Replacing 'broken windows': crime, incivilities and urban change

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Introduction

It is no accident that the debate about crime, incivilities and public order should mark one of the earliest confrontations between the 'new realists' and the 'radical realists'. This debate focuses upon an underlying interest in street crime and community cohesion which is a central focus of both these groups of criminologists. Although they approach the issue from different political and theoretical vantage points, both sides are clear that these issues are seminal to any viable 'law and order' policy.

The debate, however, remains unresolved. The 'new realists' represented by James Q. Wilson and George Kelling continue to express support for the prioritization of order maintenance issues in relation to policing; while the 'left realists' have argued that the police's proper role is controlling crime and it is on their ability to reduce crime rates that they should be judged (Kinsey et al., 1986; Wilson, 1986; Kelling, 1987).

The focal point of this encounter has been the classic article on 'Broken windows' by Wilson and Kelling (1982), in which they laid out their now-familiar thesis on the role of incivilities in promoting neighbourhood decline. They summarize this thesis in the following terms:

> A piece of property is abandoned, weeds grow up, a window is smashed. Adults stop scolding rowdy children; the children, emboldened, become more rowdy. Families move out, unmarried adults move in. Teenagers gather in front of the comer store. The merchant asks them to move, they refuse. Fights occur. Litter accumulates. People start drinking in front of the grocery, in time, an inebriate slumps to the sidewalk and is allowed to sleep it off. Pedestrians are approached by panhandlers.
> (Wilson and Kelling, 1982: 32)

For Wilson and Kelling the visible evidence of drunks, panhandlers and youths hanging around the area indicates that 'no one cares' and that the area is a vulnerable target for criminal activities. As the more mobile and more respectable families move out, the existing system of informal controls breaks down and the mechanisms for regulating social interaction become less effective. In conse-

quence, both crime and incivilities proliferate.

The primary indicator of decline is the growth of incivilities, and where these problems become intensified, aggressive policing is seen as necessary to prevent their continuation. The better-off areas experience relatively low levels of street crime and incivilities, while in the majority of the poorer areas these problems are so entrenched that it makes 8ense, Wilson and Kelling argue, to target those neighbourhoods which are identified as being in danger of 'tipping' into decline.

This thesis is undoubtedly attractive and eminently plausible. It draws upon a range of criminological and sociological material and touches upon some real experiences of urban life. By arguing for a strategic intervention, aimed at preventing decline, it offers a more hopeful response than simply throwing more and more money at the problem. It is this strong realist edge, combined with an imaginative attempt to link crime, incivilities and urban change, which has encouraged so many criminologists and policy makers to adopt this thesis in various forms. Over the past few years 'Broken windows' has become one of the most widely referenced articles in criminology and is currently in danger of becoming one of the subject's 'folk wisdoms' . .In a discipline characterized by deep disagreements the widespread adoption of this thesis is both surprising and significant. It is surprising in that it has been adopted with only a minimal degree of empirical support. It is significant in that the relationship between crime and incivilities -despite the prioritization often given to the latter by the public -remains largely unexplored.

One of the few responses which has been critical of the WilsonKelling approach is that offered by Kinsey and his colleagues (1986) in their Losing the Fight against Crime. In this book they take issue with the Wilson-Kelling thesis and argue that the prioritization of order maintenance problems amounts to letting the police 'off the hook' in terms of accountability and the formal criterion of performance -the clear-up rate. Moreover, they argue that much of what Wilson and Kelling depict as order maintenance issues -gang fights, domestic disputes and the like -are, in fact, crimes. The police may 'no crime' or treat these infractions 'informally' in order to dispose ofthem rapidly, but this does not mean that we have to accept these definitions or practices.

Kinsey et al. (1986) conclude that 'order maintenance' is something of an ideological category and that 'those incidents which might be regarded as dis-

turbances but which do not involve illegalities, are surely not the areas in which the police should intervene'. Thus, for them, it is crime control which ought to remain the focus of police work and this rationalization of effort is seen to be an important element in improving the service and accountability of the police. There is no dispute that the police ought to deal effectively with minor crimes. The issue is whether or not they should be encouraged to deal with that range ofactivities -which we will refer to as incivilities -that would not normally be considered as crimes, but which are a cause of social concern.

In general Kinsey et al. are correct in pointing to these ambiguities and limitations of the Wilson-Kelling thesis. However, as Wilson and Kelling point out, 'order maintenance' problems are of major concern to many members of the community -particularly the poor -and need to be addressed. And, although there may be some overlap between what Wilson and Kelling identify as incivilities and crime, there are a number of activities related to noise, low-level harassment and intimidation which would not normally be considered as criminal acts but which can have a profound effect on the quality of life in particular neighbourhoods. If we are interested in developing a criminology which responds to public interests and concerns, tben it is necessary to take both crime and incivilities seriously. Within this brief exchange between these 'realists' a number of questions remain unanswered. First, we are left with the problem of determining the exact relationship between crime and incivilities. Is this relationship arbitrary and contingent, or is there a causal connection? The second issue which is left unresolved is the extent to which the hypothesis of neighbourhood decline and its proposed association with crime and incivilities is credible. Thirdly, we are left with some uncertainty about the most appropriate and effective system of regulating incivilities. . In addressing these questions we are encouraged to rethink the relationship between crime and community safety, the 'seriousness' of crime, the problem ofdisplacement, different forms of policing, as well as the spatial dimension of crime and disorder. l Although there is clearly an overlap of interests between 'left' and 'right' realists on these issues, there are also some substantial differences. In order to begin to identify some of these points ofdivergence it is necessary to re-examine some of the key elements of the Wil~on-Kelling hypothesis.

Re-examining the Wilson-Kelling hypothesis

When neighbourhoods go into decline they often exhibit the type of characteristics which Wilson and Kelling identify. There is often evidence of high crime rates as well as a growth of a range of other social problems. There is also likely to be an increased sense of vulnerability and sensitivity to the 'signs of decline', as well as changes in the composition of the local population. The initial question, however, is whether declining areas normally exhibit these characteristics and whether or not these processes are actually set in motion by the presence of physical or social incivilities. That is, we need to determine the relation -both logically and historically -between incivilities, crime and neighbourhood decline. For it is Wilson and Kelling's contention that:

> ... at the community level disorder and crime are usually inextricably linked in a kind ofdevelopmental sequence. Social psychologists and police officers tend to agree that if a window in a building is broken and is left unrepaired, all the rest of the windows will soon be broken. This is as true in nice neighbourhoods as in run-down ones.
>
> (Wilson and Kelling, 1982: 78)

There are three central issues which arise from this often-quoted statement. The first involves the degree to which crime and incivilities are inextricably linked. The second is whether 'broken windows' _ either metaphorically or literally -have the same effect in different areas; and the third involves the accuracy of the developmental sequence which is suggested. These questions are important, since they have a direct bearing on the formulation of policy concerned with preventing neighbourhood decline.

The 'inextricable' link between crime and incivilities

 Crime al1d incivilities can and do occur together -but not always. There are, it should be noted, areas with high crime rates and low levels of incivilities, just as there are areas with a high incidence ofincivilities and relatively low levels

of crime (Lewis and Salem, 1986). But, as Wilson and Kelling suggest, there is evidence which indicates that crime and incivilities do tend to occur together. This has been one of the main findings of Home Office researchers who have attempted to assess the applicability of the 'broken windows' thesis to the British situation. The British Crime Survey (1984), for example, incorporated measures of crime and incivilities in different parts of the country. To the question: 'What would you say are the worst things about living in your area?', responses were given as shown in Table 2.l.

What these figures indicate is that areas with low concern about crime tend to have lower concern about incivilities. If we put the figures for rural areas aside and concentrate on the urban areas, we find that in designated 'high-risk' areas the concern about crime is high but the identification of incivilities is slightly lower than that presented for 'medium-risk' areas. In 'medium-risk' areas only 5-8 percent of the interviewees considered crime and v~ndalism as the worst problem, but the incivilities score ranged from 10 to 14 percent. However, in 'high-risk' neighbourhoods -multi-racial areas and high rise council estates -some 17 percent said that crime and vandalism were the worst problems. In these areas the level of incivilities registered was less than in the 'medium-risk' areas (7-10 percent). These figures do not indicate what the objective relationship between crime and incivilities might be, but do suggest that highest levels of perceived incivilities were not recorded in the 'highest-risk' areas, but in the 'medium-risk' areas.

An attempt to explore this relationship further -again using the data from the 1984 British Crime Survey -has been presented by Michael Maxfield (1987). His reworked data shows much closer correlation between areas with high levels of incivilities and victimization. These findings have also been broadly supported by the figures produced from the same data Source by Tim Hope and Mike Hough (1988). Their results show, not surprisingly, a similar distribution with the level of incivilities roughly the same in medium-and high-risk areas except on the 'better off and 'poorer' council estates (see Table 2.2). Hope and Hough's (1988) account which was designed explicitly to examine the Wilson-Kelling thesis found that the 'rates of perceived incivilities are more strongly related to levels of fear of crime (p <.05) and neighbourhood satisfaction (p< .01) than the level of victimization itself'. Thus Hope and Hough find only a 'loose' relationship between incivilities and crime but do suggest that incivilities may strongly influ

TABLE 2.1 *The worst thing about the local area, by Acorn neighbourhood group (Percentages)*

	Crime and vandalism	In-civilities	Shopping facilities/ amenities	Poor transport	Too much traffic
Low-risk areas					
A Agricultural areas (*n* = 460)	1	1	16	24	7
C Older housing of intermediate status (*n* = 1936)	3	8	15	7	12
K Better-off retirement areas (*n* = 443)	4	6	12	10	13
J Affluent suburban housing (n = 1589)	3	5	13	11	11
B Modern family housing higher incomes (*n* = 1475)	4	8	17	8	10
Medium-risk areas					
E Better-off council estates (*n* = 975)	5	10	14	8	10
D Poor quality older terraced housing (*n* = 735)	6	10	10	3	16
F Less well-off council estates (*n* = 1129)	8	14	10	2	7
High-risk areas					
I High status non-family areas (*n* = 573)	7	7	7	4	19
H Multi-racial areas (*n* = 379)	12	9	7	2	11
G Poorest council estates (*n* = 523)	17	10	8	2	5
National average	5	8	13	7	11

Source: Hough and Mayhew, 1985

TABLE 2.2   *Perception of incivilities, by Acorn neighbourhood group*

	Perceived incivilities		
	Drunks, tramps on streets % saying 'common'	Litter lying around % saying 'v. common'	Teenagers hanging around % saying 'v. common'
Low-risk areas			
A Agricultural areas ($n=476$)	1	4	3
C Older housing of intermediate status ($n=2001$)	9	14	12
K Better-off retirement areas ($n=463$)	11	13	8
J Affluent suburban housing ($n=1659$)	4	8	7
B Modern family housing high incomes ($n=1537$)	5	11	11
Medium-risk areas			
E Better-off council estates ($n=1018$)	9	17	18
D Poor quality older terraced housing ($n=759$)	16	32	20
F Less well-off council estates ($n=1175$)	14	25	23
High-risk areas			
I High status non-family areas ($n=609$)	25	21	12
H Multi-racial areas ($n=400$)	19	34	17
G Poorest council estates ($n=543$)	19	40	31
National average	10	17	14

Weighted
Source: British Crime Survey, 1984

ence feelings of personal and neighbourhood security.

Maxfield's (1987) evidence, on the other hand, indicates that in the areas in which the level of incivilities increased, there was a corresponding increase in the estimated levels of burglary and mugging. Interestingly, his reworked data showed that it was on the poor innercity council estates that the level of incivilities is highest. These figures, however, do not show, it should be emphasized, that there is any causal relationship between crime and incivilities or that they are 'inextricably' linked.

Unfortunately, these types of studies which have set out to correlate various crimes and incivilities provide only a snapshot. However, the picture which is presented is far from clear. This is partly because the research on which it is based suffers from two major limitations. First, the methodology which underpins national victimization studies is often imprecise and tends to lump together significantly different types of responses. Respondents are often asked whether they 'worry' about certain things, for example. Questions of this kind are too vague to draw any sound conclusions, and no amount of statistical manipulation can compensate for these conceptual difficulties. The second problem is that there is little attempt to separate the effects of specific types of incivilities on specific crimes. To some extent Wilson and Kelling's approach encourages this lack of specificity since, in their analysis, they maintain that it is the spread of incivilities in general which is seen to encourage a range of criminal activities. This is also possibly why, in their analysis, there is ~ tendency to conflate 'environmental' or 'physical' incivilities -'broken windows', graffiti and litter -with 'social' incivilities such as rowdyism, harassment and intimidation. But physical and social incivilities can give out significantly different messages and it is not always the case that an increase in one leads to an increase in the other. The two are not synonymous and they do not necessarily occur together.

The case for incivilities inviting crime remains weak, whether or not crime is measured by official statistics-or victimization rates. The lack of a strong correlation between crime and incivilities has led researchers to turn to the potentially more fertile area of the impact of incivilities on the fear ofcrime. Michael Maxfield (1987) has attempted to examine some aspects ofthe Wilson-Kelling thesis in relation to the fear of crime, and claims that the prevalence of incivilities in an area appears to affect neighbourhood and personal risk assessment. He suggests that, although incivilities may not be directly related to actual crime levels, they

may, nonetheless, affect what people think about crime. In particular, he reports that burglary and mugging were thought to be common by those who saw incivilities as rife.

In examining the relation between incivilities, victimization rates and fear of crime, Maxfield is aware that different groups express different levels of concern about future victimization. In contrast to Wilson and Kelling's generalized thesis, he finds that, even in areas with high recorded levels of incivilities, only certain crimes are a major cause of concern. Unfortunately, he does not provide data on the actual victimization levels of different groups, and therefore it is impossible to assess the relationship between objective and subjective dimensions of risk and fear of crime, but what he does provide, which is useful, is a reworking of the Wilson-Kelling thesis, which tends towards a rethinking of the relationship between crime and incivilities.

What Maxfield tries to show is that there is a relation between the experience of certain incivilities and estimates of neighbourhood and personal risks of victimization. As opposed to Wilson and Kelling's propositions, he suggests that there are variations, both in the sense that certain incivilities appear to have little or no impact on the fear of crime, while others only have an influence on certain groups under certain conditions. In introducing greater specificity into the relation, Maxfield examined the differential impact of particular incivilities; namely noisy neighbours, groups of teenagers, graffiti, tramps and litter. He found that:

> Of these five items, the belief that 'drunks and tramps on the street' were common was more consistently related to worry and anxiety about personal safety than were the other incivilities. To a lesser extent 'noisy neighbours and loud parties' also increased worry about burglary and mugging. With one important exception, the degree to which incivilities were widespread was inversely related to their effects on worry and anxiety for personal safety. Litter and groups of rowdy teenagers were the most common incivilities, but had the least impact on the attitudes of most respondents.
>
> (Maxfield, 1987: 33, emphasis added)

Assessments of risk appear to vary considerably by age and gender, and different types of incivilities seem to figure differently among the different populations.

Interestingly, litter, which although the most common of all incivilities and presumably one of the most visible signs that 'no one cares', has, according to Maxfield, 'no independent impact on fear'.

The direction in which Maxfield is driven by the logic of his investigations appears to be away from the kind of global relation which Wilson and Kelling propose and towards a more specific enquiry into the connections between crime, fear of crime and incivilities. His findings would ultimately seem to negate some of the basic assertions of the Wilson-Kelling hypothesis. In its 'place Maxfield points towards an alternative hypothesis which links estimates of personal risk for particular popUlations, with the perceived prevalence of certain incivilities.

Drawing upon Maxfield's discussion, it is possible to develop an approach which posits a link -both subjective and objective -between incivilities, crime and fear of crime. It suggests the formulation of an alternative hypothesis. This hypothesis involves three assumptions. The first is that people make rational assessments about their risks of victimization and in adopting avoidance behaviour. The second is that different kinds of incivilities will have an impact on different populations in various ways, and the third assumption is that there is not necessarily a relationship between the spread of incivilities in an area and the increase of crime in general, but that certain incivilities may be directly or indirectly linked with certain kinds of crime.

An increasing recognition of the rational nature of much of what is referred to as the 'fear of crime' has been an important element of radical realist work (Crawford et aI., 1991). Through the use of local victimization surveys, it has been shown that many ofthose assessments which were once seen as 'irrational' were, in fact, much more accurate assessments of risk than the unfocused national crime surveys indicated. Also, there is a growing awareness ofthe elaborate and complex calculations which people make in developing avoidanc:;e strategies. Using different streets, travelling only at certain times of the day, staying in the house or even moving into another area, are only a few of the multiplicity of strategies which people routinely employ to avoid victimization (Painter, 1989).

At the same time, it would seem reasonable to suppose that different incivilities have a different significance for different groups. It is widely reported that, although young males are frequently the victims of interpersonal violence, they often express a low level of fear, whereas other groups, whose exposure to interpersonal violence is relatively low, may experience a high level of fear. Fear

of crime, therefore, appears to be a function of vulnerability, perceived risk and levels of tolerance (Maxfield, 1984).

Certain crimes and incivilities seem to occur together, and the fear which is associated with them may, in part, be based on assessments of an overlap of those involved in perpetrating both crime and incivilities. Thus, in contrast to Wilson and Kelling's thesis which claims that incivilities attract outsiders into the neighbourhood, it may be that in a range of crime and incivilities, the perpetrators are in fact the same people.

We might, therefore, hypothesize that members of the public make a range of calculations about the possible relationship between the risk of victimization and the prevalence of certain incivilities. Just as there is no necessary link between the incidence of different types of crimes, so there is no necessary relationship between crime in general and incivilities. Rather, there may be perceived links between different crimes and between certain crimes and particular incivilities. Where these links are seen to occur, we have what might be referred to as 'crime maps' or 'crime sets' (Smith, 1986). By these terms is meant that among certain groups, a number of key variables are perceived to be connected in a number of ways. Increased exposure to certain incivilities may be seen quite reasonably as increasing the likelihood of future victimization, which may, in turn, heighten the fears associated with particular crimes. What would appear to be critical in these calculations is when crime and incivilities are:

1. perceived to involve the same set of victims and offenders;
2. identified as involving the transgression of certain areas of social or defensible space;
3. to be seen as related in a temporal or developmental sequence.

Research carried out by Warr on fear of crime among women and the elderly lends some weight to this hypothesis. He found that among different groups, different offences were grouped together, and that: 'For example, begging is closely associated with a variety of serious personal and property offenses (e.g. assaults, robbery, murder, threats with a weapon among elderly females, but not among young males. Similarly, robbery is much more closely associated with assault, murder and threats with a weapon among elderly females' (Warr, 1984: 696). Each group, WaIT suggests, makes its own calculations and links between the

perpetration ofcertain offences and the likelihood of other related offences happening in the future. Each of these offences will have a different impact among each ofthese groups, which may be ultimately underpinned, as in the case of women, by a perennial fear of sexual attack.

The 'excessive' fear which women, in particular, are seen to express in relation to crime is explicable, not only in terms ofthe greater spread of criminal victimization to which women are subject, but also, in terms of their vulnerability to a wide range of incivilities which occur in those public spaces in which they may feel most vulnerable. Taking exposure to incivilities and experience of crime together may well indicate that women's assessment of their risk of victimization may be . far more accurate than they are given credit for by many criminological researchers.

Just how well-founded these fears and assessments are needs to be determined by a mixture of subjective and objective measures which are sensitive to the varying levels of tolerance exhibited by certain groups. At present, despit~ the efforts which have been made to investigate the applicability of the 'Broken windows' thesis to the British situation, the research remains largely inconclusive. The type of 'snapshot' which has been provided through the British Crime Survey data points to certain possibilities but can tell us little about the relation between incivilities, crime and urban decline. The variations on the conclusions reached through the weighted and un weighted figures, however, do provide a reminder of the dangers of taking the findings of national victimization surveys at face value, irrespective of how apparently sophisticated the statistical techniques employed are.

The enduring problem with the type of statistical correlations presented by the Home Office researchers is that crime correlates positively with almost every other negative social indicator (such as unemployment, poverty, mental illness, poor housing, low educational achievement, poor transport and the like). There is always a tendency to try to impute a direct causal relationship between crime in general and any of those variables. Such attempts rarely hold up (Box, 1987). What is clear, however, is that there is a predictable concentration of all these negative social indicators in certain inner-city areas and among particular populations, which produces a compounding effect and which, ultimately, heightens the impact of crime. Certain groups of people living in these areas suffer from a double jeopardy. On one side they are victims of an uncertain and segmented

labour market; while on the other side, they are often subject to low levels of security

and service provision. Unravelling the relationship between crime, incivilities and urban change, requires that we consider the relations between specific incivilities and crimes. within different contexts and try to better understand the types of assessments which people make about their future victimization. To do this requires thatwe understand something about the process of neighbourhood decline.

The process of neighbourhood decline

Understanding the processes by which particular inner-city neighbourhoods sink into decline is difficult b.ecause change is rarely linear. Identifying the role of anyone factor in this process is even more difficult, but there have been some longitudinal studies which have directly and indirectly attempted to address this issue.

One ambitious attempt to examine the effect ofcrime on neighbourhood decline in Los Angeles between 1950 and 1970 has been presented by Schuerman and Kobrin (1986). Their analysis indicates that it is socioeconomic change and related subcul~ural transformations which, in turn, affect family types and relational networks. Changes in the form of investment and sites of industrialization invariably alter the composition of the local population; social networks often fragment, and areas become characterized by instability and normative ambiguity. The end result is often an increase in crime rates. The developmental sequence which they identify suggests -in common with many other urban sociologists -that these changes tend to be 'over-determined' by economic and political developments. The question which we are left with is what role do incivilities play in this process? The answer appears to be that they are relatively marginal to the processes of decline and that both crime and incivilities are a function of underlying transformations. Rather than incivilities encouraging crime, it may well be that the growth of crime spawns various incivilities. A great deal seems to depend on the particular age and social composition ofthe populations remaining in these declining areas, the rate of decline, and the nature of surrounding areas.

Although Schuerman and Kobrin do not directly address the role of inci-

vilities in neighbourhood decline, they do seem to suggest that physicaf incivilities tend to occur separately from and to precede social incivilities, and that rundown housing, litter and damaged facilities tend to follow shortly after the initial socioeconomic changes take place. The sequence which they identify involves a significantly different dynamic to that suggested by Wilson and Kelling, who are noticeably reticent about the role of economic change, the changing structure of the labour market, and the processes of social and economic marginalization. Incivilities and disorder may be serious problems and greatly affect the quality of life in inner-city neighbourhoods, but their role within the process ofurban change, it would seem from this study at least, is far from central. At best certain incivilities may act as catalysts in this process. This possibility, although relatively far removed from the original formulation, is, in developmental terms, a more tenable proposition and one which requires further investigation.

In part the apparent atractiveness of the incivilities-crime-neighbourhood decline model is that incivilities are often the most directly visible element in this process. However, it would appear that removing incivilities, even if it were possible, would offer little possibility of halting or reversing these structural processes. They may be more of a symptom than a cause. A further difficulty in identifying the causal and historical relationship between crime and incivilities is that, in the process of rapid social change and the accompanying normative uncertainty, 'incivilities' can become transformed into 'crimes'. That is, the breakdown or reconstruction of informal controls can mean that incidents which once were dealt with through informal mechanisms are increasingly referred to formal agencies. This is not, as Wilson and Kelling suggest, simply a function of the increased seriousness or prevalence of certain 'problematic situations', but may reflect the unwillingness or inability of local residents to deal effectively with these problems. It may even involve, in some cases, a 'civilizing process', in which conflicts which were once dealt with by interpersonal violence or some form of vengeance, become dealt with by more formal and impersonal agencies. Informal control is not always benign and is rarely equitable (Abel, 1982; Matthews, 1988).

One interesting way of considering the relationship between incivilities, crime and neighbourhood decline is to invert it. That is, to examine the process of gentrification which has become an equally pronounced development within many urban areas in the post-war period. It seems to involve a reversal of the flight to the suburbs and the neglect of central inner-city areas. The corollary

ofthe Wilson-Kelling thesis would, presumably, be that the prevalence of incivilities and disorder in inner-city areas would be a barrier to gentrification and that gentrification would tend to occur in those areas where incivilities and crime were relatively low.

Significantly, what seems to have occurred among the predominantly young, professional sections of the middle classes, who prefer the 'mean streets' to the leafy suburbs, is that they have bought up large run-down properties, often in areas characterized by high crime rates and incivilities. Paradoxically, certain inner-city areas with very high rates of incivilities have become very fashionable and sought-after areas. Places like the Lower East Side and Greenwich Village in New York, Georgetown in Washington, downtown Seattle, as well as various areas in London, seem almost to have become gentrified because of the high level of incivilities, if not crime, since this is 'where the action is'. Interestingly in one area of central London, Camden Town, the range and prevalence of social incivilities and disorder grew as the area became gentrified. Street traders and street musicians, noisy bars and rudimentary 'ethnic' restaurants were all seen to give the area 'character' and make it a desirable place to live. Gentrification, it should be noted, is a destabilizing process and often involves the replacement of families by single people and unmarried, childless couples. The high levels ofcrime and disorder in the neighbourhood do not seem to prevent this process. '

There is no doubt that in other inner-city areas, the perceived risk of victimization and the visibility of incivilities will affect the value of property (Taub et aI., 1984). But, as Wesley Skogan put it, 'concern about crime does not, in itself, determine levels of investment, the confidence of residents in the future or property values. Rather, it is one strand in a bundle of features which make up a community's character. Where people are optimistic about the bundle as a whole, crime counts for less' (Skogan, 1988: 56). Interestingly, in many areas in America which were gentrified during the 1970s and 1980s, the crime rates remain relatively high. Thus, just as crime does not necessarily increase with urban decline, neither does it decrease as a result of gentrification (McDonald, 1986). It does seem, however, that there is a relationship between the stability of neighbourhoods and crime rates.

In terms of the relation between incivilities, neighbourhood decline and fear of crime, Lewis and Salem (1986) found that 'the communities' political and social resources appeared to constitute a major mediating force between the per-

ception of crime and other neighbourhood problems and the subsequent expression of fear'. The political infraStructure of neighbourhoods is a crucial feature of urban life, but it is something about which Wilson and Kelling have relatively little to say. Presumably one of the reasons why high levels of crime and incivilities are less of a problem for the young urban professionals living in gentrified areas is that they are aware that they possess political clout as well as the resources to cushion or deflect the impact of these phenomena. This raises the important issue of the differential impact of crime and incivilities.

The differential impact of crime and incivilities

Although Wilson and Kelling obviously see the process of urban decline as fairly universal, they do not see it as inevitable. It can be stopped, slowed down or reversed if the appropriate action is taken. However, they do make the bold claim that the process works in exactly the same way in 'nice' neighbourhoods as in run-down ones. This is a strange contention. It is at odds with most of what we know about the distribution and differential effects of social processes in different areas. Moreover. it portrays little understanding of the ability of different neighbourhoods to absorb and resist pressures towards decline, and at the same time, of how incivilities might be differently interpreted among different populations. .

On the first issue it seems palpably obvious that some derelict houses, or some abandoned cars, in relatively affluent areas are likely to make little impact on the sense ofvulnerability in the area. Residents in better-off areas know that they have the resources and political influence to absorb and deflect the effects of these 'signs of decline'

(Byrne and Sampson, 1986). Just like crimes, the meaning and significance of incivilities is defined by time and space. Space is becoming increasingly recognized as a critical factor in the equation and as a prime determinant in the 'construction of problematic events'. Time and space are critical variables in defining the relationship between offenders and victims. As such, they will substantially condition the reaction of both the public and the state. Thus it is not surprising to find that similar activities can have substantially different -even oppositional meanings in different areas. Youths hanging around in one area may be widely

perceived as a nuisance or a threat, whereas in others they may be seen as protecting community 'turf'.

In a similar vein, it may well be that in poorer areas where there is a high level of serious crime, 'problems' such as litter, graffiti and disorder may be seen as trivial and non-threatening. On the other hand, it could well be that, in middle-income areas where the housing market is changeable, residents may be more sensitive to minor infractions (Skogan, 1988). Sensitivity and concern with incivilities, it would seem, may be as much a function of social location as the objective incidence of such events.

There are two other considerations which are identified elsewhere by Wilson and Kelling which can significantly affect the impact of crime and incivilities in different areas and which we should readily acknowledge. The first is that the impact ofcrime and incivilities is not simply a function of the number of incidents involved. The difference between two youths and 30 youths hanging around in an area, is often not just a numerical one. At a critical point a qualitative difference occurs in the nature of the problem. When such a shift occurs it invariably necessitates a significant change in the mode ofintervention. Thi~ observation is important in reminding us that the meaning and impact ofproblems cannot be simply read off from statistical tables, and that the scale, shape and density can condition how they are conceived. In short, it is a useful antidote to both idealism and empiricism while sensitizing us to the complexities of the theory-practice relation.

A second and related point which on one level seems blatantly obvious, but which is often forgotten, is the difference between individual and social and visible and invisible effects. That is, certain problems (such as drugs, pollution, traffic, etc) may not beidentified by most individuals as a serious problem. They may not directly or consciously experience particular activities as causing harm.. However, these activities may cause considerable long-term damage to neighbourhoods or may only become apparent to individuals a long time after the event. This process of 'hidden' ot invisible victimization raises a number of important questions in relation to the differential impact of crime and incivilities. It raises questions, not. only about the validity and reliability of individualized victimization surveys, but also about the value of 'public opinion' when it is measured as the accumulation of individual responses. By the same token, it puts into relief the role of 'public opinion', as expressed through mass surveys, in the

prioritization and formulation of policies.

The implications which follow from these two points, although important, do not fit very well with the contention that incivilities have the same impact in different areas. Rather, they suggest that the meaning of different kinds of incivilities will vary considerably from place to place. They also seem to suggest that if we are to take into account the social impact of crime and incivilities, then it is on the poorest and least resourced neighbourhoods that we should focus our attention, rather than those which are described as 'tipping into decline'. This is where these problems are compounded and where the ability of residents to withstand them will be limited.

Addressing these problems would realistically involve locating the concern with incivilities within a wider context of community resources. Wilson and Kelling, as has been suggested above, are particularly neglectful of the role of the political organizations through which policies would have to be channelled. Also, what most urban sociologists would consider to be prime movers in the process of urban decline -corporations, industrial and finance capital and political groupings -playa virtually non-existent role in their presentation. Instead the focus is on the development of more aggressive policing of the 'low lifers' and obstreperous youths who are deemed to be the instigators of urban decline.

The problems of policing disorder

Controlling incivilities and maintaining order raises a number of problems. George Kelling has himself identified some of the central issues:

> Police order maintenance activities are important but controversial. They are controversial because there is no clear and consistent definition of what constitutes disorder and because the justification of police intervention in disorderly situations is uncertain. Some behaviour that creates disorder is illegal and the basis for intervention is clear: the law. Other behaviour that creates disorder is not illegal; instead, it violates community or neighbourhood expectations of what constitutes appropriate civil behaviour. Under such circumstances a primary basis for police intervention is the political will of the com-

munity.

(Kelling, 1987: 90)

Finding an effective method of policing these problems is difficult, Kelling argues, because of the growing levels of individualism and egoism which have made inner-city streets less ordered and more precarious. High levels of incivilities in these areas tend to heighten fears and decrease the 'quality of life'.

Despite these problems, Kelling insists that focusing on order maintenance has a number of advantages. On one side, he argues, the reduction of disorder has immediate benefits for the community, while providing a unique opportunity for crime control on the other (Kelling, 1985). Policing disorder can, he claims, affect crime control by preventing disorderly behaviour from escalating into criminal acts, by encouraging the moral self-defence activities of citizens and by decreasing the demand for the police's service functions as a result of greater contact on the street. Order maintenance, Kelling argues, has historically been the primary role of the police and it is only in the relatively recent past that crime control has been emphasized.

Before we examine these specific assertions it is necessary to address some of the general problems in effectively policing disorder. Kelling claims that a major distinction arises from the fact that there is 'no clear and consistent definition of disorder and unlike crimes which are defined in relation to acts, disorder is a condition'. This is an important point, but the distinction is not quite as clear-cut as Kelling suggests due to the non-specific nature of much disorder and the absence, in most cases, of any direct victim. There is a second, and arguably more important, distinction, however, which arises from the lack of public consensus over the 'problem' and the nature of these 'conditions'.

For these reasons there are serious limitations in leaving these 'problems' to be dealt with by the police, whose authority is largely tied to the mobilization (real or threatened) of the criminal law, since many of these activities do not involve specific acts and, as a result, the police, who are charged with controlling them, are often forced to adopt extra-legal means. Since Wilson and Kelling believe that order maintenance ought to be the police's primary function, they unequivocally endorse the use of extra-legal methods and the need to 'kick ass' to keep people in order. Significantly, the asses ofthe people they want kicked are winos, street prostitutes, panhandlers and juveniles. Wilson and Kelling want the

pol,ice to respond to the responsible and respectable interests of the community and to disperse these 'undesirables'. However, many of the neighbourhoods where incivilities are common are marked by a general lack of consensus. In this context the police may have no clear mandate and may be seen as acting on behalf of one section of the community (Skogan, 1990). Amidst conflicting sets of values and relying on the often inappropriate instrument of the criminal law, the police are at risk of alienating sections of the community and thereby interfering with the flow of information on which their crime control function depends. Thus, in contrast to Kelling's claim that vigorously policing disorder is the way to reduce crime, it would seem that it is equally likely to impair the police's crime control function. We have seen only too clearly in recent years when the police try to control 'disorder' in the form of strikes, demonstrations and the like in an aggressive manner, they can alienate, not only a significant number of individuals and groups, but, as in the case of the miners' strike ih Britain, they can alienate a whole community (Green, 1990).

In fact, Kelling's contention that policing disorder will reduce crime is confounded by his own research carried out in Newark, which found that, while the introduction offoot patrols increased people's sense of security, it had no measurable effect on crime at all (Police Foundation, 198 I; Klockars, 1985). One evaluation of the foot patrol experience in Newark concluded that, while it had some effect on residents' perceptions of disorder, it appears to have had no significant effect on victimization, recorded crime or the likelihood of reporting crime (Pate, 1986). It should also be added that the suggestion that order maintenance was historically prior to crime control overlooks the fact that the movement away from order maintenance was part of a development aimed at controlling police abuses, limiting discretion, and increasing professionalism (Walker, 1984). In relation to Newark, which has no doubt been the beneficiary of some innovative policies in recent years, the key problem during the 1970s in the police department was the excessive use of force, corruption and the lack of accountability. All ofthese basic problems had to be addressed before any reform was possible. According to Skolnick and Bayley (1986), the main problems facing Newark's police department during this period was poor relations with the public, the increase in the rates ofserious crime, and the tendency to operate according to hidden norms which were unacceptable to the local population. In these situations it is not surprising to find the police department was swamped with complaints

and law suits filed against them for 'harassment' and other 'excesses'. Dealing with endless complaints substantially increases the costs of policing. During the 1980s projects were carried out in both Newark and Houston which were greatly influenced by the writings of Wilson and Kelling and which Were specifically designed to reduce the fear ofcrime (Pate, 1986). These were fairly comprehensive programmes involving several community policing strategies. The programmes produced mixed results. Although there was some indication of ~eductions in perceived diso~der, perceived crime levels and improved citizen evaluations of the police, Rosenbaum comments that:

> One noticeable failure in the Houston-Newark Fear Reduction Project was the 'signs of crime' program, which attempted (a) to reduce fear and related problems by reducing social disorder (through foot patrols and aggressive order maintenance) and (b) to reduce physical deterioration (through more intense city services and a youth clean-up program). The lack of positive police-<:itizen contact and the random implementation of the program may help to explain the complete lack of effects, but in view of the amount of resources devoted to this strategy, some might question the 'incivility' theory and the 'crime attack' model that served as the rationale for the approach.
>
> (Rosenbaum, 1988: 373, emphasis added)

The influence of Wilson and Kelling has also been felt elsewhere. In Denver, for example, order maintenance was emphasized through what was called the ESCORT (Eliminate Street Crime on Residential Thoroughfares) Strategy, which attempted to improve order and safety on the streets in the Capitol Hill area by controlling the marginal popUlations by way of a strategy of 'skilled harassment'. Using an array of legal sanctions, the strategy involved combing the streets for minor violations, rowdyism and drugs. In this run-down area, aggressive policing was justified in terms of protecting the poor and powerless in the neighbourhood and to provide the necessary conditions for the minimum. level of security for local citizens. In their examination of ESCORT Skolnick and Bayley concluded that:

> It is hard to tell if ESCORT has been successful. It has certainly been

popular, and the department has been asked continually to expand it to other neighborhoods. As one would expect, ESCORT officers generate impressive totals of practice enforcement. They are surely a felt presence. The department believes ESCORT has been effective in reducing crime, although the evaluation has been rough and ready. For example during ESCORT's first twenty months (1975-77), reports of rapes and both simple and aggravated assaults declined significantly. Burglaries declined too, but only slightly. Despite a continuing high incidence of crime, many politicians and business people credited ESCORT with stabilizing transitional areas that otherwise would have become blighted and uninhabitable.
(Skolnick and Bayley, 1986: 141).

The experience of Denver appears to give some qualified support for promoting order maintenance activities. But it should be noted that in this case policing was closely monitored and tied to legal controls, and that the area concerned was atypical and subject to extreme problems. It was not an area 'tipping' into decline, but paradoxically one which would probably have been depicted by Wilson and Kelling as being 'beyond reclamation'.

Many of the problems which Wilson and Kelling identify -rowdy youths, noisy neighbours, drunks and vagrants -remain incivilities precisely because the public, by and large, do not think that they ought to be dealt with by the criminal justice system. When the public report these problems to the police, it is often not because they want a heavyhanded, truncheon-wielding army of police officers descending on their neighbourhood, but because there is not an available alternative. In recent years there has been a move by local councils in Britain to deal with a range of disorder problems -particularly those related to noise, harassment of neighbours and litter. Wilson and Kelling's contention that the police are the key to controlling disorder is, it would seem, becoming less tenable in this country at least. In fact, in many of the more imaginative and successful interventions which have occurred in recent years to control both crime and incivilities, the police have played an increasingly subordinate role. In some noteworthy initiatives they have been conspicuously absent. In Kelling's own research on reducing the level of graffiti on the New York subway, it was not tougher policing, or even better target hardening which proved successful, but, rather, reducing the

motivation of graffiti artists by removing graffiti immediately from the trains and preventing offenders from 'getting up' (Sloan-Howitt and Kelling, 1990).

The notion of 'community policing' has a great deal of prominence these days and it is widely recognized that fostering the relationship between the police and the public is crucial in improving the service which the police provide. However, the critical issue concerns the proper nature of this relationship. The kind of model which Wilson and Kelling offer is inadequate, it has been suggested, in a number of ways. First, its implementation seems to be largely dependent on the 'goodwill' of police chiefs and particular officers. The police in this model are presented as the 'good guys', who only have the interests of the community at heart (Wilson and Kelling, 1989). The reality, however, is that this goodwill is a limited commOdity within urban police forces and that the police have other interests. One of the most difficult jobs for senior police managers is to keep these various interests in check. In a situation in Britain, where one half ofthe police force is currently under investigation by the other half, the view that the police constitute a band ofcommitted 'do-gooders' is a little myopic. Secondly, patrol work and dealing with low level disorder is low priority and low status work for the police. Thirdly, it must be said that it is also a little naive to believe that the police have a total commitment to remove crime and incivilities altogether. There are bureaucratic and organizational pressures to maintain a 'manageable' level of crime. For these reasons we need to be careful about always allowing these 'community policing' strategies to be police-led. Also, a great deal is made by Wilson and Kelling of the effects of uniformed foot patrols, and certainly their research indicates that this increases people's sense of security. But it may well be that a range of uniformed patrols could fulfil this function and that, in some areas, there may be other agencies who could perform this function more cost-effectively. Dennis Rosenbaum (1987) has rightly pointed to the limits of what he calls the 'implant' approach to crime control. In many cases there is little to be gained from implanting new organs into decaying bodies. Although there are no dOUbt some significant short-term and localized gains to be made from developing more imaginative and responsive styles of policing, there is a growing recognition that if problems are not to be simply displaced or postponed, then more comprehensive and socialized forms of policing need to be developed. For the vast majority of minor infractions, interpersonal conflicts, and a range of 'incivilities', neither the full authority of the police and the criminal law, nor the threats and intimidation

of self-styled moral guardians in the form of citizen patrols, seem particularly appropriate. Between these two extremes there are a number of alternatives which may be more relevant.

The growing experimentation with multi-agency approaches to crime control has, on one hand, focused attention on the effectiveness of certain agencies in dealing with particular problems which were once seen as the province of the police; while on the other hand, they have encouraged a serious rethink about the appropriate point of intervention, both in relation to the 'evolution' of the problem and to the development of the person(s) involved (Forrester et aI., 1988; Matthews, 1986). It has, by implication, involved a re-examination of the complex relationship between formal and informal modes of regulation.

Moreover, in recent years there has been a growing awareness of the value and effectiveness of various 'intermediary' agencies in regulating social (mis)behaviour. Paradoxically, this interest has occurred at a time when many of these agencies are in decline. In a sense it is the very absence of such agencies which allows the problem of regulation to be posed in terms of an opposition between formal policing and citizen patrols. Many of the once-familiar regulatory bodies-park-keepers, station guards, etc, as well as many of the social and political organizations - working mens' clubs, trade union associations, church organizations, etc -which once acted both as channels of political and social participation and as vehicles of expression and control within the public sphere, have either gone into decline or disappeared (Habermas, 1989). In consequence, the nature of the public sphere has been significantly transformed, and this has a profound effect upon the nature of urban living and, in particular, on the organization of social space.

One immediate example of this change is a massive reduction in the number of people operating transport systems. As a result, buses and trains have become a kind of 'no man's land' in many cities. Many transport systems are characterized by high levels of vandalism, un-mediated aggression and, in some cases, high levels of fare evasion. Attempts have been made to try to resolve these problems in recent years. In Holland, for example, one useful initiative involved engaging about l200 unemployed people as transport officers who were introduced to try to improve the security and to reduce the number of fare evaders. The results were impressive. Security was increased, the levels of vandalism and graffiti decreased, and there was a reduction in petty crime and fare evasion (Andel, 1989).

A similar type of strategy has been developed in a number of countries to provide a relatively low level, but effective, regulatiOn on council estates. This involves the use of concierges or receptionists whose role is to monitor activities around the estate. This strategy is normally linked to entry control systems and the aim is that the receptionist is not only concerned with helping to reduce crimes like burglary and vandalism, but also to act as a focal point for the people living in the block and to help to improve the management of the blocks. The evaluations which have been carried out suggest that these schemes are very effective, both in terms of reducing crime and

disorder on estates and also in improving the quality of housing and repair services (Poyner and Webb, 1987). Both of these examples were reasonably cost-effective and point to the possibilities of developing middle-range interventions which can reduce both crime and the fear of crime in particular areas. These strategies are not so much 'implants' as mechanisms for developing a more integrated regulatory infrastructure.

A different kind of initiative which has proved beneficial in England is the 'Priority Estates Project'. This involves developing a comprehensive policy for 'difficult to let' or 'sink' estates which are identified as suffering from high levels of crime as well as a range of other social problems, including poor maintenance, vandalism, and high tenant turnover. These estates are often unpoliced, badly designed and poorly protected. Itis these estates where residents' fear ofcrime is notoriously high and where there is a prevalence of graffitti, vandalism, litter, drunks and rowdy youths. There is a disproportionate number of young people on these estates, many one-parent families, and a great deal of unemployment. Through a range of policies, including the setting up of tenants' associations, youth clubs, the clearing up of litter, police patrols, and prompter housing repairs, substantial improvements have been made. Importantly, these initiatives have c~ntred on residents' ability to influence events. The experience of the Priority Estates Project is that, if crime and incivilities are to be reduced in these areas, 'some combination of resident organisation, youth leadership, estate-based housing management, residential employment initiatives, communal guarding, beat policing and anti-crime measures (doors, locks and lighting, securing access-ways, vandal-proof fittings, etc) is needed' (Power, 1989).

The Priority Estates Project is particularly impressive because it has managed a rare achievement in the field of crime control; it has produced extremely

beneficial results in high-crime areas which might otherwise be written off. This multi-faceted initiative also underlines the deep-seated motivation even in depressed areas to improve security and to reduce crime. As our understanding and involvement in these neighbourhoods grows we see that the areas are neither characterized solely by egoism and individualism on one side, or a pre-given 'community' on the other. Instead, we find divisions and conflicts but also overlapping levels of interest, associations and communality. Shifting the balance from individualism to collectivism, from conflict to consensus, and from depression to confidence, appears to be largely dependent on building social networks and developing a range of intermediary agencies -both locally and generally -which can effectively channel and regulate social actions (Braithwaite, 1989). Policing plays a relatively minor back-up role in this empowering process. Aggressive and discriminatory policing employing extra-legal methods can produce, as we have seen, more disorder and, in some cases, has led to full-blown riots (Gifford, 1986). Building 'communities' is not a matter ofcreating a monolitic set ofvalues or, for that matter, reducing dissensus, but rather creating the mechanisms through which different values and aspirations can be mobilized, discussed and realized. Developing such mechanisms is an important part of creating a pluralistic, social democratic state.

The experience of the Priority Estates Project shows that various incivilities can be removed through the organization of facilities, the provision of basic resources and changes in housing polici<es. Similarly, many of the problems associated with youths hanging around have been resolved through the provision of youth clubs, training facilities and the like. Vagrancy and public drunkenness can similarly be reduced through the provision of housing, hostels and clinics.

Wilson and Kelling express little interest in developing mechanisms and agencies which may empower the poor and the powerless, and they seem even less interested in directing resources towards the disadvantaged and marginalized. Instead, their main concern is to remove these undesirables' from respectable areas, and since they do not want to do very much about their condition, they will, presumably, be deflected towards those poorer areas which already have more than their fair share of social problems. In their diatribe against decriminalization and decarceration, they seem to be suggesting that 'if only we got really tough' on these people arid put them in prison for longer, then urban decline in respectable areas could be prevented. The reality is, of course, that decar-

cerated popUlations invariably gravitate towards the run-down inner-city ghettos (Scull, 1977). Since Wilson is against rehabilitation-and seems to be largely impervious to the debilitating and alienating effect of incarceration, preferring instead a policy of incapacitation, there is no indication of how the continual flow of increasingly marginalized offenders back into the poorer urban areas is to be overcome (Wilson, 1983; Cullen and Gilbert, 1982). In fact, the policy of selective incapacitation which Wilson and some of his more punitive conservative associates support, is precisely the policy which currently operates both in Britain and America. Its undesirable effects are all too apparent (Currie, 1986). Decriminalization is a more complex problem and the debate over legal and nonlegal modes of regulation for different types of activities cannot be fully discussed here, but it should be noted that, while there has been a monumental expansion in the number of new laws passed over the last decade, it is also the case that some forms of decriminalization have occurred in recent years, not because of a new wave of 'permissiveness', but because a number of statutes have proved unenforceable.

Summary and discussion

In reviewing the literature related to the crime incivilities and neighbourhood change, very little support has been found for the 'Broken windows' hypothesis or to the central contentions of the WilsonKelling thesis relating to the relationship between crime and incivilities. The dynamics of urban decline and the differential effects of disorder appear extremely weak. Most significantly, the model of-decline which Wilson and Kelling present which involves the following sequence:

Incivilities $\longrightarrow$ Decrease in informal control $\longrightarrow$ Increased crime $\longrightarrow$ Increased fear
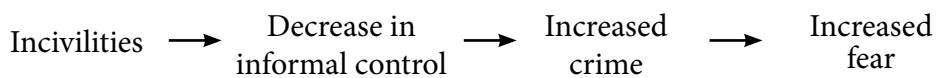
was found to have little empirical SUpport. Instead, incivilities appear to be the dependent variable and seem relatively marginal to the process of urban decline (and gentrification), and only tenuously linked to crime. There does appear to be some relationship between the levels of.incivilities, victimization and the subsequent 'fear of crime', but it has been suggested that this needs to be examined in relation to the temporal and spatial relations involved. Taking the objective

incidence of criI11e and incivilities together may indicate that the 'fear of crime' among specific groups in particular areas is more rational and realistic than it is often portrayed.

The evidence drawn from the British Crime Survey indicates a loose correlation between crime and incivilities, but allowing for different levels of tolerance and sensitivity to incivilities, it seems that these problems are predominantly located in those poorer neighbourhoods which score highly on other negative social indicators and receive generally inadequate services.

The disturbing feature of Wilson and Kelling's proposals is that they would invariably compound these problems by displacing crime and incivilities from the more 'respectable' to the less 'respectable' areas. Since they are not interested in providing the resources to deal with these problems and thereby reducing them, their objective is to move them from those areas which are probably better equipped to deal with them to the less well-equipped areas. What appears at first sight is a relatively altruistic strategy to prevent neighbourhood decline, turns out, on closer inspection, to be the cleaning up of one area at the expense of other less well-endowed ones. It is not difficult to see how such proposals might be attractive to radical conservative administrations during periods of increased social inequality. It provides a clear rationale for writing off poorer areas as 'unreciaimable', while identifying vagrants, drunks and disenchanted youth as the instigators rather than the victims of neighbourhood decline and economic change. It is a short step from this familiar ideological inversion to the critique of deinstitutionalization and decriminalization, and ,to blaming inner-city ills on the mood of 'permissiveness'. Instead they advocate more 'get tough' policies, greater use of imprisonment, and the extension of selective incapacitation. At the same time, they want, not only more legal sanctions, but also endorse the use ofextra-legal tactics by the police and seem to suggest that the appropriate response to intimidation and harassment on the street is more intimidation and harrassment by the police.

The 'Broken windows' hypothesis comes complete ~ith all this conceptual baggage. It is, no doubt, attractive to those who want to write off deprived inner-city areas and who think that marginal populations do not deserve the same safeguards as the rest of the population, who feel comfortable about endlessly recycling (often minor) offenders through a debilitating penal system, and who are basically uninterested in developing more democratically accountable forms

of policing.

Although Wilson distances himself from the 'try 'em and fry 'em' brigade on one hand, and radical non-interventionalists on the other, his particular brand of 'realist' criminology incorporates most of the major elements of conservatism (Wilson, 1986). His approach includes a mixture of instrumentalism (‚What works?') phenomenalism (a disdain for 'root' causes), biologism (that people are inherently 'wicked'), essentialism (criminality is it function of 'human nature'); combined with an underlying punitiveness which is reserved largely for the poor, the 'feckless' and the marginalized (Wilson, 1983; Wilson and Herrnstein, 1985). These essential ingredients of conservative criminology are given a new slant by Wilson, who presents his ideas in a commonsensical way.2

Like much commonsense theorizing, however, the work is littered with un-theorized and unmediated dichotomies -the wicked and the innocent, respectable and non-respectable, individual and community, the salvageable and the unsal-vageable. The continual use ofthese oppositions injects the writing with a series ofoften untenable and unrealistic choices and alternatives. This particular brand of 'new realism' is, therefore, underpinned by a constraining dualism. Within the confines of this approach there are a number of noticeable omissions. The wider economic and political configurations and the processes by which certain groups become marginalized are hardly referred to. The focus is almost exclusively on predatory street crime and a wide range of interpersonal and white-collar crime -all of which play an important part in the complex dynamics of urban living -are rarely touched upon. These omissions and the narrow focus of the work leads invariably to skewed and partisan policy proposals. As Elliott Currie · has argued:

> In the absence of that ('socio-economic') the conservative emphasis upon culture, values and tradition degenerates into wistful nostalgia, or worse, into a self-righteous, punitive demand for more corporal punishment. Harsher discipline in the family and schools and the indiscriminate use of the prisons as holding pens for the urban un-derclass we have decided to give up on.

> The conservative model turns out to be shot through with contradic-tions. In a world of dramatic national variations in criminal violence, it blames crime on an invariant human nature. In a society that ranks

amongst the most punitive in the developed world, it blames crime and leniency on the justice system. In a country noted for its harsh response to social deviation, it blames crime on attitudes of tolerance run wild.

(Currie, 1986: 436)

There is a further tension involved in this approach. On one side there is a sense of desperation which arises from the view that these problems are so widespread that only a thoroughgoing response will go any way towards dealing with them; while on the other hand there is the worry that change might be too 'radical' and far-reaching.

As we have seen, many of these policies and proposals are based on very flimsy evidence, and even the work carried out and reported by the authors themselves provides little support for their central contentions. Thus, what at first appears to be a hard-headed, no-nonsense approach concerned only with 'what works', turns out to be less of an explanation and more of a rationalization. The real issue seems to be 'what works for whom?'

It is not that the writings of Wilson and his colleagues do not contain a sense of realism, but that they are often not realist enough. Their work relies heavily on the immediate and outward appearances being guided ultimately by irrepressible ideological beliefs. There is a thin veneer of scientificity in all this, just as there is a formal concern for the plight of urban communities. Ultimately, however, it does not offer much of a solution, since it is based on a political philosophy which accepts growing social inequalities, which argues for reduction of state intervention, which sees the growth of crime as a necessary by-product of a 'free market' society and argues for the extension of those aggressive policing practices which rely on 'informal' means to resolve problems of crime and disorder.

In contrast, a 'left realist' approach would offer a different set of strategies and modified objectives. From this oppositional vantage point it is suggested that besides the need to address the underlying socio-economic determinants of crime and disorder, there are a number of alternative proposals which should be considered:

i) The equalization of victimization The unequal nature of victimization across different groups residing in different areas has been repeatedly identified. Multi-

ple victimization is often compounded by the social and geographical concentration of various other social problems. It was one of the original propositions of radical realism that a great deal of crime was intra-class rather than inter-class. Although there is considerable variation in the distribution of victimization between different categories of crime, it remains the case that the poor and the vulnerable are disproportionately victimized (Sparks, 1981). This is not a 'natural' occurrence. Significant changes in the impact and distribution of victimization can be effected, as some ofthe above examples indicate. A democratic crime control policy would attempt to equalize the risk and the effects of victimization.

ii) The prevention of displacement A prevalent characteristic of a great deal of crime prevention initiatives which ha ve been implemented to date is their extremely specific and parochial nature. Although a number of crime prevention measures have been successful in terms of specific individuals, many have resulted in the displacement of the problem into other areas or on to other individuals. The net result of much crime prevention undoubtedly has been to heighten inequalities in the distribution ofvictimization by shifting the crime from the better to the less well-protected. It is difficult to know the precise displace-. ment effects of specific initiatives, sin~e measures ofdisplacement have only rarely been incorporated into research designs. We know, however, that crime prevention tends to work better where it is needed least and, therefore, in situations in which there continues to be an increase in virtually all categories of crime, it would seem that the conseq\lence of many strategies (such as neighbourhood watch) is to displace crime into the less well-protected areas (Bennett, 1989; Rosenbaum, 1987). Such displacement is far from inevitable, but the blinkered and individualistic vision which has underpinned so many recent crime prevention initiatives is reflected in the fact that the prevention of displacement is rarely considered an essential element in evaluating the 'success' of these measures.

iii) Encouraging 'benign' displacement The prevention of displacement must be the major objective. However, controlling displacement effects can be extremely difficult. Displacement can take a number of forms -temporal, occupational and situational. But since an element of displacement is often involved in the selection of victims -'crime patterns at any point in time are frozen displacement patterns' (Barr and Pease, 1990) -the aim must be to encourage 'benign'

forms of displacement. The policies advocated by Wilson and Kelling only serve to intensify these problems by advocating the displacement of crime away from the more 'respectable' neighbourhoods. A social democratic response should aim to avoid displacement or, alternatively, attempt to facilitate those forms of displacement, which would aim to limit the level and impact of victimization by deflecting crime and incivilities away from the most vulnerable populations.

iv) The minimization of social injury As we have seen, both crime and incivilities make an impact on different populations in various ways. The younger and wealthier sections of society have more physical and social resources to deal with crime-related problems. However, the minimization of social injury requires, on one hand, support and compensation services (such as Victim Support, group insurance, etc) to reduce the impact of crime, particularly among the more vulnerable and least resourced populations; on the other, it involves the reduction of those crimes and incivilities which have the most damaging effects. Pursuing these joint strategies may well go some way to reducing the fear of crime and its consequences. As Lewis and Salem (1986) put it: 'a fear reduction policy, like a poverty reduction strategy, attempts to redistribute a value, in this case, security. '

v) The development of intermediary agencies In opposition to encouraging the development of more aggressive policing and punitive penal policies, it has been suggested that various forms of inter-agency cooperation can be effective -particularly when the police are sensitive and responsive to the views and interests of local residents. Such strategies have been important in encouraging us to think more clearly about the role of non-police agencies in regulating a wide range of social behaviour and in inviting us to examine, in more detail, the role of different agencies at different points in the process. Strategies, however, which seek to 'implant' a solution without influencing the complex matrix of social relations in a particular locality are likely to be of limited effectiveness. Beneficial crime control measures seem to involve residents in taking responsibility and interest in their neighbourhood and the development of organizations which allow them to exert influence on local developments.

vi) The targeting of resources into areas of high crime rates and incivilities Problems of disorder can have a devastating effect on the quality of life for certain

inner-city dwellers. However, we now have a considerable amount of information about which groups and which areas need to be targeted to reduce crime and other social problems. Unlike the old 'welfare' policies which were too general and often missed their target, a more diligent and imaginative use of resources is needed. We know that a range of incivilities could be substantially reduced by providing hostels, youth clubs, drop-in centres and clinics. All these services, it might be argued, cost money, but as targeted programmes they probably compare very favourably with the cost of police patrols, court procedures and prisons -not to mention the personal and social costs of continually recycling the same marginalized population through the criminal justice system. A great deal could be done to reduce this costly recycling process.

Endnote

Finally, it could be argued with some justification that this evaluation of the 'Broken windows' hypothesis has been mounted from a predominantly British vantage point and that the problems of crime and disorder in US cities are quantitatively and qualitatively different and, therefore, require a different type of response. The complex relationship between federal and state agencies as well as the size and organization of US cities is likely to make direct comparisons impossible. However, in examining the evidence, a range ofUS literature has been used and this, in general, provides little support for the 'Broken windows' thesis. The questions which have been posed in

relation to this thesis are theoretical and logical, as well as empirical.

The current 'Americanization' of British social policy, however, involving the developments of a 'safety net' state and the widening of economic inequalities, together with the encouragement of competitive individualism and acquisitiveness, has fostered a situation in which the gap between the two countries in relation to crime and disorder appears to be narrowing at a disturbing rate.

Notes

1.   The terms 'incivilities' and 'disorder' are often used interchangeably in the lit-

erature. In general, however, 'incivilities' is used to refer to both physical and social phenomena, whereas 'disorder' is normally limited to the latter. Thus, although the term 'incivilities' is a little awkward, I have used it rather than the term 'disorder'. Also, as opposed to disorder, it is used to identify a range of problems which would not normally come under the heading of crime.

2. For the sake of convenience and clarity, it is assumed that there is a wide degree of agreement in political and theoretical terms between Wilson and Kelling. However, since most of Kelling's work is more practical, the degree of overlap between these two writers is difficult to determine. To some extent the personal variations, however, are of relatively little importance, since the aim of this chapter is to respond to a particular tendency within criminology which has become identified as 'new realism'.

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