In what ways does a city’s materiality affect the security of people living in that city?

The city’s materiality can affect people in different ways, some by perception that is incorporated into everyday routines and others by realisations that gives substance to social order, but often this happens and occurs very unobtrusively, and therefore, the city’s materiality can sometimes be taken for granted, unless of course, one is asked to confront its impact and have a sense of security that can effect people living in an urban environment within in society.

A City’s Materiality

For which a sociological interpretation of materiality can be that it is judged in terms of its inherent nature, which impacts or influences in its value and by its use of that value regarding the affects in a social world, and the circumstances for the context in which materiality occurs in the social order.

To explain simply in my own definition: ‘a city’s materiality is a built realisation of an urban social world and its social order’. And by this I mean, that a city’s materiality has its own configuration being that of a social construction through which all social processes are mediated on a daily basis, because the city’s materiality remains the same, more or less, due to its historical and environmental planning because “...[t]he city as a built formation materializes, houses, and gives substance to its social and ideological structures.” (Kapferer, 2007, p.69) which themselves can exhibit their localised social worlds that can give rise to a general public’s perception of its materiality quite markedly due to a good visible presence of its people.
To elucidate on this matter further, as David Sibley states in the "Images of difference" that the city’s materiality and the perception of “...[s]tereotypes play an important part in the configuration of social space because of the importance of distanciation in the behaviour of social groups, that is, distancing from others who are represented [and also] because of the way in which group images and place images combine to create landscapes of exclusion [or inclusion]...” (Sibley, 1995, pp.14-15; cited in Watson, 2008, pp.122), for example in group images in a city’s materiality maybe found in its residential homes, its retail outlets and offices.

And this may also occur alongside the place images such as to make a contemporary social world such as street names, its postcode, and the borough for which it is located in geographically within a city, like for instance the city of London which has thirty-two boroughs, which includes the old City of London, but excludes that of Greater London, that is situated between the main thirty-two boroughs and the rural area surrounding the capital city, so the built realisation is that its substantial state is of importance as to represent the capital of a nation, as that can affect the materiality of a city, for as stated:

“...place representations are not temporally fixed but shift in relation to transformations in dominant ideologies as they pertain to the city [and] characterizations classify and essentialize place, [although it must be said that] these characterizations are by no means fixed or uncontested, they influence public disposition toward prescriptive and proscriptive actions and policies that seek to remedy, improve, or neglect an urban area’s existing social problems and overall condition...” (Mele, 2009, p.631)
So in essence, the city’s materiality is a condition that necessitates a realisation of its communal impact upon those that live within its boundaries, as it offers its people a solid foundation of a social infrastructure that is built into their everyday lives, for example, getting to and from their location of home, which has a group image of the private sphere, which may occur on the same day but at a different time for those who are homemakers, but also as well as a safe passage to and from their location of employed work on a daily basis, which has a place image of the public sphere. Therefore conditioning the people with a feeling of assured security when transforming from one social world to the other by the means of a city’s materiality and its effect on the people living in that city.

**City and Security**

As historically, the city’s security was dependant on a visible and proactive means of guarding the people within the material boundary walls and architectural fortresses, however now in the 21st century what is meant by the city and security is entirely different, with an emphasis on subtlety and a re-active means of surveillance.

As to explain, for example CCTV cameras that materialised on mainly along the road for watching speeding and traffic congestions, on estates, tower blocks, town centres and now on public transport as a means to watch for anti-social behaviour by persons within that area, which has all the means of subtle security.

Whilst the governmentality aspect of security, as governmentality was defined by Foucault as meaning the form of activity in aiming to shape or affect an individuals conduct, for example it could be found
in the 'Neighbourhood Watch Schemes’ that was introduced in the communities in the 1980s, ensured a re-active means of security by the people within the city itself, and another example being the notices in towns that used to say 'if you see something suspicious dial 999’ which was at the height of terrorist threats in the 1990s and is still issued to those who live within the city of a standard public safety notice which has aided security in urban cities.

And this city management of risk continues today as to resolve the issue of security as a “...[p]roblem-oriented policing, first espoused by Herman Goldstein, advocates the application of scientific principles to addressing community problems. The focus is on analysing and understanding problems and developing tailored responses to reducing them...” (Met Police, 2009) for making city neighbourhoods safer, and I believe that this is where understanding the city’s materiality comes into affect, before any benefits of security would be realised, because I think without its understanding the people living within the city’s enclave wouldn’t feel its impact in their everyday lives otherwise; to have a stronger ‘ontological security’, that means in my own words, having a sense of routine that ensures entrustment from the individual person to his surroundings.

Thus the city’s security placed at certain locations and conducted by the citizens, as well as those who mediated its social concerns; such as the police force, within the towns of the city itself, for what characterised a city was “...the notion of progress, rationality and order that [was] embedded in the project of modernity [that was then] translated into planning ideas and the [necessity] to organise social and economic activities in cities in a rational, predictable and safe way...” (Watson, 2008, p.113), and by safe that meant its
security, as to be first and foremost, so that the daily lives of people could be conducted with minimal disruption to their occupations and living arrangements.

**City’s Materiality Affect on the Security of City People**

Therefore, I would argue that the city’s materiality affects the security of city people, is in their objectification and incorporation of the perceptual environment in relation to their urban space, and is thereby prompted by a sense of trust and bound by a ‘material security’ and any battle against the notion of insecurity is operated on behalf of the peopled cityscape via its materiality affect, that could be relied upon without being obtrusive to the general population of a city, but is held by its very nature, to be of substantial value and influence beyond its construct.

For one clear example of the city’s materiality affect on the security of people living in that city, is that of the street lighting, as “...adequate street lighting is a municipal necessity. Its benefits are directly allied with the aims of all who are encouraging civic advancement; its services are rich contributions to the safety, comfort, and convenience of the citizens...” (Haas, 1927, p31) that is, as it inter-relates with the nature of a city’s materiality and of a city’s security on its people in this way.

As the materiality of street and household lighting has played an important part in shaping the urban way of life in society, that is, for a city dweller, artificial lighting has allowed them whilst within their home and in the public realm of the city itself, to go on living long after darkness has descended in town even though “...darkness induces a sense of insecurity because it cuts down visibility and
recognition at a distance. Dark or dimly lit streets create a limitless source of blind-spots, shadows and potential places of entrapment. Consequently, to the extent that good quality street lighting ameliorates one of the root causes of fear, darkness, it can make a substantial contribution as a fear reducing strategy…” (Painter, 1996, p.193) and this directly affects people because that city’s security have been clearly identified and acknowledge as a weakness in the materiality of the city, by being acknowledged by experts and subsequently addressed by town planners.

Secondly, it established clearly the affect that the urban materiality of a city has on people, thereby “…[w]ithin this context, improved lighting is an immediate means of cost effectively creating a sense of public safety, enhancing the quality of the built environment and increasing the number of people on the streets after dark….“ (Painter, 1996, p.194) thus their sense of control in the wider social systems that make up society has been accorded, because the city’s adjoining streets has the same security as its main thoroughfares due to its illumination giving a wider sense of invulnerability and this inter-relates with the nature of a city’s materiality and its effects on the people.

So in summing up, I’d say that there are concrete ways that a city’s materiality affects people collectively living in an urban environment, and that is because it impacts substantially in a city’s network structure, as to be inter-related in the social world of people, thereby encompassing what it means to be living in a city due to the fact that it can offer a greater sense of security in society.
REFERENCES:


