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Security and the Urban Public Sphere

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Stories of decline have always been told about the city: In the 19th century about the deterioration of morality and order in the modern city, in the 20th century about the destruction of urbanity through functionalist urban development, and today about the loss of public space. This article defends the thesis that, although shifts are taking place in the public and private spheres, it cannot be concluded without further ado that this constitutive polarity of the European city is suffering deterioration. The thesis will be examined by taking the example of new surveillance systems in cities. It is argued that such systems are quite unable to eliminate the fundamental insecurity and ambivalence associated with public space. Fears resulting from social and economic insecurity are projected into public space, which can lead to excessive controls, which can indeed impair the publicness of urban spaces.

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