

## A cultured criminology: who are the zookeepers?

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This paper takes O'Brien's critique of cultural criticism as a starting point to argue for a more fully cultured criminology. It recognises the defects that O'Brien and others note in cultural criminology but strongly argues for the merit of the cultural approach but a more fully cultural, or cultured, approach. It takes issue with some aspects of both the critique and the practice of cultural criminology. Examples are given of what might constitute a cultured criminology and work more deserving of O'Brien's accusation of zookeeping is highlighted.

If only because of the backlash (O'Brien, 2005) - if not the credentials of its protagonists - it is clear that 'Cultural Criminology' has arrived, or possibly re-arrived. It may be that the backlash is premature and that cultural criminology has scant influence but it has, nonetheless, unsettled some. In this article I seek to evaluate some of the claims made by both sides. It should be admitted here that some of my own work might be placed within cultural criminology and that therefore I am biased.<sup>i</sup> Yet I propose to take some of O'Brien's comments on board and argue not for an unmodified cultural criminology but for a cultured criminology, that is a fully cultural criminology.<sup>ii</sup>

So what is cultural criminology? First we shall look at some of the explanations of those who self identify as cultural criminologists. Then we shall turn to some of the criticisms that have been made and might be made. We will then examine work that might be seen to be cultured and exploring ways in which it might be more fully realised. Along the way some observations will be made about why propose cultural criminology now; and why it should be attacked so prominently within the *British Journal of Criminology*.

For cultural criminology

Further evidence that cultural criminology has arrived can be found in the volume of *Theoretical Criminology* (Vol8 No3) (TC) given over to it and its inclusion in the *Sage Dictionary of Criminology* (McLaughlin and Muncie, 2005) and we will start here. In his entry, Jeff Ferrell (2005:103-104) defines cultural criminology as:

An emergent theoretical orientation that investigates the convergence and contestation of cultural, criminal and crime control processes. Cultural criminology emphasises the role of image, style, representation and meaning both within illicit subcultures, and in the mediated construction of crime and crime control.

He goes on to describe its main theoretical – and methodological - underpinnings as a cultural studies-inspired ethnographic *verstehen* applied to subcultures and the critical analysis of media texts that construct deviance, crime and those subcultures. The influence of the Birmingham University's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies is acknowledged and Stan Cohen's *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972) granted an almost foundational iconic status. Much work has fallen into one aspect of this widely defined 'orientation' or the other with few attempting a synthesis – but Ferrell claims that there are some developments.<sup>iii</sup>

Ferrell's own work on graffiti and living out of dumpsters epitomises the first strand and might be seen to be 'cultural criminology' by many. The second strand, the critical analysis of media texts, is often coterminous or congruent with 'newsmaking criminology'. Ferrell's work will largely be addressed in discussion of O'Brien's criticism but his collected editions with Saunders and with Hayward, Morrison and Presdee and the work of some of those individuals are examined here briefly to set out the lineaments of cultural criminology in its own terms.

My first exposure to Cultural Criminology was in the edited collection of that name (Ferrell and Sanders, 1995). It contains many of the themes adumbrated by Ferrell in his dictionary definition (2005) but also short accessible articles on a variety of subcultures and reactions to them. Apart from opening and closing chapters by the editors we have: work on media images generally; media representations of 'random drug violence'; serial killers; crime in bluegrass ballads; surveillance in popular culture<sup>iv</sup> and a postmodern 'constitutive' approach to media. A second set of articles focuses on subcultural matters such as: style; neo-nazi skinheads, gangs, bikers and graffiti.

I have found the articles on bluegrass music (Tunnell, 1995) helpful in pointing out to students in thrall to gangsta rap that an old white music contains many of the same poor attitudes to women, and violence towards them; and that therefore some of the arguments against their musical choice is conditioned by race and class. The work on bikers by Lyng and Bracey (1995) usefully connects the illegal use of bikes with legal marketing of them – that is linking mainstream consumer culture with outlawed sub-cultures.

Given the generally sympathetic treatment of these researchers to their subjects the work of Hamm (1995) is particularly interesting. He seeks to understand, the better to oppose, neo-nazi skinheads and the music they favour. He locates the development of their politics and music in wider socio-cultural terms. Broadly the economy and Thatcherite/Reaganomic policies are structurally to blame but both apolitical heavy metal and anarchic punk are seen to feed into the music.<sup>v</sup>

Ten years after *Cultural Criminology* (CC) we have *Cultural Criminology Unleashed* (CCU) which expands on some of these themes but also incorporated more international and UK based material and theorizing. Where the first volume might have been seen as part of the United States 'culture wars' with its mentions of attacks on *avant garde* art as pornographic or unpatriotic the second seems more urgent in the shadow of the ideologically motivated terrorism of both Bin Laden and Bush. Specifically Jock Young's sabbatical at John Jay College, New York seems to have galvanised him anew against positivism. His contribution is a meditation on a dispute between a numerate biologist reviewer, in the *New York Review of Books*, and the less numerate sociological authors of a sex survey. Young sides with the biologist and argues, with criminological examples, for the importance of some figures (for instance, police and prison numbers, homicide rates) but the bogusness of positivistic criminology's use of other figures.

CCU also contains more specifically biographical elements than CC but this must always have been a strand in which a reflexive ethnography is involved. Jefferson provides a theoretical biography and Presdee draws on an unpublished autobiography. Most interestingly Wender, a serving police officer, illustrates phenomenologically how a domestic assault is rendered

bureaucratically into the numbers that Young criticises. He also prays in aid Sophocles' *Antigone* to call for a metacriminology. More culturally Morrison presents an anthropology of the tribe of positivist criminologists; mounting Lombroso's head on the wall. More tendentiously he presents Lombroso as a performance, and possibly a con, artist.<sup>vi</sup>

These collections of work in TC, CC and CCU all give a variety of hints about what might constitute Cultural Criminology but, perhaps, in a single authored book we might find a more unified vision. O'Brien mentions Hayward's *City Limits* simply as an, 'exposition of the connections between crime and consumerism, 2005:605) so a little more detail is called for here.

Hayward asks if cultural criminology:

could help bridge the current divides between theories of crime that emphasise structural, 'situational' and environmental factors and those that instead prioritise the actions and motivations of the 'individual' – two areas previously thought of as mutually exclusive, irretrievably antithetical?

Whether this is pious hope or empty rhetoric is a moot point. He mostly focuses on urban theory – with a tendency to the post-modern, but applied to the question of consumer culture and crime. He specifically mentions modern art and architecture's relationship to the city. He favours the European cities of Baudelaire and Benjamin and Mike Davies' Los Angeles but I would argue also for New York and its movie simulacrum, of which Sanders says (2002: 3) 'both are called "New York"'.

Against cultural criminology

Adam and Allan comment that the word 'culture', 'seems to be appearing everywhere, its meaning stretched to the point that attempts to specify the non-cultural run into severe difficulties' (1995:xiii). The main burden of O'Brien's criticism appears to be on Cultural Criminology's muddled use of the concept culture and we shall come to that but first a summary of his other objections.

Early on O'Brien makes this aside (before moving smartly on):

Of course, whether cultural criminology really does represent a new intellectual endeavour rather than a logical elaboration of previous work on deviant subcultures is itself debateable – worthy of a separate paper and a proper historical reflection. (2005:600)

Short circuiting this I will largely assert that cultural criminology is not new even though I am a friendly critic.<sup>vii</sup> Evidence for this assertion might be found in Jock Young's earliest published work (Young: 1969). In this he uses Gouldner, as does O'Brien, to critique those with an 'underdog identification' and the 'cool' 'stance' of the 'liberal criminologist'. Indeed, anticipating his most recent full length treatment of the topic claims that, 'our society is characterised by exclusion' (1969:210). What is interesting is that it is so recently proposed and opposed as new. It is that question that awaits criminological history but politics and academic enterprise play their parts as we shall see.

Much of O'Brien's critique turns on his reading of the anthropological and ethnographic literature. As Ferrell is a leading proponent of cultural criminology who is well known for his ethnography, O'Brien properly starts with a reading of Ferrell's work on hip hop graffiti.<sup>viii</sup> Some of his criticism is fair. Indeed one might go further and suggest that Ferrell's account of the nomenclature and apparatus of spray-painting graffiti borders on the fetishistic (if only in anthropological terms). In conclusion O'Brien asks, 'why anyone should care whether Ferrell's respondents smoke dope or cigars, drink vodka or wine, use red paint or green'. O'Brien also rightly notes that the culture of graffiti cleaners and those who employ them are ignored. In what might be seen as a 'green realist' mode, he notes 'the carelessly discarded paint and beer cans ...' (2005:603). Similar criticisms are made of other work by Ferrell and his co-authors.

O'Brien admits:

To date, theoretical extrapolations of cultural criminology's insights – particularly those that explicitly adopt the cultural mantle – are few and far between. (2005:605)

Yet he felt moved to challenge its cultural credentials and the *British Journal of Criminology* gave his work lead article status. Whilst the later discussion of O'Brien is of culture; here politics must be mentioned. Ferrell's anarchism is mentioned and Presdee and UK adherents are seen as cultural Marxists. Specifically O'Brien objects that, 'cultural criminology is a political, rather than analytical, orientation'. He cites as evidence for this cultural criminology's rejection of control theory and routine activities theory as too rational and conservative; though he cites no instance.

In his attack on 'voodoo' criminology Young (2004:13) says only, 'rational choice/routine activities theory does not fully mirror the texture of the time, but only one part of it.' Moreover the editors of CCU (Ferrell *et al*, 2004:6) claim, 'it is not that cultural criminology excludes the possibility of numerical summaries.' And we have already mentioned Hayward's hopes for cultural criminology as a 'bridge'.

Turning to O'Brien's specifically cultural criticisms we find an engagement with anthropology and some distaste for cultural studies. I share the lack of knowledge about the anthropological literature that he imputes to the cultural criminologists and suspect my own notions of culture owe too much to cultural studies so cannot do his argument full justice here. But I believe that, in addition to the political disagreement, there is some disciplinary policing going on. This is ironic as he chides cultural criminology for such policing in respect of control and routine activities theory.

The title of O'Brien's article is 'What is *Cultural* about Cultural Criminology' but as we've seen his critique is both wider and narrower than that. Largely his critique on the cultural nature of cultural criminology turns on his disagreement with Hayward and Young on the meaning of a quote from Geertz<sup>x</sup> and Ferrell's concentration on (sub)culture. Wider issues are the matter of politics already touched on and the related one of criminological theory. For in his conclusion he focuses on politics and criminological theory not culture or anthropology.

In a very short conclusion he mentions Mark Thatcher twice and contrasts his freedom with, 'so many untried and unconvicted inmates of the world's prisons' (2005:610). He condemns the plain silliness (my words) of cultural criminology in the face of such a disjuncture.<sup>x</sup> It is only here that the full force of his politico-theoretical blast is felt. The mentions of control and routine activities theories might suggest a right wing critique but in this conclusion and in the allegations of left idealism that pepper the text a call is heard for both left realism and theoretical rigour.

It may be a lack of criminological rigour or open mindedness but O'Brien is right to note Ferrell's inclination to the tropes of postmodernism but the UK contingents preference for late modernism though Hayward argues for agnosticism on this as the 'world is in fact a composite of *both* modern and 'postmodern' features' (2004: 48). This is not tied to politics but clearly might be. Anarchists feel less threatened by postmodernism than modernist Marxists, or indeed modernist administrators and positivists.

### A cultured criminology

Having seen some of the arguments for and against cultural criminology we turn to consider the possibilities of a criminology that takes culture seriously; a cultured criminology. Necessarily this discussion favours my own work but first let's examine some of the work of Vincenzo Ruggiero (2003) on crime in literature, as he epitomises what might be brought to mind by such a phrase.

Within cultural studies there is always an inclination to move beyond what might be dubbed high culture and sometimes a censure of elite cultures; so Ruggiero's taste for high brow European literature is not for all. But I would argue that, whilst no express adherent of cultural criminology, he is an example of a cultured criminology. A short summary and discussion of Ruggiero's work follow.

Dostoevsky and Camus are used to discuss Lombroso, a bit of Durkheim and conflict theory. Cervantes, Gay and Brecht are used to discuss organised crime – particularly to make a point about the distinction between it and professional crime. Baudelaire's opinion on various drugs, via De Quincey, Rimbaud and Dumas and Sherlock Holmes, is set out: wine – good; hashish – antisocial and opium – 'no crime ... but weakness' (p64) and *John Barleycorn* reveals Jack London's wrestle with the Bottle and his eventual prohibitionist conclusions. Zola's *Nana* is used to discuss women and crime but doesn't go much beyond the justified complaint of many women that in life, as in art, they meet a sticky end if they transgress. James Baldwin and Richard Wright illustrate the chapter on Ethnic Minorities, Hate and Crime.

He engages so extensively with the text of Melville's *Moby-Dick* that he breaks his promise not to attempt literary criticism. Differential association and propensity event theory are discussed to understand Ahab's behaviour but, following Slapper and Tombs, much of the criminality is seen in the workings of business. Ahab is also seen to innovate - in a Mertonian sense - in using whaling to pursue his own personal business with the whale.

In discussing Thomas Mann's *Confessions of Felix Krull: a Confidence Man* Weber gets an outing but in a discussion of techniques of neutralisation the sociology of deviance comes to the

fore. Mark Twain's *The Man Who Corrupted Hadleyburg* is an interesting treatise on hypocrisy and revenge as an embittered stranger leaves a sack of money for the town's elite to wrangle over.

Dostoevsky – a one time prisoner – is seen, in *House of the Dead*, to aid Rusche and Kirkheimer. Hugo, author of *Les Misérables*, apparently quotes Beccaria in several novels and sides with him against judicial murder. Mirbeau's cult classic, *Torture Garden*, features the tantalising of prisoners by taking them food they cannot eat and inspires abolitionist and Durkheimian reflections on prison as damaging to prisoners but as reinforcement of the *conscience collective*.

I might have wanted to broaden out the debate at several points, to add further disciplinary transgressions. For instance, how can you mention Beethoven's *Fidelio* in a discussion of *Les Misérables* without mentioning the stage version – the means by which the majority might come to know the work? Moreover, popular fiction might offer greater opportunities to connect with a wider public or students so I would want to discuss Jake Arnott's *the long firm* on the sociology of deviance and Ben Elton's *High Society* on drugs and the Harry Potter series on miscarriages of justice.

After that intellectual excursus we are brought to an abrupt halt by the Home Office's Standing Conference on Crime Prevention (1988:19) contention that, "there is no joy in 'joy-riding'. It is theft of a car in exactly the same way as 'shoplifting' is theft from a shop....". This is where my own work intrudes; my research (Groombridge: 1998b) into car crime sought to rebut both the explicit and implicit assumptions of this statement: specifically to address the material and ideological significance of the car which means that its theft had far greater meaning for victim, offender, state and society (yes, that old square of crime) than shoplifting.

Car ownership, car use, the desire for a car and the pollution, disruption and loss of public transport are not equally shared. They are skewed by class, 'race' and age. Cars continue to be owned and used disproportionately by white men over 17, and are only readily affordable by those older. As an industrial good the car is profoundly modern as are many of its problems. Indeed pollution, disruption and loss of public transport may be seen as threatening a return to the pre-modern. Whilst the car is modernist much of its use today is iterated within interlinked post-modern discourses of advertising and masculinity.

As a modernist discourse criminology has had difficulty in theorising the postmodern elements of the discourses around both cars and men. Both cars and criminology remain stalled within the modern but it is not enough to simply abandon modernism by the roadside and hitch a lift with postmodernism as cultural studies might suggest because as experience, and much criminology insists, the 'reality' of crime and cars persists. Paradoxically therefore both modernist and postmodern concerns, theory and method have to be used to bring a critical gaze to bear on cars and crime.

The material, modern aspects of car culture combined with the developing postmodern discourses around it combined with both the modern reality of men's lives and the discourses of gender constitute a number of potential (often temporary and overlapping) car-related gendered positions such as: the joyrider; road rage assailant; anti-roads protestor and even the 'careful lady owner' beloved of car salesmen.

Joyriding is seen in my work as related to aspects of both cars and masculinities which are both obscured in criminology and car culture. My study therefore initially concentrated on a specific crime committed against and with the car - 'joyriding' - but argued for a relationship to a wider car culture. Such theorising as there had been about car theft ignored both the specificity of joyriding and the wider issues of class, 'race', gender, environment and culture. Many theories and findings about why joyriders 'joyride' are possible; my purpose became less to set out an alternative proposition but to more fully understand joyriding as a practice which is deeply embedded in society with a history and meaning which cannot easily be separated from other crimes nor from legitimated activities.

Joyriding is an example of ways in which subordinate masculinities (whether by reason of age, class and access to legitimate motoring opportunities) share dominant masculine assumptions. Joyriding also offers the dominant masculinity opportunities to dominate that subordinate masculinity - through both punishment and rehabilitation. Seen in this way joyriding and joyriders were the narrowest focus of the research

In short the thesis was not about 'crime' as studied by positivist, administrative and correctionalist criminology. It was about the cultural practice of car use - legitimate and illegitimate - and the relations of masculinities which influence responses to illegal use. It is in part an 'outlaw' or 'border' text (Young, 1994:25). Joyriding too is a text. It is a text that can be read but it is written on the palimpsest of the streets; its interpretation competing and combining with other texts written on the same streets, each seeking to erase each other - the joyrider, the drunk driver, the motorway madman, the Sunday driver, the travelling sales-rep. And, as anti-motorway protestors remind us, the very roads themselves are written on the land.

I would argue that Ruggiero's resolutely high tone and attention to theory protect him from the fair points of O'Brien's critique. I would also argue that my attention to the sub culture of joyriding and the wider culture of car use should defend me from the criticisms he makes of Ferrell. Many of the contributors to TC, CC and CCU recognise, but don't always avoid, sliding into the simple zoo-keeping O'Brien criticises them for.<sup>xi</sup>

Who are the zookeepers?

The cultural criminology of Ferrell *et al* may be too concerned with sub-cultures' and mine with popular culture but even if it is only to illustrate a point or catch our student's attention we need to pay more attention to these issues. It may be that 'cultured' is too heavy a tag but criminology must understand the totality of human experience in a holistic fashion. This would necessitate consideration - though not the uncritical adoption - of all standpoints (race, class, gender, age etc) including those I have specifically referred to previously as missing (green and queer). Perhaps this is what Wender has in mind as 'metacriminology'. I would argue that I have already argued for culture to be added in those contributions but conclude by specifically stating it here: Crime is cultural; culture is criminal; though both culture and crime should be understood polysemically.

Before commencing his critique, O'Brien (2005:599) mentions this quote from Hayward and Young (2004:259) on the need to place, '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'. He

then, rightly, notes that they themselves pass too quickly on to emphasise: ‘working at the margins’, contra ‘mainstream’ criminology and its ‘administrative rationalization and statistical complexity’ to investigate the ‘sensual and symbolic characteristics of transgressive behaviour’ (2004:271). However, it is the earlier formulation that I wish to rescue from both parties: O’Brien for his critique and Hayward and Young to their radical gesture. I am supported here by Hallsworth who concludes his review of CCU thus:

Cultural criminologists need to study the culture and edgework of the state and its workers with same diligence and verve they extend towards studying the edgework of those who engage in extreme sports. (2006: 149)

Art is transgressive. A fully cultured approach to Ferrell’s graffiti writers would take on the quality of their work and the status of such artists within the wider culture. I’d rather have many ‘pieces’ than the urban blight they cover but not the monotonous tags that deface much public transport. I’d rather have many pieces than advertising hoardings but these themselves may host subversive additions.<sup>xii</sup> Moreover, Banksy has a manifesto of his own which requires no interpretation by Ferrell.<sup>xiii</sup>

Finally let’s examine the work of Johnson *et al* (2006) to further investigate the (sub)cultural and the cultured. Johnson *et al* find that some people in New York smoke marijuana and use their own argot! The abstract suggests that such argot is ‘commonly used to maintain the subculture secrecy’ yet in the introduction note, ‘the secrecy function appears to be considerably less important to participants than the functions of expressiveness, in-group communication and subculture integration’ (205:46). Yet despite this they make no mention of the classic sub-cultural literature or the emerging cultural criminology.

Some useful information about the particular drug sub-culture of New York in 2004 comes through but it is precisely this sort of work which most clearly merits O’Brien’s allegation, derived from Gouldner, that such researchers were ‘zoo-keepers of deviance’. Indeed one might ask why the *British Journal of Criminology* continues to publish such ‘zoological’ work. Over a hundred words are provided to enable us to pass as users or dealers in the field. What is most interesting is the extent to which some of the words are familiar from both the late 60s and current pop culture. They note this but never open up the discussion to this wider phenomenon; the extent to which drug language has become normalised within contemporary consumer culture (see Groombridge, 2005). A fully cultured criminology would also note the literary antecedents Ruggiero (2003) cites and historic sources such as supplied by Srebnick and Lévy (2005).

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## <sup>i</sup>Endnotes

Presdee (2000) quotes my work on joyriding kindly.

<sup>ii</sup> In arguing for a cultured criminology I risk being seen simply to argue for cultural criminology. In arguing to queer criminology or at least take issues of sexuality seriously within it (Groombridge, 1999) I have been represented as calling for a 'gay' criminology (Jewkes, 2004:30). I have been associated with 'green criminology' (Groombridge, 1998a) but Halsey (2004) excludes me from his specific criticisms of the genre. I believe I argued for a greened criminology not a 'green criminology'.

<sup>iii</sup> It is to be seen whether this might be considered a work of synthesis.

<sup>iv</sup> Marx (1995) notes surveillance as a theme in popular culture. I've a growing list of pop songs with specifically CCTV references.

<sup>v</sup> One might take issue with his list of 'left wing, "new romantics" of the era such as the Clash, Elvis Costello, the Police, the Pretenders, bob Marley and the Wailers and the Boomtown Rats" (1995: 199-200).

<sup>vi</sup> Gibson notes, 'criminal anthropologists were indefatigable in giving lectures and writing articles for popular audiences' (2005: 40) in which stories played as important a role as 'facts'.

<sup>vii</sup> Hallsworth (2006: 147) is friendly but opens his review, 'Cultural criminology is, of course, by no means new.'

<sup>viii</sup> Ferrell is sufficiently well known as an ethnographer to warrant the *Times* giving him 2358 words on 18 November 2004 ('How I skipped work and found a secret world') to publicize his work on living from skips.

<sup>ix</sup> The quote is: '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 those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (Geertz 1973:5, quoted in Hayward and Young 2004:260)

<sup>x</sup> In view of such strictures I sublimate my desire to mention Carol Thatcher's appearance on ITV's 'I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here' to this footnote.

<sup>xi</sup> Many of those who seek to go beyond criminology - such as Hillyard *et al* (2004) - use and refer to culture. They look at the harms done by capitalism, the State, its justice system, heterosexuality, men and to the environment and animals. They see criminology as a 'suspect discipline'. So, just as Young rediscovers his radicalism, some seek to outflank him on the left.

<sup>xii</sup> See <http://adbusters.org/spoofads/index.php> (accessed 5/1/6)

<sup>xiii</sup> <http://www.banksy.co.uk/> (accessed 5/1/6)