

Placing community self-governance: Building materialities, nuisance noise and neighbouring in self-governing communities

Emma R Power

University of Western Sydney, Australia

Urban Studies

2015, Vol. 52(2) 245–260

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DOI: 10.1177/0042098014525242

usj.sagepub.com



Abstract

In self-governing residential communities processes of governance through community appear to be triggering a contractualisation of neighbouring and demise in socially inflected relations. Research to date has examined the socio-political dimensions of neighbouring, highlighting governance frameworks and the social context as key forces shaping transformations in community practice. Meanwhile, the material space of residential estates has largely disappeared from view, assuming a static role as either a container for social relations or a symbol informing estate standards. This paper advances a different perspective, arguing that residential materialities must be taken seriously as agents within community governance and neighbouring. Through a case study examining the management of pets and nuisance noise in strata-titled apartments in Sydney, Australia, the paper shows that community governance takes place through the material environment. Understandings of community self-governance and the ‘building event’ are productively combined to re-place understandings of community self-governance processes.

Keywords

apartment living, building event, community self-governance, neighbouring, strata title

Received January 2013; accepted January 2014

Introduction

A growing body of research highlights transformations in neighbouring and community practices in private and social housing estates through self-governance regimes that mobilise community as a means (rather than simply site) of governance. In these communities formal governance mechanisms mobilise a form of ‘ethopower’, tying residents to contractualised community agreements with the intent that they will monitor and

self-govern their behaviour to become ‘good’, ‘responsible’ neighbours who are actively involved in estate management. Much of the existing research examines the social dimensions of the governance relation and the obligations that residents (ideally)

Corresponding author:

Emma R Power, School of Social Sciences and Psychology, University of Western Sydney, Locked Bag 1797, Penrith, New South Wales 2751, Australia.

Email: e.power@uws.edu.au

feel to community that lead them to perform as responsible neighbours (e.g. Blandy and Lister, 2005; Cheshire et al., 2009; Flint, 2003; Flint and Nixon, 2006; Flint and Rowlands, 2003; McGuirk and Dowling, 2011). Further research identifies limitations in the achievement of these ideals, noting that while some residents readily adopt rules outlined in community contracts, others appear to reject the idea that such rules are required, or simply avoid participation in community organisation (McGuirk and Dowling, 2011). Whether accepted or rejected, contractualised self-governance processes appear to be triggering considerable transformations in neighbouring dynamics, prompting a rise in depersonalised and legalistic neighbouring and a demise in socially inflected, negotiated neighbouring (Blandy and Lister, 2005; McGuirk and Dowling, 2011). These governance structures and the shifting community practices associated with them are argued to be connected to the neoliberalisation of urban space, a phenomenon seeing the expansion of privatised ownership forms and retraction of public ownership and regimes of governance. Shifting urban politics, state and developer imperatives and resident attitudes toward estate governance processes have been the focus of research to date and produced a resolutely socio-political analysis of self-governance and neighbouring. Contrastingly the material space of residential estates has largely disappeared from view, playing a relatively static role as either a container for social relations or symbol informing estate standards.

This paper argues that the material environment plays a highly dynamic role in estate processes, both co-constructing and challenging the performance of responsible neighbouring. In shaping relationships between residents, building materialities shape the social context of neighbouring and the social dimensions of the governance relation. From this perspective community self-governance

takes place through (rather than simply within or around) the material environment. Conceptually, understandings advanced in this paper bring together work on community self-governance and 'building events' (Jacobs, 2006) to re-place understandings of self-governance. In re-placing self-governance I connect with recent calls to broaden the agenda of research on "'actually existing" urban neoliberalisms' (McGuirk, 2012), recognising the broader, contingent and often imperfect assemblages that shape neoliberally inflected self-governance processes. Further, I expand the empirical scope of studies of self-governing communities. Research to date has examined social housing and private gated and master-planned estates. This paper instead examines self-governance processes within strata-titled apartments in Sydney, Australia,¹ explicitly building on McGuirk and Dowling's (2011) call in this journal for work examining the functioning and technologies of self-governance across different neighbourhood types. I draw on research examining the experiences of people living with dogs in strata apartments to investigate the governance of nuisance noise through community self-governance processes. The focus on pet keeping opens a useful window on community self-governance, first, because pet keeping is governed by strata policy, and second, because noise is a key rationale for opposition to pets in strata apartments (whether founded or unfounded), and a key source of dispute in strata (Easthope et al., 2012). The containment or transmission of pet and other noises through apartment buildings, and the ways that buildings both open up and constrain the movements of residents, opens a crucial window on the performativity of building materialities, including the ways that buildings structure relationships between residents and shape the governance process. I start with a review of community self-governance before introducing the strata context and case study.

Subsequent sections present the case study, identifying how nuisance noise and responsible neighbouring are negotiated through building materialities.

Responsible neighbouring and community contracts

Practices of community and neighbouring have a strong moral underpinning and work to discipline residents' behaviour and activities within residential communities. These capacities operate informally through unspoken moral codes and normalised practices that shape the nature of social interaction and depend upon self-regulation with the risk of social exclusion if transgressions against community norms are made (de Certeau et al., 1998). A particular focus of neighbouring moralities entails balancing community togetherness and support with an 'appropriate' social distance, for example, by keeping an eye on the neighbourhood, but without 'being a nosey neighbour' (Laurier et al., 2002: 352). These normalised moral codes shape the performance of community and are arguably central to the production of successful and harmonious neighbourhood-based sociality. They discipline and exclude individuals and households that do not perform within expectation.

Recently attention has turned to the ways that community and neighbouring relations are formally mobilised as disciplining forces. Research examines the ways that community is mobilised in a neoliberal context to constitute a form of de-centred, locally derived governance. This is a form of ethopolitics where individuals are 'governed through their associations' (Cowan and Marsh, 2004: 846), however defined, including through neighbourhoods, subcultures, age groups and ethnicities (Rose, 2000: 1399). As Rose explains:

It is from these communities that autonomous, freedom-aspiring individuals are thought to derive the guidelines, techniques and aspirations by which they think about and enact their freedom. (Rose, 2000: 1398)

These strategies are not overtly disciplinary in nature, but rather are dependent upon individuals enacting their personal freedom in the name of these techniques and guidelines. Such strategies:

can and must act on this freedom indirectly. They should try to intensify and redirect the forces that bind individuals into such groupings and relations – shame, guilt, responsibility, obligation, trust, honor and duty. This, it is thought, will intensify the virtuous consequences of such bindings – reciprocity, mutuality, cooperation, belongingness, and identity. In these ways, perhaps, free and autonomous individuals can be governed through community. (Rose, 2000: 1399)

In residential communities these strategies ideally nurture a sense of belonging and responsibility to community and activate feelings of guilt if responsibilities are not met (Cheshire et al., 2009). Consumption practices are central to these mechanisms, with 'moral and ethical value [...] attributed to particular socially sanctioned [...] forms and standards of consumption', with the middle-class consumer fashioned as the normalised and idealised citizen subject (McGuirk and Dowling, 2011: 2613; and see Flint and Rowlands, 2003). Foucauldian analyses highlight the 'politics of conduct' through which these processes are enacted and demonstrate the deployment of moral discourses that seek to develop and promote 'responsible' self-conduct that reflects community norms. Research has examined changing neighbouring dynamics in estates where these types of agreements operate. In a UK social housing context Flint and Nixon

(2006) show that local neighbourhoods, and particularly housing, are key sites through which civility is regulated. Here the promotion of 'civil' behaviour is framed as a key function of responsible citizens, and community members are encouraged to monitor and report uncivil behaviour. In private estates social contracts perform similarly (albeit administered by the body of owners rather than an external housing manager and therefore offering a greater degree of resident control that is not tied to punitive state-based behavioural regulation, see Crawford, 2003): McGuirk and Dowling (2011), for example, highlight the contractualisation of community and neighbouring in master-planned Community Title estates in Australia. In these places strata and community by-laws codify the 'material and behavioural elements of middle-class respectability' (McGuirk and Dowling, 2011: 2623), outlining supposedly 'common sense' behavioural expectations such as the importance of keeping a clean property and not impinging on others' right to the quiet enjoyment of theirs. Many (perhaps most) residents appear to accept these rules as representing the 'normal' behaviour of residents in a neighbourhood context (Cheshire et al., 2009; McGuirk and Dowling, 2011) and therefore do not view them as restrictive of their own behaviours but instead value the regulation of others' who may not share the same values and norms (Blandy and Lister, 2005). Although research suggests that these guidelines are imperfectly achieved, with some expressing outright rejection of rules and covenants (McGuirk and Dowling, 2011), it is unclear whether rejection of rules extends to the rejection of associated behaviours. Regardless, central to the success of these formal codes is the self-disciplining of resident behaviour, reinforced by the potential for other residents to complain and take formal (usually anonymous) action through the residents' committee.

In studies of self-governing communities the governance framework and social context have been identified as key forces shaping community practice. Governance frameworks and the processes of community self-governance that they instil provide an overtly legal underpinning to neighbouring practice that appears to prompt the contractualising of neighbourhood relations and a corresponding decline in socially inflected relations. In practical terms, Blandy and Lister (2005) and McGuirk and Dowling (2011) show that the internalisation of community guidelines results in residents deferring personal confrontation and instead managing and resolving neighbourhood disputes anonymously through the community or strata committee. The social context of estates is a further factor widely cited as shaping community practice and the performance of self-governance. In particular, differentiations in social class are a motivation for governance through community as well as being reproduced through these processes. For example, renters (whether in the social or private sector) are frequently constructed as 'flawed consumers', the potentially irresponsible residents for whom by-laws are essential management devices (Cheshire et al., 2010; Flint and Rowlands, 2003). Strongly classed by-laws and covenants work to discipline these outsiders (Cheshire et al., 2009; McGuirk and Dowling, 2011; Sauger, 2000).

However, while legal contracts and social difference are foregrounded as playing productive roles in the reconstitution of neighbouring relations in self-governing estates, the material environment of housing estates has been afforded a secondary and much more limited role. To date residential materialities have been discussed in a largely symbolic way. In private estates this has involved marking the estate as unique, prestige and exclusive, establishing an aesthetic benchmark that reflects middle-class aesthetic values and which residents should

aspire to maintain (Cheshire et al., 2009; McGuirk and Dowling, 2011). In social housing the material environment performs similarly, providing a proxy judgement of resident responsibility and 'class' (Flint, 2004). Well maintained properties are said by housing providers to indicate a more responsible and higher standard of tenant (Saugeres, 2000). Community governance frameworks are entwined with this symbolic role, making the upkeep of the material environment a key community goal and resident requirement. Residents are responsible for maintaining their individual spaces to community standards, and in private estates contributing funds toward maintenance of shared facilities including streetscapes, local parks and private facilities such as swimming pools.

The more-than-symbolic materiality of privately governed estates is a significant absence in existing studies. Buildings are more than a context or stage upon which residents' lives are lived; rather, they actively shape practices of inhabitation. This power incorporates the intentional activity of architects, who 'preconfigure, limit, and engender particular effects to accomplish very particular goals' (Kraftl and Adey, 2008: 213; and see Miller, 2001), for example, designing a building 'to feel "welcoming" or "homely" or "tranquil", and induce appropriate behaviours in its human occupants as if it had "an unwritten code of conduct"' (Rose et al., 2010: 339; citing Kraftl and Adey, 2008). It also incorporates effects outside of those intended by the designer. This incorporates the agency of buildings themselves which, as Jacobs and Cairns (2011: 93) remind, are 'not simply a pre-designed and made container for a social world of domestic living, but rather live in their own way: expanding, crumbling, falling, wearing and tearing' in a performance of their component materials. This performance of building materialities impacts upon and alters the experience of

inhabitation, shaping the ways that people inhabit, move through and even feel within buildings. Strebel (2011: 244), for example, shows that inhabitants of buildings 'organise their activities, not simply with respect to co-workers and other people involved, but with respect to a specific layout and arrangement of the built environment'. Exploring emotions and affects, Lees and Baxter (2011) explore the sense of fear experienced by one resident of a social housing block in London, demonstrating that the building was a key factor shaping what they come to describe as a 'building event of fear'. In this case the building both set the scene and was productive of fear. Power (2009) similarly shows that residential construction styles can shape feelings of homeyness and unhomeyness, whilst also structuring senses of belonging. Buildings are thus more than a simple stage or setting for human activities and instead emerge as potentially significant players in the constitution of everyday activities and rhythms of neighbouring and community. These understandings mesh with earlier studies of neighbouring practice that point to the spatialities of neighbouring relations. Laurier et al. (2002), for example, foreground the importance of distance in the ordering of neighbourly relations, showing that distance is created and maintained through the ways that people orient themselves to structures such as fences (not looking over them) and front doors (only approaching them if there is a specific purpose). Likewise, examining neighbourhood disputes, Stokoe and Wallwork (2003) highlight the moralisation of neighbouring and neighbours through space, with 'bad' neighbours identified as those that transgress 'private' boundaries. These boundaries and other key sites such as the front step and door are key neighbouring sites, though the spaces and objects themselves appear as relatively static elements around

which neighbouring takes place. In this paper I expand these discussions recognising not just the spatial context, but also the more-than-human materiality of buildings and its role in structuring the relations of neighbouring and neighbourhood governance.

Building on these understandings, in the analysis of community self-governance that follows, I imagine residents' practices as a form of 'dwelling *with*' rather than simply 'in' buildings (Jacobs and Merriman, 2011: 214). As buildings affect neighbouring I argue that they play a much more than symbolic role in community self-governance. In particular, as buildings concurrently bring residents together and hold them apart they profoundly shape the performance and construction of the ir/responsible neighbour. I first overview the research context, highlighting the strata context and the nature of responsabilisation in strata communities.

The strata context: Legislation and responsabilising community

Strata is often described as a fourth tier of governance in Australia, sitting beneath the Federal, State and Local tiers (Easthope and Randolph, 2008). However, the growing prevalence of Community Title (governing the horizontal division of land within estates such as master-planned communities) means that Strata Title is a fifth tier of governance within some estates. In these Strata Title is both nested within and operates as a separate tier of governance, with its own mechanisms for self-governance and expectations of responsible neighbouring. Approximately half the buildings in this research operated within a Community Title context. Strata Title and Community Title are legislated by State government in Australia. Strata title provides the governance context for the majority of apartment buildings in Australia.

Prior to strata legislation, Company Title saw apartment properties owned and managed by an elected Board of Directors. In this formulation residents and the Board were responsible to the Company. Strata Title instead provides for individual ownership of unit lots within a building, and makes building management the responsibility of the community of owners (New South Wales Law Reform Commission, 2007). The legal framework in New South Wales, the *Strata Schemes Management Act* (1996), provides guidelines for the management of strata schemes and model by-laws that can be adopted by new schemes.

Strata by-laws differ across buildings. Although typically based around the model by-laws in the Act, they can be amended by owners' corporations to reflect the needs of specific buildings and groups of owners. By-laws can be made in relation to activities including:

safety and security measures; details of any common property of which the use is restricted; the keeping of pets; parking; floor coverings; garbage disposal; behaviour; architectural and landscaping guidelines to be observed by lot owners; matters appropriate to the type of strata scheme concerned. (*Strata Schemes Management Act* 1996)

By-laws can address the use and maintenance of the built environment, as well as governing behaviour within individual and communal spaces.²

Strata Title shifted the nature and location of responsibility and ethical practice in apartment governance. Whereas in Company Title the orientation of ethical practice and responsibility is toward the Company as a singular entity, in Strata Title responsibility is oriented toward the community of owners in addition to the community of occupants (who may not be owners). These responsibilities are outlined throughout the Act, but most overtly in Chapter 4,

Part 1, sections 116 and 117, which outline the 'responsibilities of owners, occupiers and other persons relating to lots'. These two sections foreground the responsibility of these groups 'not to interfere with the structure of lot or services to lot', and 'not to create nuisance'. These responsibilities are broad and traverse practices and relationships across the social and material (particularly the infrastructural) dimensions of community. These sections of the Act do not sit in isolation but rather cross-cut the Act, including through opportunities to be involved within decision-making processes, property appearance, and the rights and responsibilities of residents across diverse fields including pet ownership.

Strata title informs ownership and management of building materialities. In Strata Title individual property ownership is of the lot 'airspace', extending from the coat of paint on the boundary walls, while physical structures 'outside' the paint, including walls, ceilings and electrical and water connections, remain the responsibility of strata (Fair Trading, 2011). For example, light fittings recessed into the ceiling are the responsibility of strata, while those suspended in the lot (below the ceiling) are the responsibility of the apartment owner (Fair Trading, 2011). Wall insulation and doors are owned by strata and individual owners cannot change these structures without approval. For instance, individual owners cannot insulate walls or replace hollow cavity doors without strata support. This fundamental entwinement of building materialities and governance frameworks foregrounds the importance of an approach that engages with the ways that building materialities shape community governance.

Research methods

The research examined the experiences of people living with dogs in apartments in

Sydney. Reflecting the distribution of pet-friendly apartments in Sydney the focus was on suburbs to the north, east and inner-west of the city. Only one participant lived in an outer suburban location. Participants were recruited through local media and advertising, including fliers delivered to known pet-friendly buildings.

Participants were nearly all women (21 women, 5 men across 23 households), a statistic reflecting the gendering of pet care (Fifield and Forsyth 1999). They tended to be from two distinct social groups: retired, or young professionals. This reflects the demographics of apartment living in inner-city Sydney which is dominated by these groups (Randolph and Tice, 2013). Participants were all dog owners at the time of interview. Participants lived in three dominant apartment types. The first were new, medium- to high-rise buildings up to 16 storeys (eight visited). These were predominately security buildings with secured access into and, sometimes, between different sections of the building. The second were new low-rise buildings with up to four storeys (five visited). These were both small (e.g. six apartments) and large scale (e.g. 50–60 apartments across a series of buildings in the one complex) and were typically security buildings, with residents sometimes restricted to the floor that they lived on. These two building types were typically constructed around a concrete core. The third type were older buildings constructed in the early to mid-twentieth century (ten visited). A small number had security intercoms at the main door, but the majority did not. In the latter, members of the public and residents could enter the building and access floors freely. These apartments were of two key types: small three-storey buildings with two to three apartments per floor; two buildings were larger, up to six storeys high and housing up to 24 apartments.

Participants took part in a diary-interview method, keeping a photographic

diary for one week and participating in a 1–1.5 hour recorded interview examining their everyday routines with their dog; their familiarity with others in the building, how they had come to know them and how other residents responded to their dog. They were also asked to discuss the strata context, including their familiarity with strata laws relating to their dog and how these functioned in practice. A focus on practices of homemaking, pet keeping and neighbouring underpinned engagement with building materialities and allowed buildings to emerge as agents within these social relations. Photographic diaries were not designed to gain a comprehensive log of human–dog activities, but rather encouraged participants to reflect on their daily routines in their building and enabled the researcher to be part of a diverse range of activities that participants engaged in with their dogs. Photographs from participant diaries were used to prompt discussion of routines. The researcher additionally maintained a diary of reflections about buildings visited, including descriptions of the built environment. These qualitative techniques examined the diverse ways that participants interacted with their dogs and neighbours. Analysis for this paper focused on instances where strata by-laws were operationalised or questioned. These themes are presented in the remainder of the paper, which examines how nuisance noise and ‘responsible’ neighbouring were produced and governed in a strata context. The first section identifies the production of nuisance noise and its intersection with responsible neighbouring; the second section reflects on the governance of nuisance noise.

Pets, noise and community decision-making

The production and governance of noise and ‘responsible’ neighbouring are the focus of the remainder of the paper. These are

intersecting issues in strata living, with ‘noise’, and residents perceived as ‘irresponsible’ through their production of nuisance noise, a source of conflict within many buildings (Easthope et al., 2012). In residential apartments noise is any sound heard by others that constitutes a disruption or disturbance. Under strata legislation this noise can be classified as a ‘nuisance’ and a noise complaint served. Dogs that are a source of noise can be removed from the building. Complaint processes are typically initiated through a complaint made to the strata committee and a notice being issued to the resident responsible. If a strata committee fails to act on a complaint, or if a recipient of a complaint notice continues to produce the nuisance noise, the complaint can proceed to formal adjudication and a ‘notice to comply’ issued. This can involve fines to the infringing resident. Involved parties can appeal the adjudicator’s decision through an appeal to the ‘Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal’ (Fair Trading, 2011).

Noise is critical to the definition and performance of responsible neighbouring as articulated in strata legislation. In the context of noise, responsible neighbours are those who do not disturb neighbours with personal and household sounds by letting these sounds invade the common areas of buildings or, more importantly, into the private spaces of others’ apartments. The discussion that follows examines nuisance noise and the practice of ir/responsible neighbouring through noise. The discussion is in two sections. The first argues that noise is not simply a product of irresponsible neighbouring, but should instead be understood as a building event. This opens up the idea of the ‘responsible’ neighbour, suggesting that responsibility is in part produced in relation with the material context of the apartment building. The second section examines how building materialities impact on the relationships between people living in apartment

buildings and how these relationships in turn shape neighbouring and the governance of nuisance noise in strata. Together these sections point to self-governance, responsabilisation and neighbouring as sociomaterial complexes that take place not just within but through buildings.

Nuisance noise and responsible neighbouring

The materiality and spatiality of buildings together play a key role in the production of nuisance noise through the containment of sounds, the transformation of sound into noise and, it will be shown, the co-production of noise. Rather than being simply the product of an irresponsible or nuisance neighbour (or their dog), nuisance noises are a building event co-produced with and through buildings. The experiences of one participant, Judy, who had lived in two different buildings with her dog, capture the role of these dual forces.

In the last year Judy had moved into a new apartment. On her second day in the building her dog barked throughout the day:

I came home – there was an old lady who lived downstairs, and she said all the barking – it hasn't stopped all day. She was out in the garden yelling up at him, which was probably why he was barking.

[...] So I got a letter from the executive committee saying we've had a complaint. Your dog has been barking all day – maybe you shouldn't leave him on the balcony – maybe you should think about this.

The dog was identified as a barker, not just by the resident who heard the dog and complained, but also for posterity in the strata minutes and file of official letters. Judy was distressed and acted quickly, purchasing a citronella collar, a disciplinary device that would squirt her dog with citronella if it barked. The device's sound-sensitive switch

extended Judy's disciplining through time and space, keeping the dog in line when she was not present. Although many dogs develop strategies to by-pass these devices, Judy's did not. She also closed the veranda door during the day to confine the dog within the apartment – reducing the possibility of outside noises disturbing her dog, and of any barking leaking out through the window. Over time, once Judy was satisfied that her dog would no longer bark and her neighbours were comfortable having a dog in the building, Judy stopped using the citronella collar. She did not receive any more complaints, and the dog began to be recognised as a quiet dog. Through this period Judy's identity as a responsible neighbour was first challenged and then confirmed and solidified. Two questions emerge from this example: first, why the dog barked and what turned this bark into a disturbance?; and second, what turns any sound into a recordable and punishable nuisance? For Judy it may have been the unfamiliarity of a new home, or something outside, perhaps even the neighbour yelling from the garden, that prompted the barking. It is possible the dog continued to bark after this first event but that the neighbours did not hear him because the veranda door was closed; it was also possible that he barked, but then stopped because the lady did not yell. This issue played out around the definition, identification and management of nuisance noise, and drew together social, governance and, central to this paper, material components of apartment living. The building and its context played a critical role. A comparison between Judy's current and former buildings makes the role of the spatiality and materiality of the building apparent. The dog *had* been a barker at a previous building, barking when disturbed by noises outside the apartment. This happened regularly because the apartment was near the front door, which people passed throughout the day:

he was very good but even when I was at home, if a whole lot of people came home and they were running up the stairs, and making a lot of noise, he would go *grrrr* then, because it's quite close to where we were. [...] So he might have done it when I'm not there. In fact, the caretaker told me sometimes he did, because he'd get complaints.

Other residents heard his growls because the apartments were extremely close together: 'there was no privacy there. There was nothing between. There was just the window and then you could hear full on conversations'.

By contrast, her new apartment had a different spatial and material context, positioned not near the front door but in the top left corner. Judy described this as:

another real advantage for me [...] There's no reason for anyone to walk past our door. So that was a major plus for me in buying the apartment.

This spatiality meant the dog could not hear resident or visitor footsteps and therefore did not bark as regularly as at the previous apartment. The only disturbances came from outside, and once the veranda door was closed the distance from the ground meant that these were few. Further, the solid brick construction of this art deco double-brick building meant that sounds were absorbed into the building mass and did not readily transfer between apartments. In this spatial and material context Judy's dog became a dog that did not bark and Judy in turn became a responsible neighbour and a responsible dog owner who was seen to keep her dog under control.

Noise – its occurrence and its identification as noise, and as a disturbance – is an event that is entwined with building spatiality and materialities. In the research some dogs barked because they could hear noises in other parts of the building – or did not bark, because they were separated from other spaces and sounds and were not

disturbed. Others barked and their sounds were absorbed into the building, the solid brick or concrete walls enveloping and suppressing any sound, preventing it escaping into common areas or other units. For others sound flowed through flimsy walls, around gaps, and through hollow cavity constructed front doors and disturbed by-passers and neighbours. Others barked but no-one could identify the source because of the way it transferred and oscillated around and through the building.

In Gabriella's neighbourhood it was apartments facing other buildings that experienced most disruption from barking dogs, similarly, in Leisa's building a barking dog disturbed her and one immediate neighbour, but no-one else in the building. The people who were affected were:

down there [down the road] because the sound carries a lot with the barking. In the situation where that dog was, it faced other buildings and it faced the park and the sound would really carry over there.

Rhoda similarly could not hear her neighbours, and they could not hear her dog barking. However, she was regularly disturbed by the 'really loud' music of people in a different building whose lounge room faced onto her study; likewise these people could hear her dog. In the first few weeks with the new puppy the neighbours screamed for them to 'shut that dog up', while Rhoda's husband yelled (along with other neighbours) for them to turn their music down.

Quirks of apartment design and materiality can transfer sounds into unusual places, causing them to echo around courtyards and between buildings, to bounce off walls and ricochet around corners. Buildings also magnify sounds. The sound of Janice's dog running around her apartment transferred into the apartment below, stirring the neighbour's dog up, causing it to bark and

problematizing it within the strata minutes. Jasper had a problem with a dog that he was given when it first arrived at his home in central Sydney.

Interviewee: he's got quite a piercing bark. [...] Once he goes, it's a case of stopping him as quickly as possible. [...] So simply put, it definitely carries. It carries out onto the street and it does echo a bit down the street as well.

Facilitator: [...] do you mean the courtyard area between the restaurant and here, it bounces around? [...]

Interviewee: Yeah but you can still hear him if he gets up there and he starts teeing off at a dog across the road, you can hear him on the far side of the wharf, you can hear him down the road. You can hear him to a lesser extent in the courtyard. I suppose it's slightly round the corner. The noise of him does carry because of his particular bark. [...] It's absolutely piercing, especially also when they see fire engines and they get up and they start howling. Once they've finished howling, he shrieks. It's just absolutely incredible the noise.

Amazingly, Jasper's neighbours within the building could not hear his dogs, the solid internal walls absorbing the sound and preventing its dissemination through the building. Rather it was passing pedestrians and people in the building across the road that heard them.

Buildings – or more specifically the materials that they are constructed from – also produce sounds. A drill, for example, makes little sound when spinning freely in air; inserted into a wood framed door or even the double-brick walls of an older style building it might produce a low vibration that is heard by the driller and others in adjacent apartments. Inserted into the wall of a tall apartment building with its tensioned concrete innards, however, it becomes a vibrating and resonating force that, quite literally, shakes the building to its core. Abbey explained noise transfer in her building:

It's really weird. I don't know. These apartments are really well built. Out of all of them, I think these are the better built. So once you close your front door, I never hear music, I never hear televisions. The only time there is noise is when you get people – like workmen – drilling because of course it's a concrete structure so the noise just travels. So you can't tell whether it's above you or on the 15th floor. The noise is just drilling sound.

The co-production of sound is common across all residential contexts but has particular resonance in high density living where residents not only live close together, but share common walls and other structures that can transfer sound. In strata contexts this is even more significant as a result of formal governance mechanisms that regulate resident behaviour, identifying and penalising irresponsible and 'nuisance' neighbours. However, as these examples illustrate, nuisance noise is an assemblage created through building materialities. It is allied with what Jacobs (2006) might describe as a building event: it is produced through the building, and its impact, including its apprehension as a nuisance, is a co-production of the building. Attention to building materialities and noise co-production works to open up the idea of responsible neighbouring, suggesting that it is perhaps appropriate to think about nuisance noise as not simply a product of inconsiderate neighbouring but equally as residents betrayed by their building.

By-laws governing 'responsible' behaviour are in an essential relationship with the material environment, not simply keeping up appearance, but also regulating auditory components by regulating behaviour in and through buildings. Additional economic and socio-legal dimensions flavour these relations. Residents with financial capita or who own their apartment can outsource their responsibility to other actors, for example, a citronella collar to deter dog barking (all residents), or insulation around leaky doorways

(owners). Less well-off residents and renters must instead alter their behaviours or risk sanctions. This foregrounds the innate moral geographies shaping social contracts in private housing communities where, as Flint (2004: 906) notes in a UK social housing context, 'individual moral deficiency, rather than poor noise insulation levels [is the focus of..] discourse on neighbourhood disputes'.

Governing nuisance noise

Strata by-laws provide a framework for monitoring and disciplining nuisance behaviour. Previous research (e.g. McGuirk and Dowling, 2011) has argued that these formal governance frameworks lead to legalistic neighbouring practices and the reduction of socially inflected neighbouring. In the following section it is argued that while the strata process provides an immediate legal framework through which these neighbouring processes can proceed, the built and material environment is equally implicated in these shifts. Building materialities shape the governance process by impacting on the ability of residents to identify the origin of nuisance noises, and shaping the social dynamics of apartment buildings.

Buildings that obscure the origin of building-sounds challenge the governance of nuisance noise. The place where sounds are loudest can, sometimes, be the furthest point from where they are made. Judy's neighbour at the bottom, opposite corner of her building was more disturbed by the dog barking, which travelled out the window, down around the building, and into her window, than her immediate neighbour who did not report a sound. Sound also flows in hidden ways: through lift shafts, stairwells and air conditioning ducts, which track secret pathways through buildings, in between floors and inside wall cavities, bouncing and even amplifying sounds in their galvanised steel innards before shooting them out into different

apartments in different parts of the building. Such pathways can only be identified through a schematic plan or auditory tour.

Hidden sounds caused residents to learn their building in new ways, travelling and navigating its sound contours and tracing auditory flows rather than their usual ground-based bodily flows. Rather than entering the building, accessing the lift or stairs and walking purposefully to their destination, residents' traced the flow of sound through space, listening at places where the air was most textured by sound and using their building knowledge to track its origin. Some walked slowly past doors to trace the origin of leaking music and dog barks. Janice recounted standing outside her building with neighbours and counting up the number of verandas until the one where the sound was loudest and the small black nose of a Cocker Spaniel protruded; they mobilised this counting and their knowledge of the internal configuration of the building to identify the apartment that was the origin of the sound. Being unfamiliar with the layout of the building opposite, Rhada could only feel annoyed or yell across the void to the music players. Difficulties identifying the origin of sounds reduced the capacity of neighbours to complain whether through direct approach to the noise maker, or through formal strata processes.

Building security functions further obfuscated the identification and governance of sound, restricting affected residents from accessing those parts of the building that appeared to be its origin. The majority of buildings visited included at least front door security preventing any non-resident from accessing the building. Many buildings additionally included floor security functions so that residents could only access their own floor. This limits bodily movement around a building, making it more difficult to identify the source of nuisance sounds and difficult

to personally approach individuals or households perceived as responsible. As Rhada recounted:

So I think actually the noise problem is with two bigger blocks facing each other because the noise just travels straight through. Because their lounge room faces onto that room, so when they're playing music really loud, I've often felt like complaining. But not knowing even who to complain to because I don't know – I know what building it is. So if I really wanted to I could find out who their strata managers were and work it through that. But I don't even know which unit within the block it is.

The inability to move around a building and talk with neighbours was a key trigger for legalistic, strata committee-based neighbouring. At the same time, security mechanisms afford power to key individuals such as building managers and executive committee members whose access keys open up their capacity to move through buildings – and, therefore, to determine the nature of nuisance noise, its origin and penalty.

Buildings also shape neighbouring and governance relations in more subtle ways, affecting or impressing upon the body and giving rise to distinct actions, feelings and emotions such as the pressing senses of fear created in lonely stairwells and lifts of the social housing block considered by Lees and Baxter (2011). Rather than reverting to security functions that physically restrict and discipline movement and access, the feeling or atmosphere of a building can also shape behaviour and the ways that people move through shared spaces. My experiences as a visitor in these buildings illustrates this function. The feeling of buildings visited for this research was of a pressing anonymity. Security functions meant I could not enter most buildings without buzzing the occupant through an intercom system. In some larger buildings I was

buzzed through multiple doors and up lifts. Sometimes I was met at an external door and chaperoned across courtyards, through doorways, up lifts and into the apartment. I only rarely encountered another resident; when I did it was people passing through the hallways on their way into or out of the building. The common landscape in these places was of fluorescently lit carpeted hallways, which connected vertically by stairs and lifts, and opened horizontally onto more hallways and closed doors. In buildings with security entrances doors were solid in appearance; in buildings without security entrances an additional security door was common, allowing the occupant to open their internal door and view any visitor. The feeling of these spaces was of absence, and, from the outside, occupants are a present absence: it is assumed that the units are occupied but any sense of who occupants might be, if they are home, is obscured. The feeling of these places, that presses on the visitor, is of privacy and seclusion. Not the sort of place where it is appropriate to wander, or knock on doors. I am greeted with surprise and suspicion when I knock on the incorrect door in a few buildings. My experiences as a visitor connect strongly with those recounted by participants. Neighbours were met at strata meetings if they were owners and attended, or in the common hallways, lifts and mail room, on the off chance that residents happened to coincide there. Residents did not knock on other's front doors, unless they knew the person or had an invitation. This was particularly true for residents of larger buildings, which were typically described as anonymous and even unfriendly:

The thing about strata living, as far as I'm – I don't want to live in each other's pocket but it's friendly. Everyone says hello in the lift. Everyone says have a good day, how've you been. But I don't want people knocking on my

door all the time and saying, what are you up to? Can I come in? (Adam)

Neighbours actively avoided eye contact when they met in the hallway:

at first I was like trying to say hello to everyone I saw and then afterwards I guess you kind of give up as well. You just think oh well, that's just how it is. (Rhada)

These senses of anonymity are as much a product of the social rules of neighbouring which demand friendliness in conjunction with privacy, as they are of the buildings themselves. Security functions that limit residents to their own floor or restrict building access entirely only instil this further by preventing people from moving freely around their building.

Senses of uncertainty, privacy, anonymity and separateness instilled by buildings feed into strata governance processes as much as they do ordinary relations of neighbouring. The built environment thus constitutes the neighbouring and governance context in multiple ways, shaping and structuring the places and means through which residents encounter one another whether that be physically, affectively or sensually, such as through sound. Where neighbours were held apart by the building, issues around nuisance sound were approached remotely through the strata committee, or through notes and posters in public spaces. Personal notices displayed in public areas of some buildings, such as in the lift, pleaded with the noise maker to 'keep it down'. In this way buildings not only shaped responsabilised neighbouring, co-constituting residents as responsible and considerate or irresponsible and inconsiderate by shaping the nature of encounter between neighbours, they also informed the neighbouring event and the governance event. These buildings challenged socially inflected neighbouring and favoured socially detached, legally based relations.

Conclusions: Community self-governance, neighbouring and building events

Self-governance, responsabilisation and neighbouring are sociomaterial complexes that take place not just within but through buildings, as illustrated here through the case study of nuisance noise. First, buildings turn some sounds into nuisance noises, or, contrastingly, absorb and invisibilise them. This co-creates residents as 'good neighbours', or contrastingly, as 'bad' and 'irresponsible'. Governance processes are inherently entwined with the built environment, with strata by-laws compensating for deficiencies in the built environment through regulation of resident behaviour. The financial capacity of some residents to outsource their 'responsibility' to sound-proofing agents, while others become subject to formal noise complaints and even (in the case of dogs and tenants) evicted, foregrounds the moral economies and geographies shaping these processes and the importance of re-placing and re-materialising studies of self-governance.

Second, the affective dimensions of neighbouring and self-governance processes have been highlighted. Building design and security functions affect and proscribe neighbouring relations: neighbours sharing a floor might share common hallways and be able to access one another's doors, while those immediately above and below may be connected by infrastructural flows and the ceiling/floor interface, but unable to access one another's floors. This limits opportunities for personalised, socially inflected neighbouring and alters the nature of possible responses to neighbouring disputes, in this research prompting depersonalised and legalistic neighbouring. Where previous research has suggested that the growth of legally based neighbouring is a by-product of community self-governance processes, these examples suggest that this phenomenon

might be equally influenced by the materiality and spatial design of buildings which works to hold residents apart.

Third, the paper has pointed to the potential for building materialities to disrupt resident responsabilisation. Responsibilising processes depend on individuals modifying their behaviours whether through senses of 'shame, guilt, responsibility, obligation, trust, honour [or] duty' (Rose, 2000: 1399). In apartment communities the responsibilities of neighbours are codified in strata by-laws. When buying in to these places, owner occupiers do not simply buy a set of property rights, but buy into a set of governmental objectives that define their responsibilities as neighbours. However, this paper suggests that some buildings may counteract these responsabilising urges, holding residents apart and diminishing the capacity for affects such as guilt and obligation to act on residents and promote self-regulation and community-minded neighbouring, in turn making legalistic interventions more likely. Rhada's neighbour, who persistently played loud music despite knowing that the noise was disturbing residents of an opposing block, may be evidence of this.

These trends speak to the imperfect spaces of neoliberal governance and the sometimes conflictual tendencies encoded within governance frameworks and built environments. This dissonance means that buildings can both reinforce and undermine the intent of community self-governance regimes and foregrounds the importance of analyses that examine the places and materialities of self-governance.

Funding

This research was funded by a University of Western Sydney Early Career Researcher Seed Grant.

Notes

1. Strata title is a governance framework allowing for multi-ownership of apartment

buildings, as outlined later. Apartment buildings can also be the property of one owner. This type of building is not governed by Strata Title and residents are hence not beholden to the forms of responsibility outlined in the Strata Act. Neighbouring in this context may mirror that in a strata context, but is not legally governable.

2. Community title also addresses these types of issues. It also frequently encompasses the privatisation of formerly public facilities such as roads, green space and garbage management, which in many instances are managed through private contractors. Strata title by contrast is more focused around the shared ownership of formerly privately owned facilities such as driveways. A further differentiation is in ownership rights. While in Community Title developments it is common for the community to have approval rights over development or changes to the external appearance of a property, changes inside the property are usually at the discretion of the owner. In Strata Title, however, individual ownership extends only from the coat of paint in.

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