

# **CULTURAL CRIMINOLOGY: SOME NOTES ON THE SCRIPT**

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## **Introduction**

Let us start with a question: what is this phenomenon called 'cultural criminology'? Above all else, it is the placing of crime and its control in the context of culture; that is, viewing both crime and the agencies of control as cultural products - as creative constructs. As such they must be read in terms of the meanings they carry. Furthermore, cultural criminology seeks to highlight the interaction between these two elements: the relationship and the interaction between constructions upwards and constructions downwards. Its focus is always upon the continuous generation of meaning around interaction; rules created, rules broken, a constant interplay of moral entrepreneurship, moral innovation and transgression.

Going further still, it strives to place this interplay deep within the vast proliferation of media images of crime and deviance, where every facet of offending is reflected in a vast hall of mirrors (see Ferrell, 1999). It attempts to make sense of a world in which the street scripts the screen and the screen scripts the street. Here there is no linear sequence, rather the line between the real and the virtual is profoundly and irrevocably blurred.

All of these attributes: the cultural nature of crime and control, their interaction in an interplay of constructions, and the mediation through fact and fiction, news and literature, have occurred throughout history and are thus a necessary basis for any criminology which claims to be 'naturalistic'. However, what makes cultural criminology quintessentially late modern is twofold: Firstly, there is the extraordinary emphasis on creativity, individualism and generation of lifestyle in the present period coupled with a mass media which has expanded and proliferated so as to transform human subjectivity. From this perspective, the virtual community becomes as real as the community outside one's door – reference groups, vocabularies of motive, and identities become global in their demesne. Secondly, there is a shared understanding that it was at the beginning of the late modern period that the antecedents of cultural criminology emerged. For it was in the mid-seventies that the cultural turn occurred within the social sciences. Paramount here is the work of Clifford Geertz, whose symbolic anthropology has had influence across disciplines from history through literature, from political science to labour history (see, for example, Berlanstein, 1993). Here the emphasis is on understanding social action in terms of the deep reading of culture. Thus Geertz wrote:

The concept of culture I espouse ... is essentially a semiotic one. Believing with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself

has spun, I take culture to be these webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning.' (Geertz 1973: 5; see also commentary in Harcourt, 2001: 109-121)

Explicit in this endeavour is a stress on the interpretative rather than the mechanistic; the naturalistic rather than the positivistic. Accordingly both a reduction of human action to a reflex of the material situation or a positivistic enactment of a pre-given culture are ruled out of court. In this domain an interpretative analysis focusing on the way in which human actors generate meaning becomes paramount.

Parallel to this development, a similar movement - cultural in its focus and post modernist in its sensibility - occurred in the sociology of deviance. As Stan Cohen famously put it: 'After the mid 1960's - well before Foucault made these subjects intellectually respectable and a long way from the Left Bank - our little corner of the human sciences was seized by a deconstructionist impulse.' (1997: 101). In Britain, there were two major influences on this process of deconstruction: phenomenology and subcultural theory. The radical phenomenological tradition of Becker, Kitsuse and Lemert, supplemented by the social constructionist work of writers such as Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, was extraordinarily influential. Particularly insofar as it involved a stress upon the existential freedoms of those 'curtailed' and 'oppressed' by the labels and essentialism(s) of the powerful. This was never truer than in David Matza's book, *Becoming Deviant* (1969), with its concepts of 'naturalism', 'drift', pluralism, ambiguity and irony, on the one hand, and crime as transgression on the other. The synthesis of such an approach with subcultural theory commenced in the late sixties at the London School of Economics with David Downes' book *The Delinquent Solution* (1966). Here an emphasis on both subcultures as 'problem solvers' and the expressive rather than the instrumental nature of much juvenile delinquency began to neutralise the more wooden American sub-cultural theory of the Mertonian tradition. Culture was not a thing out there to be learnt and enacted, rather lifestyles were something which constantly evolved. This line of inquiry was further developed in the work of PhD students at the LSE, including Mike Brake (1980), Stan Cohen (1972) and Jock Young (1971), all of whom focused on how deviant subcultures were both created by the actors involved and mediated and constructed by the impact of the mass media and the interventions of the powerful. It gathered further theoretical traction at the National Deviancy Conference; the work of Phil Cohen (1972), Ian Taylor (1971), and Geoff Pearson (1975) all stressing the need for a humanistic sociology of deviance that had at its core a sensitive ethnographic method. Finally, it came of age at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, most notably in the various analyses of youth culture undertaken by Stuart Hall, John Clarke, Dick Hebdidge, Tony Jefferson and Paul Willis (see, for example, Hall and Jefferson, 1975; Hebdidge, 1978; Willis, 1977). In this body of work, youth culture is seen as a hive of creativity, an arena of magical solutions where symbols are bricolaged into lifestyles, a place of identity and discovery and, above all, a site of resistance.

This re-working of American sociology replaced a narrow subcultural theorisation with notions of expressivity and style, relocating transgression as a source of meaning and 'leisure'. It evoked a rich narrative of symbolism and an awareness of mediated reality. By the mid eighties such a humanistic sociology, buttressed by strong critiques of positivistic methods, was a major force within criminology. Since then, however, there has been a palpable lurch back to positivism. It is in this context that cultural criminology seeks to retrace its roots and move on into the twenty first century.

What is the reason for this hiatus? One does not have to look far to identify the external, material forces that have transformed criminology. To start with there is the continued expansion of the criminal justice system, particularly, of course, in the United States, but also in the majority of Western countries. This seemingly unchecked development involves massive expenditure on prisons, police, treatment regimes, and crime prevention devices, from CCTV to electronic 'tagging'. It is a process accompanied and augmented by the 'war' against drugs and, more recently, 'the war against terrorism'. Such developments have ensured, of course, that the demand for consultancy and evaluative research has rocketed. These transformations are clearly reflected in the way criminology is now taught and delivered in Western universities, as departments respond to new demands to train criminal justice personnel, both practitioners and researchers. Indeed, the exponential growth in criminal justice studies has ensured that this sub-discipline is now the largest sector of social science teaching. Students, who once would have studied social policy and administration, now routinely study criminal justice – a clear consequence of the movement from welfare to 'justice system' interventions as the leading edge of social policy. Further, the restricted funding available for higher education has led to considerable pressure on faculty to bring in external funding from research (see Robinson, 2001). The crime control industry has, therefore, come to exert a hegemonic influence upon academic criminology. The 'wars' against crime, drugs, terrorism, and now 'anti-social behaviour' demands facts, numbers, quantitative incomes and outcomes – it does *not* demand debates as to the very nature of these battles. Nor for that matter does it want to question definition, rather it wants 'hard' facts and 'concrete' evidence. The social basis for positivism is thus assured. Couple this with the ascendance of neo-liberal thinking in the economic and political sphere, and the movement into an unmediated market society where market values become the dominant ethos (see Taylor, 1999; Hayward, 2004a), and there is the basis for the development of rational choice theory – a form, as we will argue later, of market positivism.

The response in the academy has been substantial and far-reaching. Research has begun to be dominated by statistical testing, theory has been downplayed, and 'soft' data eschewed (see Ferrell, this issue). It takes little reflection to realise that the now dominant journal format - ill-developed theory, regression analysis usually followed by rather inconclusive results - is, in fact, a relatively recent genre. Data that is in fact technically weak (because of the well known difficulties inherent in the collection of statistics whether by the police, victimisation studies, or self-report studies) and, by its very nature, contested,

blurred, ambiguous, and unsuited for quantification, is mindlessly churned through personal computers. The journals and the articles become myriad yet their conclusions and pontifications become more and more obscure – lost in a mess of figures, techno-speak and methodological obfuscation. Meanwhile the ramifications within the academy involve a form of quasi-professionalisation or bureaucratisation. This is most blatantly apparent in current PhD programmes. Here, induction into quantitative methodological techniques becomes a central part of academic training. Qualitative methods, meanwhile, take a more lowly position – and even here bizarre attempts are made to produce software that will enable the researcher to quantify the qualitative. The distance between the world out there – the place, you will remember, where Robert Park famously admonished students to: ‘go out and get your hands dirty in real research’ (see Adler and Adler, 1998) – and the academy becomes wider and wider, fenced in by numbers and sanitised by computer printouts. On top of this, the bureaucratisation of the research process by overseeing academic committees has stultified the possible range and type of research. As Patricia and Peter Adler put it:

‘Beginning in the late 1970s, but not fully taking hold until the 1990s, Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) at most colleges and universities have made ethnographic work on criminal and deviant groups almost impossible to conduct. Even the new Code of Ethics of the American Sociological Association yields to the decisions of these boards, claiming that if projects are disapproved by these local agencies, the research, in the association’s eyes, is unethical. Potentially gone, then, is any ethnographic research involving a covert role for the investigator (thus removing hidden populations further from view), any ethnographic research on minors that does not obtain parental consent (obviously problematic for youth involved in deviance or crime or who are victims of parental abuse), and any ethnographic research on vulnerable populations or sensitive (including criminal) issues without signed consent forms that explicitly indicate the researchers’ inability to protect subjects’ confidentiality. This approach puts governmental and institutional bureaucratic mandates ahead of the research bargains and confidences previously forged by fieldworkers, denigrating the impact of critical dimensions of fieldwork techniques such as reciprocity, trust, evolving relationships, depth, shifting roles, and the relative weighting of research loyalty (subjects versus society).’ (*ibid.*, pp.xiv-xv)

Between the iron cage of the Institutional Review Board and the gentle pulling and pushing of government funding, the discipline inevitably changes its form, its critical edge, and its direction.

This, then, is the setting for the new cultural criminology. It is a place of irony for as we have noted, it occurs in late modernity which is characterised by the rise of a more individualistic, expressive society, where vocabularies of motives, identities and human action begin to lose their rigid moorings in social

structure. It is in this context that cultural criminology becomes all the more appropriate yet at the same time the subject begins to be dominated by precisely its opposite, a positivistic fundamentalism bent on rendering human action into the predictable, the quantifiable, the mundane.

Let us now look briefly at some of the major tenets of cultural criminology. Importantly, we must stress that the various themes discussed below should not be read as either a prescriptive or exhaustive definition of the cultural 'approach'. Similarly, neither should these five 'motifs' be considered mutually exclusive, rather we wish to emphasise their interconnectedness - each one, in their own way, helping to explain and enhance the other.

### **1. The Lens of Adrenaline**

Two approaches to crime dominate contemporary sociological theory: rational choice theory and positivism – the first stresses the mundane, the second the measurable. Both have very simple rational/instrumental narratives. In the first, crime occurs because of rational choice(s) – it is depicted in terms of availability of opportunity and low levels of social control, particularly where individuals are impulsive and short-term oriented (see, for example, Felson, 2002). Curiously (or perhaps not), every intellectual attempt is made to distance crime from structural inequalities and social injustice. Instead, we have pallid, calculative individuals, committing crime where it is possible, coupled with putative victims who, as likely targets, are only understood through their attempts to calculate their optimum security strategies. In the second approach, that of sociological positivism, while inequality, lack of work, community breakdown, lack of social capital, etc, is, to a certain extent, recognised, the jump from deprivation to crime, particularly violent crime, is scarcely attempted, rather it is assumed (see Katz, 2002). Like rational choice theory, it is a desperately thin narrative, where intensity of motivation, feelings of humiliation, anger and rage – as well as love and solidarity – are all foresworn. If the first is the criminology of neo-liberalism, the second is that of social democracy – but in truth there is little to choose between them. They are even similar in terms of determinism: rational choice theory might be better renamed *market positivism*, for between the determinants of poor character and opportunity for crime there is only a small space for the most pallid of market choices.

Against these two abstractions – the rational calculator and the mechanistic actor – cultural criminology counterposes naturalism. The actual experience of committing crime, the actual outcome of the criminal act, bears little relationship to these narrow essentialisms. Rather, the adrenaline rush of crime, that takes place, as Jeff Ferrell puts it, between 'pleasure and panic', the various feelings of anger, humiliation, exuberance, excitement, fear, do not fit these abstractions. Crime is seldom mundane and frequently not miserable. Nor does it have the instrumental payoffs that rational choice theory would suggest; nor for that matter the adjustments for the deficit of inequality that sociological positivism would pinpoint as the major mechanism. The armed robber, as ex-con John McVicar (1979) once remarked, could make more money as a day labourer; the juvenile delinquent, as Albert Cohen pointed out a long time ago, spends

much of his time making mischief and mayhem whilst in school: 'the teacher and her rules are not merely something onerous to be evaded. They are to be *flouted*' (1955: 28). And, following Jack Katz's seminal *Seductions of Crime* (1988), the sensual, visceral, bodily nature of crime is ignored in the orthodox academic depictions of criminality – in remarkable contrast, of course, with the accounts of offenders or indeed of much crime fiction.

Furthermore, such feelings of intensity extend throughout the whole process of crime and its depiction: from the offender, to the intense gutted feelings of the victim, to the thrill of the car chase, to the drama of the dock, to the trauma of imprisonment. And behind this, the outrage of the citizen, the moral panics of the media, the fears of urban dwellers, whether in the streets or at home. As Ferrell puts it:

Adrenalin and excitement, terror and pleasure seem to flow not just through the experience of criminality ... but through the many capillaries connecting crime, crime victimization and criminal justice. And as these terrors and pleasures circulate, they form an experiential and emotional current that illuminates the everyday meanings of crime and crime control. (1998, p.38)

Here we have a naturalistic and an existential position (see Morrison, 1995) which contrasts with the de-natured essentialism of rational choice theory and sociological positivism.

## **2. The Soft City**

Jonathan Raban, in his book *The Soft City* (1974), contrasts two cities. On the one hand, he notes the conventional depiction of the city as the site of mass planning, rationalisation, consumption and production - the urban grid of neighbourhoods and zones, an iron cage where humanity is channelled and pummelled. On the other hand, there is the 'soft city', an alternate 'space' where all sorts of possibilities are on offer, a theatre of dreams, an encyclopaedia of subculture and style. A similar representation of the city is offered by Michael de Certeau (1984), who contrasts the city of planners and rationalistic discourse, of quantitative data and demographics, with the 'experiential' city; a place of street level interaction and inter-subjectivity that occurs beneath the interstices of plans and maps (see Hayward 2004a for more on this notion of urban 'duality' and its relationship to cultural criminology). Such accounts closely parallel Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the 'second life of the people' (1984), which, as Mike Presdee has pointed out, is 'the only true site for the expression of one's true feelings for life. It is where the irrational laughs and mocks the rational – where truth can be told against the cold-hearted lies of rational, scientific modernity.' (2000: 8)

This 'dual' analysis of urban space, not of spatial segregation and division within the city – although these, of course, inevitably occur – but in the sense of the 'underlife' of the city, runs throughout cultural criminology and should be considered a key organisational concept. Consider, for example, how this dyadic approach to city life evokes the theories that underpinned the sociology of

deviance. Within this rubric, deviant action was/is understood not as a marginal or abstracted concept, but rather as a thinly veiled nether world that bubbles up just under the surface of appearances (a place, incidentally, where ethnography can go, but where social surveys merely reflect the surface) – or, to choose an alternative example, Goffman's 'underlife' of institutions. It is not that the 'soft city' is the only reality - far from it. More that the bureaucratic rationalistic world increasingly exerts its influence and impinges on every aspect of human existence. Ironically, it is this world that is imaginary, the idealised construct of planners, politicians and official spokespersons. It fails to grasp or engage with the existential fears, hopes, joys resentments, and terrors of everyday existence – such idealism is, of course, not limited to questions of crime or delinquency. This is the world where transgression occurs, where rigidity is fudged, where rules are bent, and lives are lived. It is the world upon which the imaginary of the powerful impacts upon the citizen. As Presdee puts it: 'The second life is lived in the cracks and holes of the structures of official society. It searches for and finds the unpunishable whilst official society seeks to dam up the holes, and fill the cracks, criminalizing as it does and making punishable the previously unpunishable' (2000:9).

It is this struggle between the forces of rationalisation and that of existential possibility and lived lives which is central to cultural criminology. It is the tension seen in Ferrell's work on boredom and (urban) resistance, and in Keith Hayward and Mike Presdee's work on the commodification of culture. It is not, therefore, that rational choice theory or sociological positivism (with its images of planning and inclusion) fail to understand the reality of crime, rather that these theories are precisely those that create the iron cage of rationalisation. And any notion that a future utopia can be achieved by increasing levels of security and situational crime prevention, or by simply including the excluded in a world of unfulfilling work and commodified consumption, is profoundly in error. It presents the problem as the solution.

Furthermore, it is precisely such a struggle that occurs within the academy. For it is the forces of 'professionalisation', the bureaucratisation of research through Institutional Review Boards, the structuring of funding, the santisation of quantitative methods, which seek to distance the criminologist from his or her object of study.

### **3. The Transgressive Subject**

Crime is an act of rule breaking. It involves an attitude to rules, an assessment of their justness and appropriateness, and a motivation to break them whether by outright transgression or by neutralisation. It is not, as in positivism, a situation where the actor is mechanistically propelled towards desiderata and on the way happens to cross the rules; it is not, as in rational choice theory, a scenario where the actor merely seeks the holes in the net of social control and ducks and dives his or her way through them. Rather, in cultural criminology, the act of transgression itself has attractions - it is through rule breaking that subcultural problems attempt solution.

Important here is the stress placed by cultural criminology on the foreground of experience and the existential psychodynamics of the actor, rather than on the background factors of traditional positivism (eg unemployment, poverty, poor neighbourhoods, lack of education etc). In this sense cultural criminology can be seen as following the framework set out by Jack Katz (1988) but, at the same moment, it is also critical of his position for the way it dismisses any focus on social background as irretrievably positivistic or as a mistaken materialism. Thus Jeff Ferrell, in his review of Katz's *Seductions of Crime*, where he writes that despite Katz's critique:

the disjunctions between Katz's criminology and certain aspects of left criminology are not insurmountable; much can in fact be learned from the intersection of the two. If, for example, we understand social and economic inequality to be a cause, or at least a primary context, for crime, we can also understand that this inequality is mediated and expressed through the situational dynamics, the symbolism and style, of criminal events. To speak of a criminal "event", then, is to talk about the act and actions of the criminal the unfolding interactional dynamics of the crime, and the patterns of inequality and injustice embedded in the thoughts, words, and actions of those involved. In a criminal event, as in other moments of everyday life, structures of social class or ethnicity intertwine with situational decisions, personal style, and symbolic references. Thus, while we cannot make sense of crime without analyzing structures of inequality, we cannot make sense of crime by *only* analyzing these structures, either. The esthetics of criminal events interlocks with the political economic of criminality. (Ferrell 2000:118-9; see also Young, 2003).

This relationship between foreground and background can be rephrased in terms of the instrumental and the expressive. As we have seen, sociological positivism would translate background factors of deprivation into a simple foreground narrative of experienced deficit, with crime as the relief of such deprivation. Rational choice theory meanwhile would dispense with social background altogether, and have a foreground dominated by an equally simple and abstract narrative of taking the available opportunities to acquire desirable goods etc. Cultural criminology would point to the way poverty, for example, is perceived in an affluent society as an act of exclusion - the ultimate humiliation in a consumer society. It is an *intense* experience, not merely of material deprivation, but of a sense of injustice and of ontological insecurity. But to go even further than this, that late modernity, as described earlier, represents a *shift in consciousness*, so that individualism, expressivity, and identity become paramount and material deprivation, however important, is powerfully supplemented by a widespread sense of ontological deprivation. In other words, what we are witnessing today, is a *crisis of being* in a society where self-fulfilment, expression, and immediacy are paramount values, yet the possibilities of realising such dreams are strictly curtailed by the increasing bureaucratisation of work (its so-called McDonaldization) and the commodification of leisure. Crime and transgression in this new context can be seen as the breaking through of restraints, a realisation of immediacy and a reassertion of identity and ontology. In this sense, identity becomes woven into rule breaking.

An extraordinary example of this line of thinking within cultural criminology is the work of Stephen Lyng and his associations on edgework (Lyng 1990, 1998; see also Lyng, this volume, for his latest augmentation of edgework). Here Lyng studies the way in which individuals engaging in acts of extreme risk-taking (base jumping, joy-riding, sky-diving, motor bike racing etc), push themselves to the edge of danger in search of both excitement and certainty. Like a metaphor for reality, they lose control only to take control.

#### **4. The Attentive Gaze**

Jeff Ferrell and Mark Hamm talk of the methodology of attentiveness, of a criminological *verstehen* where the researcher is immersed within a culture. This phrase 'attentiveness' reminds us of David Matza's (1969) 'naturalism', the invocation to be true to subject – without either romanticism or the generation of pathology. It is also reminiscent of the work of their heroes, James Agee and Walker Evans who, in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1960/1941), provide us with a sensitive and respectful account of the lives of Southern sharecroppers during the depression.

This is an ethnography immersed in culture and interested in lifestyle(s), the symbolic, the aesthetic, and the visual. In its attitude to quantitative analysis it invokes Feyrabend's (1978) methodological injunction 'anything goes'. But quantitative data must be dislodged from claims of scientific objectivity, precision, and certainty. Such data must be reconceptualised as an imperfect human construction and carefully situated in time and place. And, in a significant inversion of orthodoxy, it is noted that 'they can perhaps sketch a faint outline of [deviance and criminality] but they can never fill that outline with essential dimensions of meaningful understanding' (Ferrell and Hamm, 1998, p.11).

We must therefore substitute 'a sociology of skin for a sociology of correlation' and this must be associated with a high level of reflexivity. And here, once again, one finds echoes of Clifford Geertz, for the criminologist, like the anthropologist, comes to his or her research with a heavy luggage of culture and preconception. We need, therefore, an ethnography of ethnography, a double awareness of the process of research in contrast to conventional quantitative research which wantonly imposes survey category and Lickert Scale upon its subjects.

Lastly, cultural criminology stresses the mediated nature of reality in late modernity; subcultures cannot be studied apart from their representation and ethnography and textual analysis cannot be separated. Because of this, the orthodox sequence of first the mass media and then its effects cannot be maintained:

'Criminal events, identities take life within a media-saturated environment and thus exist from the start as a moment in a mediated spiral of presentation and representation ... Criminal subcultures reinvent mediated images as situated styles, but are at the same time themselves reinvented time and time again as they are displayed within the daily swarm of mediated presentations. In every case, as cultural criminologists

we study not only images but images of images, an infinite hall of mediated mirrors.' (Ferrell and Sanders, 1995, p.14)

## 5. Dangerous Knowledge

'Many criminologists believe that crime has no universal definition. They see crime as subjective, whereas society and its justice system "manufacture" crime by changing the definition. Their intellectual lawlessness makes a mess of our field by

- Giving it no boundaries and keeping it vague
- Requiring a different criminology for each legal system
- Letting criminology students get an easy A, no matter what they write' (Felson, 2002: 17)

David Sibley, in his remarkable *Geographies of Exclusion*, talks not only of spatial and social exclusion – the exclusion of the dangerous classes – but the exclusion of *dangerous knowledge*. He writes:

The defence of social space has its counterpart in the defence of regions of knowledge. This means that what constitutes knowledge, that is those ideas which gain currency through books and periodicals, is conditioned by power relations which determine the boundaries of 'knowledge' and exclude dangerous or threatening ideas and authors. It follows that any prescriptions for a better integrated and more egalitarian society must also include proposals for change in the way academic knowledge is produced. (Sibley 1995: xvi)

In fact the traditional positivism of sociologists and psychologists, or the new 'crime science' of Marcus Felson and the rational choice/routine activity theorists, have exceptional interest in *maintaining* rigid definitions and demarcations between science and non-science, between crime and 'normality', between the expert and the criminal, between criminology and more humanistic academic disciplines – and even between the individuals studied themselves as isolated atoms incapable of collective activity. It is the nature of cultural criminology that it questions all these distinctions and is thus an anathema to the project of criminology as a 'science' of crime. As such its 'intellectual lawlessness' (and sometimes its actual lawlessness) serves as a direct challenge to such an orthodoxy.

If, by questioning established definitions, focusing on subjective emotions, countering the heartless numeric abstractions of positivistic criminology, and generally adding a human dimension to the late modern crime problem we 'make a mess of the field' of criminological 'knowledge' (as currently perceived by rational choice theorists, crime 'mappers' and other practitioners of social control criminology), then let it be stated here without reservation; we make no apology for our actions.

So, then, to the six articles that together make up this Special Edition of *Theoretical Criminology*. Simply stated, our aim here is to play a key part in defining the arrival of cultural criminology. Although, in recent years, a diverse range of critical criminologists have made great strides in directing theoretical 'imagination' towards the study of everyday culture, it remains the case that,

despite these positive developments, the parameters and methods of the 'cultural approach' have yet to be firmly established and its potential fully tested and explored. Our remit as editors was to draw together the leading figures from within the vanguard of cultural criminology in an effort to present both an up to date overview of current thinking and research in the area, and to offer a series of reflections on the 'methodology' of the cultural approach, its theoretical antecedents, and its place within the contemporary criminological enterprise. This Special Edition also has the added advantage of drawing on a series of papers presented by the contributors at the first International Cultural Criminology Conference (held in London on May 9-10th 2003).<sup>1</sup>

The Edition proceeds in two distinct sections. In *Part 1: Points of Orientation*, the aim was to be reflexive about the lineage of cultural criminology. At one level it builds on the (primarily) American precursor moments of the 1990s, yet, at another level, it seeks to ground these moments in the richer earth of long-standing and diverse American and British criminological investigations of culture, and its associations with crime and criminality. In *Part 2: Critical Horizons*, we asked the contributors to reflect on how the emergent field of cultural criminology is likely to grow, what directions it might take, what issues it might confront, and what methodologies it might mix and mulch.

It should be immediately apparent that each of the articles overlaps with several of the five themes outlined in this opening, scene-setting essay. The articles by Jeff Ferrell and Mike Presdee, for example, are a *cri de coeur* to criminologists to consider the 'dangerous knowledge' that, too often, is marginalized within conventional criminology. At the same time, both these pieces also challenge us to (re)focus our energies on unearthing aspects of everyday life (and their relationship to crime) that are highly commensurate with our evocation of the 'soft city'. This emphasis on 'thick description' (to use Geertz's term) and the gritty particulars of street-level human interaction is likewise much in evidence in the contributions of Stephanie Kane and Mark Hamm. These are authors whose work, for many years, has exemplified the very term 'attentive gaze', and who have striven hard to prioritise the need for a multi-layered ethnographic approach to the study of crime and transgression. This accent on rich description and 'story telling' is similarly much to the fore in Wayne Morrison's putative cultural criminology of photography. He shares with Hamm the understanding of how the many diverse trajectories of modernity have helped create 'a transgressive subject', who, when confronted by certain desperate, yet worryingly not unique, social and cultural conditions, is capable of perpetrating the most destructive and vituperative of human actions. This emphasis on transgression and 'limit experience' is also much in evidence in Steve Lyng's concluding article. In Lyng's hands 'the lens of adrenalin' is focused skilfully and accurately as he considers the embodied pleasures of 'edgework', and by doing so adds a visceral, physical dimension to the idea of the transgressive being.

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<sup>1</sup> This conference was organised with the generous financial assistance of the University of London's, External Laws Programme, and was held at the Chancellor's Hall, Senate House, University of London. Planning is currently underway for a second international conference (Cultural Criminology 2005).

These, then, are some of the ways in which cultural criminology seeks to counter mainstream criminology's modern (allegedly) 'scientific methods'. Although in no way a comprehensive summary of cultural criminology's diverse alternative approaches, these papers provide a forceful account of the rationale and ethos underpinning the 'cultural approach' (see also the forthcoming edited collection *Cultural criminology Unleashed* (Ferrell et al 2004) for further examples). Whether we can achieve our goal of derailing contemporary criminology from the abstractions of administrative rationalization and statistical complexity remains to be seen. In the meantime, however, we will continue our work at the margins; for it is here, in these forgotten spaces that the story of crime so often unfolds.

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