to test the limits of their cars or motorbikes and socialize with like-minded car enthusiasts. These boy racers, as they are typically referred to in the media and popular culture, are known locally in Aberdeen as the 'Bouley Bashers' (Lumsden, 2013). The reputation of the Beach Boulevard is one of accidents, crashes, and deaths, reflected in extensive local (and on occasions national) media coverage which focuses on what Martin Innes (2004: 335) calls 'signal crimes', particular accidents or incidents which then act as 'warning signals' about the 'levels of risk to which they are actually or potentially exposed'.

The Beach Boulevard, a quarter-mile stretch of road, connects the beach to the city centre and forms the centre of the drivers' 'cruising' circuit. The Beach Boulevard was completed in 1960 and in 1972 the road was likened to 'Brands Hatch Race Circuit' by residents.¹ Proposals for dealing with problematic drivers were suggested by a councillor in 1980 who claimed that speeding drivers on the Boulevard were 'mindless morons'. However the press coverage of the boy racers and societal response remained largely silent until the significant regeneration of this space from the early 1990s onwards, culminating in increased social contestation and policing and surveillance of the space and the subculture from 2003 onwards, as a result of residential regeneration and the introduction of a middle-class residential demographic with a 'Not In My Backyard' (NIMBY) sentiment (see also Falconer and Kingham, 2007). As local residents explained, youths from the surrounding towns and villages would frequent Aberdeen's Beach Boulevard, to socialize and engage in driving performances with like-minded car enthusiasts:

They're coming from all over. They're coming from Montrose, Ellon, Peterhead, Fraserburgh, Bridge of Don, Kincorth, Potterton, Kingswells. They were coming from everywhere. And they were running up and down there and it was ending up more

and more, and that's why there was so much noise. (Interview with May, local resident, June 2006).

Residents like May, who had lived in the community since the 1970s, also highlighted an evolution with regards to the types of cars being driven, and the driving styles: 'if your car wasn't bashed at one time you couldn't run the Bouley. It was old cars, all old cars bashing against one another. But this has all changed because it's all good cars that they have now.'

Urban Regeneration and Aberdeen's Beach Boulevard

From the late 1990s onwards, Aberdeen City Council began to implement a host of urban regeneration and revitalization strategies in the beach area of the city, which brought the boy racers to the forefront of political, community and media debates. The first development was the Queen's Links Leisure Park (which included a cinema, bars, restaurants and Amadeus nightclub) closely followed by a retail park (which included a gym, supermarket, and host of 'out-of-town' retail outlets). In 2000 it was reported that a £150,000 plan was underway to improve the urban environment, and also in relation to 'cutting the accident toll' linked to 'dangerous driving'. It was claimed that this regeneration project would:

...slow down the traffic with road humps, improve Esplanade street lighting, install CCTV spy cameras, and revamp dangerous parking places which force drivers to reverse into coming traffic. The project also includes firm proposals – which have already been agreed by councilors – to install zebra crossings and one pelican crossing in the next few months. Beach Esplanade pavements look set to be widened, traffic lights installed at the Beach Boulevard junction and speed limits lowered on the beachfront.²

In 2002 it was reported that the 'urban revamp' and expansion of the area had brought pedestrians into conflict with boy racers.³ Thus it was necessary to implement additional changes to improve the safety of the area with an estimated cost of £700,000. This included the range of aforementioned improvements in addition to a single carriageway along a section of the Beach Boulevard and traffic lights that defaulted to red in the evenings to slow the boy racers down and stem the flow of traffic. A cycle lane and parking restrictions were also implemented to deter boy racers from congregating outside residences.⁴ Known as the 'Aberdeen Beach Project', this scheme attempted to 'provide a new, exciting and safer streetscape' and the council's development manager claimed that: 'The use of high-quality paving materials, street furniture, new lighting columns and landscaping will combine to enhance the visual attractiveness and functionality of this area'.⁵

Hence, the boy racer culture was an issue for the council, which was keen to attract consumers, residents and tourists to this area of the city, demonstrating how conflicts arise over rights to public space and constructions of public space. This class, cultural and intergenerational conflict was further exacerbated by the sale of new high-priced luxury apartments in close proximity to, and alongside, the Beach Boulevard road. Residents began moving into what was known as the Bannermill complex from 2002 onwards, and became

increasingly concerned and vocal about the unwanted presence of their neighbours – the Bouley Bashers, highlighting what they perceived to be the threat of illegal racing, speeding and anti-social behaviour (Lumsden, 2013). In sum, the ‘moral panic’ concerning Aberdeen’s boy racers drew in, and included, the voices of a number of interested groups such as local residents and businesses, property developers, police, the local authority, politicians – including local councilors, Members of Parliament, and Members of the Scottish Parliament, the local and national media, and also citizens of Aberdeen more generally. These groups and individuals – from ‘deviant’ car subculture, to civic society, to politicians – each contributed to the destiny of this urban space.

Surveillance, Policing and Crime Prevention Measures

For Hayward (2012: 453) crime prevention is concerned with linking space and use in one ‘unequivocal functionality’. At Aberdeen’s Beach Boulevard a host of policing and surveillance measures were employed in order to control and regulate the boy racers use of this public space. These included attempts to provide legitimate spaces for the drivers to meet at the weekends away from the Beach Boulevard, the use of CCTV surveillance, police patrols in the evenings and at weekends, speed checks, the implementation of anti-social behaviour powers including in the summer of 2005 the introduction of Dispersal Orders for two three-month periods, during which drivers were not permitted to congregate in groups in a specific vicinity including the Beach Boulevard during the evening hours, the use of Seizure of Vehicles powers and Anti-Social Behaviour Orders.

However, despite the actions of the authorities, this physical space remained symbolic and meaningful for the young drivers who frequented it in their newly acquired cars, generation after generation, with the purposes of socializing, displaying their cars, and sharing enthusiasm for the hobby of car modification. They thus had to find ways of negotiating continued use of this space, as we shall see below, which ultimately entailed ‘cleaning up’ their behavior.

Methods

The discussion draws on data collected via ethnographic research with Aberdeen’s boy racer culture between 2006 and 2007. Access was aided by Grampian Police who regularly met with a group of drivers from the beach area of the city. These ‘Drivers’ Group’ meetings took place every few months and it was here that I met the two gatekeepers to the subculture: Debbie and Robert.² The main location for the research was Aberdeen’s seafront or as it is otherwise referred to, the Beach Boulevard and in total, around 150 hours were spent in the field. The fieldwork also involved attendance at related car shows and events across Scotland (referred to as ‘meets’ or ‘cruises’) and to local garages, scrap yards and car accessory stores. Websites which were created and visited by informants as part of the car culture were also source of data collection.

Research also consisted of eight semi-structured interviews (which were recorded and transcribed). The majority of drivers were unwilling to participate in formal interviews and accused me of being a ‘spy for the authorities’. Thus informal conversations engaged in

during the observation proved more fruitful. Debbie was the only female who agreed to a formal interview and thus, the majority of data from the female participants had to be gleaned from informal discussions. With the exception of Debbie (who was 33 years old), interviewees were all aged 20–25 years old. In the subculture more generally, most participants were male and aged 17–25 years old. However some participants were over 25 years old and a growing number of females participated as girl racers, girlfriends and/or passengers in cars. After exiting the research setting, field notes were written up and contained detailed descriptions of the setting, conversations and events observed by the researcher. The notes covered a variety of events, activities, and locations across Scotland, including primarily observations of the group at Aberdeen Beach, discussions during car journeys, internet and telephone exchanges, ‘Drivers’ Group’ meetings, and car shows, ‘meets’ and ‘cruises’. In addition, the notes contained observations and conversations in relation to societal groups, including council meetings, community meetings between residents, police, businesses and politicians, and informal discussions with police officers and a retired police officer. In terms of research ethics the identities of research participants and Internet forums have all been disguised via the use of pseudonyms. Ethics followed a deontological approach which privileged the rights of research participants and the study adhered to both university ethical guidelines and the British Sociological Association ‘Statement of Ethical Practice’ (2002).

Content analysis was also utilized with regards to media reports focusing on Aberdeen’s boy racers. Over 200 articles were collected between August 2003 and September 2008 from daily local newspapers: *The Press & Journal* and *Evening Express*; and two free newspapers distributed weekly across Aberdeen: *The Independent* and *The Citizen*. Relevant articles from national media outlets such as *BBC News* online, *The Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The Scotsman* were also analyzed. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with police officers, politicians, local journalists, council officials, and local residents – including those who had stayed in the area previously and were part of the original working-class community, and those residents who were newcomers to the area after 2003.

The Right to the City: Public Space and Social Exclusion

Henri Lefebvre and the Production of Space

Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) Marxist analysis of the social and symbolic production of space has been profoundly influential, helping to inform the ‘spatial turn’ (Thrift, 2006) across the social sciences and the humanities. His project aims to uncover the ‘actual production of space by bringing the various kinds of space and the modalities of their genesis together within a single theory’ (Lefebvre, 1991: 16). In Lefebvre’s theorization ‘space becomes reinterpreted not as a dead, inert thing or object but as organic and alive: space has a pulse, and it palpates, flows, and collides with other spaces’ (Merrifield, 2006: 105). As Lefebvre (1996: 185) writes:

This theory of social space encompasses on the one hand the critical analyses of urban reality and on the other that of everyday life. Indeed, everyday life and the urban, indissolubly linked, at one and the same time products and production, occupy a

social space generated through them and inversely. The analysis is concerned with the whole of practico-spatial activities, as they are entangled in a complex space, urban and everyday, ensuring up to a point the reproduction of relations of production (that is, social relations).

Thus '(social) space is a (social) product' and within the mode of production it 'serves as a tool of thought and action', but also as a 'means of control, and hence of domination, of power' (1991: 26). In order to analyze the production of space Lefebvre (1991: 33) develops a 'conceptual triad' that consists of:

1. *Spatial practice / perceived space*: 'embraces production and reproduction and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation. Spatial practice ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion. In terms of social space, and of each member of a given society's relationship to that space, this cohesion implies a guaranteed level of competence and a specific level of performance'.
2. *Representations of space / conceived space*: these are linked to the relations of production, the order imposed by them, and hence to 'knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to "frontal" relations'. Examples include the organization of space by urban planners, geographers, etc.
3. *Spaces of representation / lived space*: embody 'complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art...' This is where we see transgressions at play, in how various social groups and actors attempt to define, claim and code space for their own interests and appropriation.

For Lefebvre 'the mental and the social find themselves in practice in *conceived and lived space*' (1996: 197 original emphasis). As Merrifield (2006: 111) points out 'lived experience invariably gets crushed and vanquished by the conceived, by a conceived abstract space, by an objectified abstraction'. These three spatial elements all interact and hence Lefebvre (1991: 41) warns us that the analytical division between them should be 'handled with considerable caution'.

Social Justice and the Right to the City

Lefebvre's (1991, 1996) work has been influential in geography and the social sciences (Shields, 1990), including the work of writers such as David Harvey (1973) and Edward Soja (1989). For instance, Soja (1989: 79-80) combines Lefebvre's (1991) 'conceptual triad' with Foucault's (1986) concept of 'heterotopia' to demonstrate that although space in itself may be 'primordially given', 'the organization, and meaning of space is a product of social translation, transformation, and experience'. For Foucault (1986), 'heterotopias' emerge from intersections of space, power and knowledge, and thus geographies are produced from 'little tactics of the habitat'. He believes that all geographies are filled with injustice and oppression, but that they are also potentially emancipatory and liberating communities. Given this, it follows that:

...the geography, or 'spatiality', of justice... is an integral and formative component of justice itself, a vital part of how justice and injustice are socially constructed and evolve over time. Viewed in this way, seeking spatial justice becomes fundamentally, almost inescapably, a *struggle over geography* (Soja, 2010: 1-2 original emphasis).

David Harvey (1973) also draws our attention to the concept of 'territorial social justice' claiming that 'the problem of the proper conceptualization of space is resolved through human practice with respect to it' and hence 'social space therefore is made up of a complex of individual feelings and images about and reactions towards the spatial symbolism, which surrounds the individual' (Harvey, 1973: 34). For Harvey (2012), the neoliberal era has resulted in an increasing polarization in the distribution of wealth and power. This polarization is then 'etched into the spatial forms of our cities, which increasingly become cities of fortified fragments, of gated communities and privatized public spaces kept under constant surveillance' (Harvey, 2012: 15). This is highlighted in Mike Davis' book *City of Quartz* (1990) that focuses on the erosion of public space and the militarization of the police in Los Angeles. Davis (1990: 156) portrays Los Angeles as a 'forbidden city' in which genuinely democratic space is 'virtually extinct'. This is a city characterized by both spatial and social polarization, epitomized in gated-communities for the bourgeoisie and 'the social imprisonment of a third-world proletariat in increasingly repressive ghettos and barrios' (Davis, 1990: 156). However Avila (2010: 188) points out that the 'primacy of class' in *City of Quartz* 'obscures the salience of race, which continues to divide Los Angeles'. Others have drawn attention to his focus on the rhetorical, while highlighting that the empirical is not his *métier* (Walton, 2000; see also Hayward, 2004).

Soja (2000: 320) questions the conceptualization of public space, arguing that although there is evidence that public (versus private) space is being destroyed, the distinction between public and private space has never been clear cut and that what is happening today is more accurately described as a 'restructuring of both private and public spaces, accompanied by a reconceptualization of the categorical distinction between them':

When seen in simply dichotomous terms, there is a tendency to see changes in public space simply as a kind of undemocratic transfer to the private domain, resulting in an incontrovertible loss of civic freedom. Such thinking universalizes and homogenizes the public realm – as well as the privatization process – and protects them from critical examination of how each is also affected by other processes of differentiation and change. (Soja, 2000: 320)

Soja (2010: 45) notes that for some the starting point in the search for 'spatial justice' is thus the 'defense of public space against the force of commodification, privatization, and state interference'. However, we can also view public space as a space which 'engenders fears' founded on the sense that this public space is indeed 'an uncontrolled space, as a space in which civilization is exceptionally fragile' (Mitchell, 2003: 13). In addition, it is also important to note that the tension between Lefebvre's lived and conceived space is not just

the outcome of neoliberal urban renewal processes, but a fundamental aspect in the profit maximizing schemes of twenty-first century capitalisms across the world.

Spatial Transgressions and Exclusion

The point made by Foucault (1986) in relation to ‘heterotopias’ is also important, for although space and its production within the neoliberal context may result in the exclusion of individuals and/or groups from (public) space, it is equally important to recognize the ways in which spaces can also be potentially emancipatory and liberating. Hayward (2004: 113) argues that with regards to spatial exclusion:

...greater understanding is needed of the way privatised, decentralised forms of auto-surveillance and security are being drawn into the world of consumer culture, and how the exclusionary strategies that result from this situation are being interpreted and responded to at street level.

As will be demonstrated with regards to boy racers, certain street scenes can challenge the ‘assumed primacy of modernity and its adjuncts – criminology and the market among them’ (Hayward, 2004: 140). These ‘hidden spatial practices’ and cultural differences are therefore ‘a vital component of the urban landscape’ (Hayward, 2004: 141). However, transgressive uses of space can also lead to surveillance, policing and crime prevention measures, entailing ‘representations of space’, intended to reclaim and impose order on what is deemed to be by societal decision-makers deviant or unruly appropriation of (public) space. According to Soja (2010: 43):

Fear of potential invasion and violence by what the more powerful perceive as threatening ‘others’ drives all these processes of spatial control. This almost endemic and security-obsessed sense of fear has been reaching a fever pitch over the past thirty years of profound urban restructuring, hastening the fortressing of urban space and the drenching of the city with surveillance cameras.

Social scientists and geographers have long documented the exclusion of social groups from various public and/or social spaces in relation to the neoliberal agenda. This is part of the ‘widening net’ of social control (Cohen, 1985) in which punitive regimes emerge that stigmatize and further exclude marginal groups such as the homeless, prostitutes, the traveller community and youths. Youth transgressions and crime have always been a particular focus of moral contestation and debate, reflecting a tendency over the past two centuries to vilify youth (Pearson, 1983). These means of sanitizing public space extend and widen to encompass any groups deemed to be deviant or ‘undesirable’, most often than not minority groups in society. Certain city spaces can be subject to ongoing criminalization: ‘those considered “disorderly” are more easily prohibited from certain areas, and a wider range of their behaviors are subject to legal sanctions’ (Herbert, 2008: 660). Hence we have further ‘profusion’ of sanctions ‘as society continues to polarize into ‘safe zones (ie, regulated, privatised consumer spaces) and dangerous urban no-go areas (ie, underfunded enclaves of exclusion and repression)’ (Hayward, 2004: 11.) This destruction of public space has

entailed a loss of ‘public spiritedness amongst middle class homeowners’, which is epitomized in a ‘NIMBY (“not in my backyard”)’ sentiment (Hayward, 2004: 115; see also Davis, 1990).

In countries such as the United Kingdom, the introduction of anti-social behaviour powers under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and subsequently the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, include various measures by which to control and regulate individuals’ and groups’ uses of public spaces such as Dispersal Orders, Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOS), Seizure of Vehicles, and more recently Public Spaces Protection Orders.⁶ The section below moves on to consider the control and regulation of space in Aberdeen City, frequented by the car culture popularly referred to in the media as boy racers, and the conflict that arose in relation to this. The use of these powers will be considered within the discussion, as a means of regulating their use of both this specific public space, but also of mobility itself, and the threat this posed (see Lumsden, 2013), focusing on ‘spatial practice’ (perceived), ‘representations of space’ (conceived), and ‘spaces of representation’ (lived) (Lefebvre, 1991).

The Production of Space: Representations of Space, Spaces of Representation and Spatial Practice

As explained above, Lefebvre’s (1991) ‘conceptual triad’ of space is drawn upon to analyze the contestations and (class and intergenerational) conflict with regards to the appropriate use of this space and the Beach Boulevard road, and who had rights to use of this public space. First, we focus on ‘spatial practice’ (perceived space) – the everyday activities on the Beach Boulevard road. Second, we focus on ‘representations of space’ (conceived space) on the part of groups including the local government, politicians, police and local community. We then explore the Beach Boulevard as a ‘space of representation’ (lived space) – a political space (or moment) which is historically significant for the young drivers who congregate there (and also the community who reside there) as they represent themselves and disagree with how this space is (temporarily) conceived.

Spatial Practice (Perceived)

The first part of Lefebvre’s triad, ‘spatial practice’, mediates between ‘representations of space’ and ‘spaces of representation’ and consists of the everyday activities of the users of space (McCann, 1999: 173). These are the ‘learnt and often eventually intuitive, spatial practices that enable individuals to participate effectively in a spatial event’ (Watkins, 2006: 213). ‘Spatial practice’ has three main aspects which include: 1) the ‘material city’ (such as buildings, infrastructures, routes and networks linking work, home and leisure); 2) the ‘daily routine practices of everyday life’ (such as the journey to work); 3) and the ‘socio-economic processes by which the material city is reproduced’ (Leary, 2009: 195). It is also important to note that ‘spatial practices’ cannot be fully separated from ‘spaces of representation’ and ‘representations of space’, which makes application of the triad to a “real world” social space both difficult and useful’ (Carp, 2008: 132).

Here we are concerned with the ‘material city’ in terms of routes such as the Beach Boulevard – a road connecting the north part of the city to the city centre. It formed a leisure and ‘play’ route for the boy racers who used it as part of their ‘cruising circuit’, a commuting (to work and to retail and leisure outlets) route for the citizens of Aberdeen and local businesses, and for local residents was also an everyday commuting route and extension of their home environment. Each group thus had differing expectations regarding the appropriate ways of performing and living in this physical space, of ‘spatially practice-ing’ (see also Carp, 2008). For instance, the above example of the proposed road closure, demonstrates the different expectations that members of the local community, the subculture, the ‘commuting’ citizens of Aberdeen, politicians and the police, had regarding who had the right to use this physical road, and at what time of day.

More often than not, perceptions of the boy racer culture also centered on commonsensical misconceptions and misunderstandings with regards to what went on within the culture, and included the idea that they were all irrational ‘speed demons’, engaging in illegal street racing, speeding, and other forms of criminal or anti-social behaviour. An ‘us versus them’ mentality was evident with officials claiming that the drivers would resist or challenge their authority and designs on the urban space:

There was also the cultural significance that the so-called boy racers knew that this plan was supposed to be the Council’s way of defeating them. It appeared that these people were by no means all to be categorized in the same way, but it seemed beyond doubt that some of them would be actively motivated by the thought that the Council’s plan to defeat them could itself be defeated. This kind of talk had been characterised as the appeasement of anti-social or event criminal elements.⁷

Drivers often highlighted the media misconceptions and stereotypes regarding how the drivers appropriated the Beach Boulevard road and surrounding area, including the ‘trammers’. Debbie explained that:

It’s about coming here to socialize and because you’re interested in cars. You think of boy racer and you think of them driving up and down doing laps all night. None of us do that. We’re happy sitting on the trammers⁸ all night and if we do leave it’s to get food or go home. It’s just a label but it’s what the public perception of us is, because groups say we’re like that. If you tell someone you go down the beach at weekends they call you a boy racer. (Interview with Debbie, October 2007)

Therefore there was a tension in terms of perceived use of space in that the majority of driving behaviours by the youths were in line with the laws of the road and the expected driving performances of the atypical law-abiding motorist. This was contrary to media representations, and hence a further important point to bear in mind with regards to the production of space is the role of the media in (mis)representing and (re)producing myths regarding both particular public spaces and the various groups who use them.

Representations of Space (Conceived)

According to Lefebvre (1991: 26) conceived spaces such as urban plans, far from being objective or neutral are instead 'a means of production' and 'a means of control, of domination, of power'. As a result the lived spaces where 'concrete daily activity takes place, are boxed in, disrupted, forgotten, if not fragmented and destroyed' (Ng et al. 2010: 414). As discussed above, for societal groups the Beach Boulevard and surrounding area were spaces that had been redefined in line with capitalist consumption practices via either residential properties or leisure and retail facilities. The aim was to create a 'safe haven' for both residents and visitors to the area for instance via the 'Aberdeen Beach Project' which would dictate and mold appropriate 'spatial practices' in this area in terms of how pedestrians and drivers should make use of the space. In contrast, the car culture were deemed to be unruly and ultimately a threat to the pursuit of the capitalist interests of business and local government, for they challenged the daily ways in which residents and pedestrians would make their way through, and appropriate, this space. For instance as a local politician explained:

It was obvious the strength of feeling and in addition to the people at the top of the Boulevard, Wales Street, that sort of area, there was a new element because there's been a lot of housing built at the bottom end, the beach end of the Boulevard and a lot of these people that had paid a lot of money for their houses were getting involved. So there was a more middle-class influx which was variable and wanted to see something done about the problem. (Interview with Member of Parliament, May 2006)

Therefore, there was acknowledgement from politicians and also the traditional working-class resident community that a new 'middle-class impetus' was behind the response of the authorities to the boy racer culture. In 2003, the property developer George Wimpey, which built the Bannermill housing complex along with property developer Stewart Milne, was reported as being concerned with regards to the negative publicity surrounding the boy racers:

Management are... privately understood to believe that newspaper reports about the issue may have led to reduced property sales... Yesterday, a George Wimpey East Scotland spokeswoman confirmed senior directors from the company had this month met with police and council representatives to discuss the problem. She said: 'George Wimpey as offered an element of funding towards any measures which will help improve the environment for local residents'.⁹

Meetings were held between residents, members of the culture, police, politicians and council officials to discuss the issue. However, residents claimed that the meetings would 'do little to solve the on-going dispute' and that 'basically we want them to stop what they are doing as it disturbs us and there is no way they will agree to that'.¹⁰

The availability of powers under the Antisocial Behaviour (Scotland) Act 2004 meant that the policing tactics and strategies adopted in response to residents' concerns shifted from just

enforcement and a focus on road traffic legislation, to the ability to challenge infractions and incivilities deemed to be ‘anti-social’ in the eyes of the beholder (Millie, 2008) – in this instance the local residents. Not unique to Aberdeen, we have seen these powers and also the recently introduced Public Protection Orders used across the United Kingdom to disrupt and disperse car cruising or boy racer culture and their use of retail car parks. These Dispersal Zones mapped out designated city spaces which were out of bounds to the drivers at certain times of the day. These official ‘representations of space’ were reflected in information leaflets given out to drivers, which included maps of the Dispersal Zone which drivers should adhere to.

A further proposed initiative, which brought the citizens of Aberdeen City into the debate concerning the ‘Bouley Bashers’, was the suggestion by a local councilor in 2004 that the Beach Boulevard road was closed in the evenings, with access to residents only, forming a quasi-‘gated community’. This measure was cited as having proved successful in other Scottish cities such as Edinburgh, as a means of tackling car cruiser culture. Eventually voted out by councilors, the proposal initially received ‘widespread support’ from the local community and police. However, the proposal was contested by the media and wider public, with citizens objecting that:

This area is and always will be a leisure area. The Bouley Bashers have been there since I can remember and [it] is probably the best place for them. The big change is the new flats and perhaps the power of big bucks talking.¹¹

Here, we have acknowledgement of this space as an openly accessible ‘leisure area’, which includes the boy racers in the list of groups and cultures who should be able to use it. Therefore it also demonstrates the tension between ‘representations of space’ and the other two elements in Lefebvre’s triad, for in this instance the attempts of the majority of official groups to redefine this space were largely unsuccessful. The road closure received objections from some residents and businesses in the beach area of the city, demonstrating that the reaction to the drivers and their use of space was in no way a homogeneous one. For instance, a parking survey of an adjacent road, Constitution Street, was designed to address objectors’ concerns with regard to displaced traffic and parking space. Residents on this road voiced concern that commuter traffic would be displaced to this street and including boy racers who would then use it as a race track. Letters from citizens objecting to the closure emphasized the negative effect dispersal of the boy racers could have on children and the elderly who resided there:

We live at the moment in a quiet street that has sheltered housing and a nursing home for the elderly and that has adequate parking for its residents and bought our house after taking these factors into consideration. We can’t believe the council would propose measures that would bring more noise and congestion to a street that has families and a large amount of elderly and vulnerable people living in it.¹²

Spaces of Representation (Lived)

'Spaces of representation' is the 'other' in Lefebvre's (1991) conceptual triad, a culmination of perceived and conceived. This is 'space *as it might be*, fully lived space (*l'espace vécu*), which bursts forth as... "moments" of presence' (Shields, 1999: 161 original emphasis). It is within this lived space, that we witness 'veiled criticism of dominant social orders and of the categories of social thought often expressed in aesthetic terms as symbolic resistance' (Shields, 1999: 164). For the boy racers, having an impressive vehicle to display and perform with at social events and at the Beach Boulevard was a source of pride and self-esteem and means of challenging mainstream car culture. These public performances demonstrated material ownership and social capital (Graham and White, 2007: 31) and the Beach Boulevard was a 'mechanical catwalk' of cars (Lumsden, 2013). For instance, one driver, Brad, acknowledged the visual impact of a modified car, demonstrating the way in which it provided its owner with celebrity status:

I modified the [Renault] Clio for more of an experiment than anything else. When I bought it, it looked really bad. So I did as many modifications as I could do to it. People would take note when I was down at the beach and I got lots of admiration for the work I'd put into it. It definitely made heads turn once it was finished but eventually the novelty wore off. So I sold it and bought the Ford Fiesta. It was someone from the beach I sold it to so I still see it going around from time to time. (Fieldnotes, July 2005)

Robert described the reaction that his cousin's high performance Noble elicited when he drove it at the Beach Boulevard:

Did you see all the folk rubber-necking when he drove by? They were all looking at his car. That's what always happens – whether it's here or in town... you could imagine every time he started the engine the noise of it. Everyone looked round. (Fieldnotes, October 2007)

As Beatrix Campbell (1993: 255) notes in her study of joyriders in the Blackbird Leys estate of Oxford, the rituals performed involved a 'genesis of display' in which the crowds of people watching became just as central to the drivers' performances, hence demonstrating how the car can be used as a means of claiming public space, and as will be discussed further below, 'spatial practice' on the part of the drivers. The drivers also referred to the historical legacy of the culture at Aberdeen's Beach Boulevard from the late 1960s, claiming their stake in appropriation of this space for cultural practices. There were references to the residents 'getting what they deserve' for buying property in an area already occupied by boy racers. As Paul explained:

I lived in the area for six months in the flats which are at the back of the apartment block, not on the main road. I did sometimes hear the noise of the cars in the distance but anyone who buys a flat there must know about the area first... and if they are

from Aberdeen then they were probably down there themselves when they were that age. (Interview with Paul, December 2005)

Debbie was sympathetic to some of the residents but also highlighted instances where the residents had taken the law into their own hands:

I can understand the residents' views because nobody wants lots of cars parked directly beneath their house but they must have known us drivers were there before they bought their property and who would spend £200,000 on a flat if they knew that? But they all say that they bought the property because it's right in the business district. A few years ago I was driving down past the Wales Street houses with my husband and kids in the car when someone from one of the houses threw a massive stone off my car. It hit the side and just missed a window. (Fieldnotes, September 2006)

Robert also reiterated Debbie's above statement that the boy racers had a previous historical claim to the Beach Boulevard space:

Interviewer: What do you think of the residents' concerns about drivers congregating in the beach area?

Robert: Hit and miss. I can understand why they're aggravated by our presence with folk doing burn-outs outside their houses but on the other side a lot has calmed right down and the centre of attention shifted away from them. And the bulk of complaints are unfounded because they sprung up recently from those new flats and people should look into the area they buy into. I mean, if you bought a flat on Union Street you're not going to complain about there being too many drunks. (Interview with Robert, October 2007)

As a result of police presence and surveillance mechanisms and social controls in place, the drivers had their own code by which to warn each other of the presence of police. This system and code involved the use of mobile phones and car headlamps:

Debbie received a text message from one of her friends warning her that there were police sitting beside the ATS garage. They were undercover in a silver Ford Focus. Debbie said they must be cracking down on them by trying to catch people speeding. (Fieldnotes, September 2006).

These largely hidden and transgressive codes of communication between members of the culture should also be understood within a wider strategy of informal self-policing which members of the group engaged in, working often with police to ensure that drivers adhered to the rules of the law, and subcultural norms, in order not to jeopardize their ongoing access to this public space. Respectability was an important lens through which the drivers assessed themselves and others, aiming to distance themselves often from those drivers they deemed to be deviant outsiders. For example, drivers who were new to the Beach Boulevard or had

recently passed their driving test were viewed as high-risk by the drivers, due to their unawareness of the codes and norms pertaining to subcultural use of the Beach Boulevard and related public performances by car. Goffman (1963: 132) describes the efforts of stigmatized individuals to 'normify' their own conduct, and also that of others in the group, as 'in-group purification'. According to a police officer:

Generally I think we've had a positive response to the anti-social behaviour legislation certainly to the extent that we can get the likes of the Drivers' Group or Debbie to actually phone... What I've told them is that they've got to do a bit of self-policing. If they obviously see erratic driving, bad driving, whatever, they've then to phone in and report it because it's going to be seen better from their point of view that we don't condone it. (Interview with Neighbourhood Officer, May 2007)

These Drivers' Group meetings between police and the drivers were therefore important processes of negotiation through which the culture and the local community were able to coexist. The adoption of a 'community policing' model on the part of the Neighbourhood Officer which involved engagement and educational initiatives with the drivers helped to formally improve communication mechanisms and relations between drivers, the authorities and the community. Equally, the more informal actions of self-policing, self-purification and normification of conduct which some members of the Drivers' Group promoted online, further helped them to coexist with residents in this city space. For example on one of the websites used by members of the subculture, Debbie posted information on the consequences of misbehaving:

Last night I was parked up next to a friend of mine when a police car came up onto the trammers and asked if they could have a word. They informed him that he had been seen driving at speed on the Boulevard on a number of occasions earlier that night and basically gave him a talking to regarding the possible action they could take against him. Basically, it was an informative chat. He was told next time would be an official warning, third time an ASBO which then leads onto possible seizure of car if found to be misbehaving again... the guy wasn't even aware there were CCTV cameras down the beach, so afterwards I took him out and showed him the cameras.... So be warned, even when there's no police in sight they are watching, but at the same time if you are doing nothing wrong and your car is legal then you have no worries. (Fieldnotes, April 2007)

Hence, we can view Aberdeen's Beach Boulevard as a 'paradoxical space' (Rose, 1993) in which a transgressive subculture had created its own social world, rituals and related means of symbolic resistance. However, the shifting demographics and use of policing, surveillance and crime prevention measures meant that the drivers had to negotiate a line between performative display and self-policing, if they wished to still have access to this (public) space. In this instance the role of compromises in spatial negotiation may have meant that the wider 'capitalist culture' and social groups involved in the conflict over this space had to accommodate a more 'cleaned up' version of the boy racer culture.

Discussion

In the case of boy racers in Aberdeen, Scotland we can see how their mere presence in this public space was an issue with the group deemed to be ‘matter out of place’ (Douglas, 1966). As Lefebvre (1991) argues, there are ‘contradictions of space’, ‘which may entail a challenge to or a subversion of a particular dominant coding of space by a less powerful “user” of that space or indeed a challenge from outside by an equally powerful potential “user”’ (Allen and Pryke, 1994: 454). The various surveillance, policing and crime prevention strategies adopted by the authorities and government, such as CCTV surveillance, proposed road closure, anti-social behaviour legislation (for instance Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, Dispersal Orders and Seizure of Vehicles), policing operations and patrols, and provision of legitimate spaces for the use of the car culture, were means of redefining and reclaiming this public space in line with capitalist consumer interests (hence aiming to carve out and create a (middle-class) tourist and residential ‘friendly’ space). However it is worth also bearing in mind that conflicts in/on public space such as this are not just the outcome of profit maximizing schemes of twenty-first century capitalisms, but also fundamental to their success (Lefebvre, 1991; Harvey, 1973; Shepard and Smithsimon, 2011).

Despite the concerns of local residents and the authorities, this lived space was symbolic and meaningful for the young drivers who frequented it in their newly acquired cars, generation after generation, for the purposes of socializing, displaying their cars, and sharing enthusiasm for the hobby of car modification. However, as demonstrated above a complex set of relations which were at play between the corporate groups, authorities, and the young drivers themselves. Rather than merely resist the efforts of various groups to ‘oust’ them from this public space, the drivers instead negotiated and engaged in various acts of self-policing, self-purification and normification of their conduct, in order to coexist with the local community in this part of the city. As Lefebvre notes, it is therefore important to place ‘spaces of representation’ ‘alongside those representations of space which coexist, concord or interfere with them’ (1991: 41). In this sense, Lefebvre’s triad is useful for revealing the ‘ways in which commonalities and differences in human relationship with place are multidimensional but still understandable, approachable, and workable’ (Carp, 2008: 140).

Spaces such as Aberdeen’s Beach Boulevard can also be viewed as ‘paradoxical spaces’ (Rose, 1993), in that they are marginal, but still ‘socially central’ to the aspects of identity formation and creation engaged in by boy racers and ‘the structure of feeling that informs them’ (Hetherington, 1998: 107). It is this tension and paradox that makes the efforts and measures employed in by the authorities largely ineffective in attempting to reclaim urban space. As Hetherington (1998: 108) writes:

...spaces that have a social centrality for those who share a structure of feeling and seek to establish an identity around it are likely also to be what we may call spaces of occasion, in which the values and political views of a group might be expressed and around which identities are at the same time performed.

The corporate interests of the city and thus inclusion of the middle-classes as residential taxpayers and consumers, impacted on the definitions of this space and rights to it. This is further evidenced in the comments from working-class residents who had lived in that area of Aberdeen for generations (some in council owned housing) who pointed out that efforts to shift the boy racers had only been seriously implemented since the demographics of the area shifted due to the inclusion of the middle-classes as residents and/or consumers. Therefore, it is worth noting that in instances such as this, processes of negotiation between so-called 'deviant' groups, and capitalist groups, are complex and that it is not as straightforward as to argue that top-down capitalist interests and urban regeneration results in the exclusion of certain groups. Moreover, the case of Aberdeen's boy racers is not unique, and for instance in 2014 boy racers in Essex, England were subject to a Public Protection Order to ban them from using retail outlet car parks in the evenings. In addition, research on boy racers in New Zealand by Falconer and Kingham (2007) highlights the complex relations at play between communities, drivers, and state representatives in terms of debates around the regulation of deviant drivers, including the aforementioned 'NIMBY' attitude also displayed by residents in that case.

Capitalist culture has also long played a role in terms of incorporating boy racer or car modification cultures into the mainstream with the aim of profit making. Members of the subculture also often highlighted this relationship, with some individuals working in the car industry and various car shows presenting ideal opportunities for them to display their cars, and the modifications made, to a wider public. Hebdige (1979) in his work on subcultures highlights the reincorporation of subculture styles and products into the 'mainstream' as one means through which society deals with subcultural deviance and difference. The work of Moorhouse (1991) on the American hot-rod phenomenon and O'Dell (2001) on 'greasers' in Sweden also highlights the two-way relationship between car subcultures and the mainstream capitalist car producers, and in the latter case the ways in which certain cultural groups can (re)appropriate consumer goods such as the car, to give it a new meaning and life.

Urban regeneration played a key part in a wider 'moral panic' concerning Aberdeen's boy racers in terms of class, cultural and intergenerational clashes between the boy racers and outside groups. The influx of middle-class residents to the area resulted in increased pressure on authorities to tackle the problem. This is reminiscent of Johansson's (2000: 25, original emphasis) observation that moral panics in the first half of the twentieth century involved a struggle against 'bad culture' and were 'mainly expressions of *class distinctions*, the defense of the social order and the moral mission to educate the working class'. Thus, there was a desire from the new (bourgeoisie) residents to exclude working-class people in general from the area. In this sense, the residents attempted to (re)colonize this urban space.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated how regeneration of a particular space in the city of Aberdeen resulted in the (re)definition of driving behaviours as anti-social and related attempts to exclude young drivers from public space. It explored the myriad and complex ways in which the drivers attempted to retain a claim on this public space, including acts of self-policing,

self-purification and normification on the part of subcultural participants. It drew on Lefebvre's (1991) Marxist analysis of space, and employed his 'conceptual triad' to demonstrate how different social groups and social actors attempted to define, understand, and ultimately lay claim to this part of the city, focusing on 'spatial practices' (perceived), 'representations of space' (conceived), and 'spaces of representation' (lived). In this case, the 'right to the city' (Lefebvre, 1996), was largely defined in line with consumerist, capitalist values and expectations.

However, the young drivers defensively and stubbornly refused to be ousted, drawing on their historical subcultural legacy and presence in the area, and mythical representation in the media (for instance over-exaggeration of the danger they posed) as justification for laying claim to this space symbolically, culturally and defiantly. They also engaged in the aforementioned strategies in order to improve their behaviour in line with crime prevention and policing strategies. Hence, spaces such as Aberdeen's Beach Boulevard can also be viewed as 'paradoxical spaces' (Rose, 1993) and as has also been noted in many other towns across the UK and in countries such as New Zealand (Falconer and Kingham, 2007) and North America (Best, 2006), an arena in which conflict is evident as the local community, police, and young drivers (boy racers) contest over rights to public space. It therefore demonstrates the complex relations at play and strategies adopted in which excluded groups or (sub)cultures may attempt to negotiate with capitalist groups in order to maintain use of a public space which is symbolically meaningful for (sub)cultural identity.

Finally, Lefebvre's conceptual triad also provides a useful framework through which to analyse the struggle over public space engaged in by the boy racers, because of 'his insistence on the importance of representations of bodily, lived experiences of space, especially when it is recognized that these representations are thoroughly mass-mediated by the work of journalists' (McCann, 1999: 179). The media also played an important role in constructing the space of Aberdeen's Beach Boulevard as one which was politically contested, dangerous and risky, and which thus needed to be controlled, ordered and regulated by the authorities, in response to conflicts over the appropriation and utilisation of this urban space. The young drivers were thus viewed by societal groups as posing a threat to public order, while the removal of them and any potential conflict that they posed can be seen as means of denying these drivers the right to performance and identity formation (see also Németh, 2006).

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⁶ In Scotland which has a separate legal system from England & Wales, anti-social behaviour powers are enshrined under the Antisocial Behaviour Scotland Act 2004.

⁷ Aberdeen City Council (2006b) *Council Meeting – 10 May 2006*, p.3218.

⁸ An area at Aberdeen's seafront where remnants of the city's old tramlines remain. Drivers use this space at weekends and in the evenings to park their cars, meet and socialize with one another.

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