

The Vertigo of Late Modernity

The Sociology of Vindictiveness and the Criminology of Transgression

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Chapter 3: The Sociology of Vindictiveness and the Criminology of Transgression

Oh tell me brave Captain why are the wicked so strong?

How do the angels get to sleep when the devil leaves his porch light on?

(Tom Waits, 'Mr Siegal', *Heartattack and Vine*, Asylum, 1980)

I have discussed the crossing and blurring of boundaries in late modernity. I wish to argue that, not only is such a breakdown of demarcations characteristic of the times of economic and cultural globalisation we live in, but that such a spatial, social and moral overlap is the key to the changing characteristics of crime and punishment today. Namely that the criminology of transgression and the sociology of vindictiveness must be understood in the context of the social dynamics generated by the implosive nature of the cultural systems and the contradictory nature of the spatial and social structures which both permit and restrict mobility. Furthermore, that not only are there strong parallels between the dynamics of crime and the desire to punish, but that there are close similarities between violence associated with 'common' criminality and the violence of war and terrorism.

Relative deprivation downwards, a feeling that those who work little or not at all are getting an easy ride on your back and your taxes, is a widespread sentiment. Thus, whereas the 'contented' middle classes may well feel sympathy towards the underclass, indeed their 'relative satisfaction' with their position may translate into feelings of charity, those of the much larger constituency of discontent are more likely to demand welfare to work programmes, stamp down on dole 'cheats', etc. Such a response, whatever

its rationality, is not in itself punitive: it is at most authoritarian but it is not necessarily vindictive. But tied to such a quasi-rational response to a violation of meritocratic principles is frequently a much more compelling subtext which seeks not only to redress a perceived reluctance to work but to go beyond this, to punish, demean and humiliate (see Hallsworth, 2000; Pratt, 2000).

The key features of such resentment are disproportionality, scapegoating and stereotyping. That is, the group selected is seen to contribute to the [p. 42 ↓] problems of society quite disproportionately to their actual impact (e.g. teenage mothers, beggars, immigrants, drug users) and they are scapegoated and depicted as key players in the creation of social problems. Their portrayal is presented in an extraordinarily stereotypical fashion which bears little relationship to reality. Thus in *The Exclusive Society* I note how there seems to be a common narrative on the depiction of such late modern folk devils which extends from 'single mothers' to 'drug addiction'.

Svend Ranulf, in his pathbreaking book *Moral Indignation and Middle Class Psychology* (1964 [1938]) was intrigued by the desire to punish those who do not directly harm you. Such 'moral indignation', he writes, is 'the emotion behind the disinterested tendency to inflict punishment [and] is a kind of disguised envy' (1964, p. 1). He explores this emotion using the concept of 'ressentiment' which was first used by Nietzsche in his condemnation of the moral basis of Christian ethics and developed by Max Scheler in his *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen* (1923). Ressentiment has within it the impulse, as Merton put it, to 'condemn what one secretly craves' (1957, p. 156). Ranulf's innovation was to locate ressentiment sociologically and to tie the source of envy to restraint and self-discipline. Thus he writes:

the disinterested tendency to inflict punishment is a distinctive characteristic of the lower middle class, that is, of a social class living under conditions which force its members to an extraordinarily high degree of restraint and subject them to much frustration of natural desires. (1964, p.198)

It cannot be an accident that the stereotype of the underclass: with its idleness, dependency, hedonism and institutionalised irresponsibility, with its drug use, teenage pregnancies and fecklessness, represents all the traits which the respectable citizen

has to suppress in order to maintain his or her lifestyle. Or as Albert Cohen famously put it, 'The dedicated pursuit of culturally approved goals, the eschewing of interdicted but tantalising goals, the adherence to non-morally sanctioned means – these imply a certain self-restraint, effort, discipline, inhibition. What effect does the propinquity of the wicked have on the peace of mind of the virtuous?' (1965, p. 7). Such a social reaction is moral indignation rather than moral concern. The demons are not the fallen and the pitiful which fixate the philanthropist, rather they, at once, attract and repel: they are the demons within us which must daily be renounced. Thus the stereotype of minorities is not a wholly negative identity, for as Homi Bhabha reminds us, in a telling phrase, it is a 'complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation as anxious as it is assertive' (1993, p. 70).

The rigours of late modernity extend such restraints and insecurities far beyond a narrow class band. A large part of the population are subject to relative deprivation and ontological uncertainties and on top of this the pressures and restraints necessary to function exacerbate this even further. To survive in the late modern world demands a great deal of effort, [p. 43 ↓] self-control, restraint. Not only is the job insecure and poorly paid, the hours worked are long – extra hours are expected as a sign of commitment and responsibility – children are often not seen for long after the long commute home – *people talk of 'quality time' as a euphemism for 'little'* – the weekends seem short and enjoyment has to be snatched often with the liberal aid of alcohol. The dual career family more and more becomes a norm with the planning both of adults' and children's schedules that this entails.

Let us summarise the restraints:

- increased working hours (see Schor, 1993; Gorz, 1999)
- increased intensity of work (see Burchell, 1999)
- increased commuting (see Knox, 1995)
- dual career family (see Garland, 2001; Taylor, 1999; Gregson and Lowe, 1994).

It is the experience of restraint and sacrifice which turns simple displeasure (a sense of unfairness) into vindictiveness. Furthermore, the climate of work pressure and job uncertainty pervades a wide swathe of the class structure, it is not restricted to the

lower middle classes, which Ranulf pinpointed, in line with much of the thinking at the time with its concerns about the rise and social basis of fascism (see also the discussion of Luttwak, in [Chapter 1](#)). Moreover this climate of restraint exists on the top of the problems of job security and fairness of rewards and the crises of identity – we thus have a three layered process, each layer contributing to the process of the demonisation of the underclass:

- 1. *Sense of economic injustice* The feeling that the underclass unfairly live on our taxes and commit predatory crime against us fuels the dislike and fear of the underclass.
- 2. *Crisis of identity* The underclass readily become a site for establishing identity by asserting the binary them and us, where ‘us’ is normal, hardworking and decent, and ‘them’ is a lacking of these essential qualities. It is such essentialism which demonises the underclass – constituting them as a homogenous, clear cut, dysfunctional entity.
- 3. *The situation of restraint* It is the projection of all the problems of restraint that supplies the *content* of the demonisation: the various supposed facets of underclass life; teenage pregnancy, single mothers, substance abuse, criminogenic cultures, highly racialised (e.g., the focus on immigrants and asylum seekers).

Such a process is, of course, not that of simple envy. The lawyer does not want to be a junkie, the professional woman certainly did not want to be a teenage mother, the bank manager could not countenance being a street beggar, the life of the new wave traveller does not instantly draw the careful couple from [p. 44 ↓] Croydon (an English suburb). Certainly not: for both real and imagined reasons, the lives of such disgraced ‘Others’ are impoverished and immiserised. No one would want to swap places with them. But their very existence, their moral intransigence, somehow hits all the weak spots of our character armour. Let us think for one moment of the hypothetical day of the hypothetical ‘included’ citizen on the advantaged side of the binary: the traffic jam on the way to work, the hours which have been slowly added to the working day, the crippling cost of housing and the mortgage which will never end, the need for both incomes to make up a family wage, the delay in having children so that the woman's career can get established, the fear of biological timeclocks and infertility, the daily chore of getting the children to school across the crowded city, the breakdown of locality

and community, the planning of the day of two careers and two children (thank God for the mobile 'phone!), the lack of time with the children, the fear of missing out: 'they've grown up before you knew it', the temptations and fears of the abuse of alcohol as a means of enjoyment, in the time slots between the rigours of work.

It is surely not difficult to see how an underclass who, at least in stereotype, are perceived as having their children irresponsibly early, hanging around all day with their large families, having public housing provided almost free, living on the dole, staying up late drinking and taking exotic, forbidden substances and, on top of all that, committing incivilities and predatory crimes against the honest citizen, are an easy enemy. They set off every trigger point of fear and desire.

Fear of Falling

Underlying all of this is the ever present possibility of downward mobility, of a descent into the underclass, a loss of control, of dignity, a process all the more possible as automation and outsourcing threatens wider and wider swathes of the population. Nowhere is this better described than by George Pelecanos, the crime writer, who captures well this fear as well as the tale of two cities which touch yet are divided by a hiatus of illusion and indifference:

You hear about race in Washington, but to be honest the whole thing's more about class than it is about race, and that's what I try to write about. Anyone who's so-called middle class here is just one step above poverty. They've got the car, and the house, but it's *all* on credit; they're one pay cheque away from the poor and the junkies and the dispossessed, and that's why they hate them, that's what breeds the fear ...

What did we grow up in? This great dichotomy of Washington. This federal city existing in the middle of this working-class city, and the two of them never touch. You've got this famous Capital dome looming over the streets where you see nothing but despair and poverty and drugs and crime. It's right there, man, and the government is right there, it's

right in front of them, and they don't do a god damn thing about it. Not a god damn thing.'

Interview with George Pelecanos, *The Guardian*, 16 July 2000, p. 13

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The Change in the Focus of Reward

Resentment is more than just unfairness when someone receives a reward disproportionate to their merit. Resentment is when someone short circuits the whole marketplace of effort and reward, when they are perceived as getting exactly what they want without any effort at all – or more precisely exactly what *you* want and can only achieve with great effort. But there is an extra twist to this: an additional ratchet up of the situation. Because the equation of merit and reward has shifted in late modernity from an emphasis on merit to a focus on reward. Effort, delayed gratification, meritorious progress towards a goal has given way to immediacy, gratification now, short term hedonism. Work may well be valued, as André Gorz suggests, but hard graft is not. The whole tenor of a society, based on a lavish underwriting of credit, an economy based on the exhortation to possess *now*, is that of a consumer society based on instant gratification. The old values of hard work leading to a deserved reward – the Keynesian formula of working hard and playing hard, characteristic of the Golden Age of modernity (see Young, 1971) gives way to a society where the consumer is the paragon and spontaneity the king. Restraint, planning and control of behaviour may be the necessary undergirding of the included citizen but there is no one out there to admire or congratulate such sacrifices. Furthermore, there is a strange irony here because, whatever the political perspective on the underclass, whether they are seen to have alternative values or a lacking of them, their behaviour is seen to epitomise spontaneity, short-term hedonism, lack of planning, immediacy. All the classic statements with regards to lower class culture highlight this combination, whether it is Walter Miller writing in the 1950s or Charles Murray writing today. And if those on the right see this as a collation of individual failures, those on the left see it as a fairly rational plan of action given the unpredictability and insecurity of any long-term future. For if everything is uncertain you might as well enjoy yourself while you can.

The circle becomes complete: just as the excluded absorb the values of the wider society which both incorporates them and rejects them, the values of the wider society and the margins begin to converge. The central ethos of late modern capitalism becomes like the ethos of the ghetto. Conservative commentators, of some acuity, have noted this convergence. William Kelso, for example, argues against Wilson's isolation thesis that 'the problem with the black underclass is not that it is isolated from mainstream values but that it has adopted an exaggerated version of society's emancipated and often chronic culture' (1994, p. 173). And Myron Magnet, the author of *The Dream and the Nightmare* (1993) and reputedly a great influence on President George Bush II, locates the problem of the underclass not in their individual failings but in the influence of the new middle-class [p. 46 ↓] values which have devalued all the things which would get you out of poverty (such as hard work and marital stability) and valued all of the things which keep the poor in poverty (taking drugs, personal liberation, valuing leisure rather than work). What these writers fail to do is relate these values to the changes in late modern capitalism and to the exigencies of life today. Not only do such market values of immediacy permeate all corners of society, the situation and predicament of people become more similar and favour short-term solutions and immediate pleasures. Thus Gabriel and Lang, in their insightful study of the late modern consumer society note how:

The weakening of the Fordist Deal suggests to us that Western consumerism has entered a twilight phase. During the high noon of consumerism, the face of the consumer was clear ... The pursuit of happiness through consumption seemed a plausible, if morally questionable, social and personal project. Today, this is far more problematic. The economic conditions have become fraught ... insecurity is experienced across social classes ... Proponents of consumerism live in the hope that tomorrow will see another bright day. We think this vision is the product of wishful thinking ...

A far more realistic picture is that casualization of work will be accompanied by casualization of consumption. Consumers will lead precarious and uneven existences, one day enjoying unexpected booms and the next sinking to bare subsistence. Precariousness, unevenness and fragmentation are likely to become more pronounced

for ever-increasing sections of Western populations. Marginality will paradoxically become central. (1995, pp. 189–90)

Towards a Criminology of Transgression

But what of the underclass? Precisely the same forces that shape the resentment of those higher in the structure to those below, serve to constitute the feelings of exclusion in the lowest point of the structure. Thus relative deprivation and a crisis of identity affect both parts of society although the direction of the hostility so conjured up and the poignancy of its impact are very different indeed.

In the case of the underclass the acute relative deprivation forged out of exclusion from the mainstream is compounded with a daily threat to identity: a disrespect, a sense of being a loser, of being *nothing*, of humiliation. The source of this systematic disrespect lies, of course, in the dynamics of deprivation, identity crisis and restraint among those in the secondary labour market – the precariously included which I have outlined above. It is crystallised in particular in the institutions of policing, where the poor become the overwhelming focus of police attention, a ‘police property’ (Lee, 1981), which serves to help constitute collections of youths, street gangs as a group and where the police become central characters in the [p. 47 ↓] narrative of the streets. It is important to underline how the humiliation of poverty and the humiliation of lack of respect interact – both on a day-today level and on an ideological level, that is, problems of gross economic and status inequality. To take the latter, first as Bauman has pointed out (1998b), income inequality and status inequality (and in turn the politics of redistribution and recognition) are not separate arenas but misrecognition and disrespect *justifies* income inequality. Thus the poor are seen to be inadequate, dependent, have the wrong personal skills and attitudes as if in a social vacuum and in more extreme cases poverty is simply rationalised as a product of biology or culture.

It is the double stigma of poverty and lack of respect which shapes the life and cultural resistance of the underclass. And all of this, of course, not in a situation of alienation from the mainstream society but the very reverse. For social bulimia involves the incorporation of mainstream social values of success, wholehearted acceptance of the American (or First World) Dream, and a worship of consumer success and celebrity. It

is this cultural incorporation which puts the sting into the humiliation of exclusion – it is much easier to ignore a system one despises than a system one believes in.

How is such a double stigmatisation reacted to? Let us first note that the situation of poverty in late modernity would seem to be qualitatively different than that in the past. Bauman (Bauman and Tester, 2001), for example, contrasts the dignity, solidarity and self-respect of many working class people in the Great Depression of the 1930s. And, as for crime, accounts of that time stress its utilitarian nature (to tackle directly material needs) and the external targets of crime rather than crime within the group (see Hood and Jones, 1999).

Today the poor often seem to exist in self-blame and mutual hatred (see, for example, Seabrook, 1984, Sennet and Cobb, 1993), Loic Wacquant talks of the Hobbesian nature of the ghetto poor ('You just gotta be alert Louie in this neighbourhood here. *You gotta be alert* – know what it is? It's the *law of the jungle*. Louie: *bite or be bitten*. And I made my choice long time ago: *I'm not gonna be bitten, by no one*. Which one do you choose?' (former gang leader of the Black Gangsters Disciples, in Wacquant, 1998, p. 133), a theme which is reiterated in Philippe Bourgois' harrowing 'Just Another Night in a Shooting Gallery' (1998).

And crime, of course, becomes internecine rather than directed at the wealthy. There is no shortage of punitive violence among the poor. For example, The homicide rate for blacks in the United States is 8.6 times that of whites and one must remember that the vast majority of black homicides (94%) are intraracial – black upon black (see Mann, 1993; DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 1996). In Donald Schwartz's study of inner-city Philadelphia over a four year period (1987–1990) a staggering 40% of black men in their twenties had been to a hospital emergency room at least once for some [p. 48 ↓] serious injury resulting from violent assault (Schwartz et al., 1994; Currie, 1998). It would be more precise to use statistics by class, but these are few and far between, and while undoubtedly blacks are much poorer than whites, the existence of a not inconsiderable black middle class in the United States, with a considerably lower homicide rate, serves to significantly soften these figures – dramatic as they are. The poor predate the poor quite apart from their markedly unfavourable predicament as victims of corporate, white collar and State crimes. Yet we must not overstate the case. There is a truth in this but it is, of course, only a partial truth. The lens of

the criminologist tends to focus on a particular aspect of working class culture and obfuscate all else. Thus it overemphasises despair, misery, internecine conflict and determinism. All of these things occur, but this narrative of pathology is only one story of the slum or the ghetto. Two other vital and important narratives also transfix this world. One of these is the narrative of resilience and resistance. Bring this lens to the ghetto and you will find everything from determination to get on in the world as it is (see Newman, 1999) to symbolic resistance to rebellion (see Brotherton and Barrios, 2004). Not all humiliation ends in pathology. Lastly, there is a narrative of fun and excitement. It has taken the recent advent of cultural criminology with its accent on subcultural creativity, the adrenaline rush of transgression, and the revolt against boredom to overturn this (see [Chapter 2](#)). Of course those in the sociology of youth culture have regularly used such a lens (see Brake, 1980; Frith, 1983). For the ghetto is a place of joy as well as one of fear, the wellspring of popular music, a theatre of the streets, a posture which the youth of the suburbs emulate, a place of creativity as well as determinism.

Yet none of this can allow us to ignore the false consciousness of self-blame. For it is not only that the included, the more comfortably off, are punitive and blaming of the underclass, the poor are self-blaming and punitive to each other. How does this come about? I would point to two factors: the chaos of reward, which I have mentioned previously, and the tendency for a shift from a politics of class to a politics of identity and with it the rise of celebrity.

In any other society the chaos of reward might be experienced merely as the arbitrary nature of destiny and fate: the random allocations of lady luck. But in a society where meritocracy is pronounced in every television programme, media and schoolyard, such a chaos is felt as an unfairness. In the Fordist structures of high modernity such unfairness involved comparisons between the serried ranks of roughly equivalent jobs in industry, in the public bureaucracies. The rise of the service industries, of part-time contracts, of outsourcing to a myriad small firms, the short time nature of any job and the decline of the lifelong narrative of work, each stage with a predictable increase in income, make such large scale comparisons less possible. Relative [p. 49 ↓] deprivation changes, in Runciman's (1996) terms, from 'fraternal' (comparisons between individuals on equivalent level or disputes between levels of reward) to 'egoistic' (comparisons between atomistic individuals).

The effect of the chaos of reward is, of course, exerted throughout the social structure. For the included, however, there is one frontier that seems clear and distinct, that between those that work and those who are 'work shy' – the chaos of reward, therefore, underwrites the targeting of the underclass. But for those at the bottom of the structure, lack of work often looks like self-failure and the allocation of the meagre state handouts and provisions on the basis of need rather than 'merit' generates divisions between individuals and frequently between ethnic groups.

The Rise of Celebrity

While poverty is deplored, success is celebrated. The rise of celebrity, the extent to which it replaces notions of class and traditional conceptions of authority, is a key transformation in late modernity. Laurence Friedman, in his brilliant book *The Horizontal Society* (1999) points to the distinguishing features of the celebrity. They are famous, of course, but also they are ordinary and familiar. People feel they know them, that they can speak directly to them. Above all it is:

a celebrity society of mobility. The boy from the ghetto can earn millions as a basketball player. The kid next door can become a rap star or a talk-show host. The girl down the block can become another Madonna or a Hollywood star. Celebrities can communicate easily with ordinary people. They do not speak an arcane, élitist language. This is because they *are* ordinary persons. (1999, pp. 34–5)

And Friedman stresses the sense of accident or fate seemingly behind celebrity. Anyone might become a celebrity: 'Fixity has vanished. Lightning can always strike. Anything can happen. Anything does' (ibid., p. 35). The celebrity is like us, is talented but lucky, is chosen by us not imposed upon us – but most important of all the celebrity *deserves* their money and their prestige. The success of celebrity echoes the chaos of reward. As Bauman puts it:

No longer the moral tales of a shoeshine boy turning into a millionaire through hard work, parsimony and self-denial. An altogether different fairy tale instead, of chasing moments of ecstasy, spending lavishly

and stumbling from one stroke of luck to another, with both luck and misadventure being accidental and inexplicable and but tenuously related to what the lucky and unlucky did, and seeking luck, as one seeks a winning lottery ticket, in order to chase more fun and have more moments of ecstasy and spending more lavishly than before. (Bauman and Tester, 2001, p. 118)

[p. 50 ↓] And, of course, the luck of celebrity is enacted in the instant fame of *Big Brother* or the speedily fabricated success of *Pop Idol*.

There seems little doubt that the poor celebrate the celebrity. The conspicuous consumption of the ghetto, the immersion in the mass media, the values of luck and excitement, and even the fact that a *few* of their number escape to become stars of music, sport and entertainment – all make for a close attraction. The celebrity becomes, so to speak, a *delegate* for a particular social group. He or she is their representative in the limelight. It is for this reason that so many black people supported O.J. Simpson, however shaky the evidence. For it was not him on trial as much as the representative of their group.

As for the wider society I have more reservations: the need for daily restraint, the valuing of meritocratic achievement, the emphasis on hard work *despite* the general debt based accentuation on consumption, now all make for a certain ambiguity rather than undiluted enthusiasm. Despite this the pre-eminence of the politics of status and identity and the emergence of celebrity as the apex point of stratification over the older politics of class and arguments over redistribution is a general phenomenon (see Fraser, 1997; Bauman, 2001). It is detrimental in several ways: it conceals the massive divisions in society between the super-rich, on one hand, and on the other, those that sell their labour or are unable to do so, and the possible alliance between them. Indeed, by collating wealth and celebrity it presents as *natural* that only a few people are the focus of overwhelming financial and status privilege.

Let us conclude this section by the astringent comments of Laurence Friedman on celebrity:

Very little seems to be left of the old class-based rage – rage at the cruel, unfair way the world distributes its goods; it has been extinguished, except for a few dying embers. Not many people, it seems, connect their own sufferings and privations, their own hunger and longings, with the wealth they see all around them. To the contrary, the money of the rich smells sweet to them. For Marxists, capitalist wealth was blood money, money squeezed from the sweat and muscles of starving workers, money poisoned by poverty, disease, and death; money was greed, exploitation; it was man's oppression of man. Contemporary money is radically different; magically, it has been washed clean of these bad associations. The public mind connects it with fun: with the world of sports and entertainment. The new (and glamorous) rich are movie stars, rock-and-roll musicians, baseball and soccer players, heroes of TV sitcoms. These are indeed the most visible rich. They breed no resentment. Indeed, the masses seem all too eager to contribute their share of the rents and the tributes. ...

All this has a profound effect on politics as well as on policies. It explains why, in the 1990s, a politics of low taxes, flat taxes, or even no taxes has become so popular; the progressive income tax has been radically flattened out; death taxes are cut or (in California) eliminated; yet masses of people, who themselves [p. 51 ↓] barely scrape by, who have no job security, let alone an estate to worry about, go to the polls and reelect the rich and the representatives of the rich. They refuse to throw the rascals out or to storm the Bastille. Indeed, these masses direct their hatred and disgust, in the main, not against the blatant rich but against those who are worse off than they are: the poor, racial minorities, immigrants, and everyone who is the total inverse of a celebrity. The lifestyle of the rich and famous is the opium of the masses 1999, pp. 46–7)

Humiliation and Rebellion

I'll chill like Pacino, deal like De Niro, Black Gambino, die like a hero.

(Rakim 'Juice (Know the Ledge)', Nightingale, 1993, p. 184)

Carl Nightingale's ethnography of the black Philadelphian underclass makes the brave, almost audacious leap of understanding that the culture of the ghetto is not one of isolation and alienation but involves a wholehearted yet desperate embracing of mainstream American values. And indeed all the portfolio of values are available out there: the stress on consumption and immediacy on machismo, on the use of violence as a preferred means of settling problems both in movies and in military adventures (and more recently in movies about military adventures) and in racist stereotypes and divisions. Nightingale sees such a process as an over-accentuation of the mainstream (rather like Matza and Sykes' (1961) celebrated depiction of juvenile delinquency and subterranean values) and that this is *compensatory*; it eases the pains and humiliations of poverty and racism. Although I think this description of ghetto values is perceptive and accurate, I worry about the rather psychologistic causality here, with, for example, the invocation of 'psychic relief and the notion that further psychological pain comes from religitimating the very values which 'created their hurtful memories' (see, for example, 1993, p. 218, 55n). In this it is remarkably similar to the 'reaction formation' invoked 40 years earlier by Albert Cohen in his classic *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang* (1955). Rather, it might be useful if we return to the two stigmas which the poor confront, that of relative deprivation (poverty and exclusion from the major labour markets) and misrecognition (lower status and lack of respect). Both of these are forms of humiliation, with poverty among abundance the most humiliating stigma of all (Bauman and Tester, 2001, p. 154). Such a crisis of identity, a need to combat a feeling of being a 'nobody', a 'loser', a worthless person, produces precisely the same process of essentialisation which I have described earlier, experienced by those who are part of the socially included – however [p. 52 ↓] precariously and tenuously. But it is done with a much greater intensity and with a different context and outcome. That is, the generation of a notion of hardness, a fixity, a difference of self based on gender (e.g. hypermasculinity), ethnicity, 'turf (locality), and age (e.g. the gang). This is seen most in hypermasculinity where, as Nightingale points out, by the fifth or sixth grade 'the bright eyes of the boy students start to glaze over in preparation for assuming a tough look' (1993, p. 47). The children metamorphose before one's eyes. And such a process of essentialising oneself is greatly facilitated by essentialising others. But it is not the rich and the celebrated who are othered, it is not vertical but horizontal divisions:

by men against women, by ethnic group against ethnic group, by gang against gang, by locality against locality. Even the essentialising projections of the better off, the othering of the poor becomes utilised by the poor to essentialise themselves. Witness the widespread self referral as 'nigga', the cult of 'badness', the ethical inversion of 'motherfucker', 'pimp' or 'b-boy'.

The humiliation of poverty finds its 'magical' solution in the cult of consumerism, in children who learn the trademarks BMW, Nike, Gucci from an early age, who value designer labels, watches, and blatant jewellery. For, unlike the labour market, the consumer society allows easy and universal entry – the sneakers and gold chains are within reach. The American poor eat their way to obesity in pursuit of the American Dream. Yet they are flawed consumers, the market welcomes micro-consumerism just as it flaunts wealth while excluding the poor. The response of consumerism merely exacerbates relative deprivation rather than alleviating it. And as for the hardened response of hypermasculinity, such cultures of toughness, as Paul Willis pointed out in his classic *Learning to Labour* (1977), merely traps them in the lowest part of the structure. Thus in *In Search of Respect* (1995) Philippe Bourgois details, with grim fascination, how the street-identity cultivated by the men from El Barrio which incorporates limited social skills, assumed gendered arrogance and involves an intimidating physical presence, rendered them well nigh unemployable in the burgeoning FIRE service sector of Manhattan, and appeared clumsy and illiterate to their often female supervisors:

They cannot walk down the hallway to the water fountain without unconsciously swaying their shoulders aggressively as if patrolling their home turf. Gender barriers are an even more culturally charged realm. They are repeatedly reprimanded for offending co-workers with sexually aggressive behavior. (Bourgois, 1995, p. 143, see also the discussion in Jay Macleod's *Ain't No Makin' It*, 1995)

The major point of all of these ethnographers who work within the rubric of social reproduction theory – influenced by the seminal work of Paul Willis – is that it is not simply that structures oppress the agents, but that the social agents themselves contribute in a pyrrhic fashion to their [p. 53 ↓] exclusion and oppression: 'In the process, on a daily level [of searching for respect] they become the actual agents

administering their own destruction and their community's suffering' (Bourgois, 1995, p. 143).

The Satisfactions of Transgression

He looked at the briefcase filled with money, the grocery bag filled with cocaine, the briefcase and the bag side by side in the corner of the room. Funny how neither one meant a damn thing to him. The money couldn't buy him anything better than he had right now, than he had felt that afternoon: the risk of just taking something you decided was yours, the head-up feeling in your stride afterward when you were walking away. *The ride ...* It was all about the ride.

... Cooper was going to take this ride as far as it would go 'cause it *felt* good. Course, he knew the way it was going to end, the same way it always ended for guys like him who never had no chance, and didn't give a good fuck if one came along. The point of it all was to walk like a motherfuckin' man; if you had to, go down like one, too.

(George P. Pelecanos (1998) *King Suckerman*)

As a criminal I have been a lamentable failure. Whatever money I have gained by crime, I could have earned as a labourer in half the time I have spent in prison. My character, which is uncompromising and addicted to taking risks, was a guarantee that I could not be a success as a thief or a bandit. But money has always been a secondary goal; crime has always been directed to more powerful objectives. I took to crime as a course which was dictated by life itself; success or failure in the actual commission of criminal acts was never a matter of much concern to me, nor did they stand in the way of what I was really seeking, which was a particular kind of life style.

Also I am not a really materialistic person. Money has never been, or ever will be, my primary object. Inside or outside, I was always liked

by my own kind. My life was always exciting and dramatic; wherever I was, I was part of the action. Psychologically, I had the satisfaction of personifying the counter-culture with which I identified myself, and I found this was confirmed by my notoriety and prestige. I embodied the supreme virtue of the criminal underworld, and I revelled in the greatest compliment it can bestow – gameness.

(John McVicar (1979) *McVicar: By Himself*, pp. 197–8)

I have noted how the response of the included to the poor is more than simply a meritocratic desire to ensure that benefits are drawn fairly and work is not actively avoided. There is a vituperative quality posited on the back of the rationale of control. Similarly with regards to crime, the punitive turn has a vindictiveness which goes beyond the principles of neo-classicism and deserved punishment. Just so with crime: the criminality of the underclass is not simply a utilitarian affair involving the stealing of money or property for food or drink or drugs for that matter – although all of these elements are indeed part of the motivation. Violence is not just a simple instrument [p. 54 ↓] for persuading people to part with their cash nor a management technique in the corporate world of organised crime. Drug use is not a prosaic matter of the pleasures of the poor – an alternative psychoactive experience to gin and tonic or a light and bitter, after a hard day at the office. Rather it involves, all of these things, but above all it has a transgressive edge. For the transgressors are driven by the energies of humiliation – the utilitarian core is often there, but around it is constructed a frequent delight in excess, a glee in breaking the rules, a reassertion of manhood and identity. It is this insight, as we have seen, that the cultural criminologists – Ferrell (1997), Presdee (2000) and Hayward (2004) – have highlighted in their critique of neoliberal criminology (e.g. Felson, 2002, Garland, 2001) with its depiction of crime as an outcome of rational choice which occurs in a situation of easy opportunity within a rubric of institutions of weak control.

In this revision of the conventional liberal wisdoms of the causes of crime we need to re-examine the classic texts. For Robert Merton (1938) crime was an alternative route to the American Dream. In his famous typology it was an ‘adaptation’ or an ‘adjustment’ where the ‘strain’ of not having access to legitimate opportunities led to recourse to illegitimate avenues. The goals of success were unaltered, the cash to achieve them

merely was achieved by illegal means. Jack Katz in his *Seductions of Crime* (1988) (a major influence on the new cultural criminology) points out that the Mertonian vision of crime simply does not fit the phenomenology of crime: the versatility, the zest, the sensuousness of the criminal act. He points to the attractions of evil, the ways of the 'badass', the transformative magic of violence. All of this is very much to the point, but in his correct emphasis on the neglected foreground of infraction, the heightened mental state of the offender, he rejects the structural background. Any such determinism he sees as a gross materialism, a liberal apologia which attempts to link too easily structural poverty to crime – bad background to bad behaviour. I think Katz throws the baby out with the bath water, to simply invert the conventional wisdom by highlighting agency and rejecting structure. Our job is to emphasise both structure and agency and trace how each constitutes the other (see Willis, 1977; Bourgois, 1995; Macleod, 1995, and social reproduction theory, also Giddens, 1984, discussion of structuration). The structural predicament of the ghetto poor is not simply a deficit of goods – as Merton would have had it – it is a state of humiliation. And crime, because it is driven by humiliation not by some simple desire to redistribute property, is transgressive. The theory of bulimia which I have proposed, involves incorporation and rejection, cultural inclusion and structural exclusion, as with Merton, but it goes further than this, emphasising that this combination of the acceptance followed by rejection generates a dynamic of resentment of great intensity. *It is Merton with energy, it is Katz with structure.*

[p. 55 ↓]

The Humiliation of Exclusion

For Merton (1938) crime was an alternative route to the American Dream and this prognosis was developed by Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin, so that for the citizen cut off from legitimate opportunities and where illegitimate chances were readily available, criminal behaviour was as normal as going out to work. The rich subcultural tradition that followed Merton represented today by theorists such as William Julius Wilson (1987, 1996), carry forward this analysis presenting forcefully the notion of crime occurring where there is 'social isolation' from the world of work.

Loic Wacquant's hustlers, for example,

do not ... experience ... rejection from the labour market as a major trauma. This is because holding a stable and well paid portion, a legit job' liable to guarantee a modicum of security, has never been part of his horizon of expectations: where marginalization becomes part of *the order of things*, it deprives one even of the consciousness of exclusion. (1998, p. 13)

Anyway, legitimate jobs simply do not compete with the criminal.

What good would it be to take the legit route' when the resulting rewards are so meager and almost as uncertain as those more immediate and palpable even if they come at high risks, offered by the street economy? (ibid., p. 14)

Contrary to this, I have argued throughout that marginalisation does have an impact. Philippe Bourgois' crack dealers in East Harlem, for example, were far from unaware of the world of legitimate work. They were ridden with self-doubt about their exclusion, had fantasies about being a 'normal working nigga', had been in work, and had been humiliated by the world of work – simultaneously wanting to be legitimate and despising it, but far from being oblivious of it (see 1995, Ch. 4). It is this humiliation that leads to the transgressive nature of much crime, however utilitarian its core. It is this transgression which means that although crime may be a substitute for work, it is rarely *like* work as many theorists would like us to believe. For example, it is not just the psychotropic qualities of cocaine that make cocaine dealing an erratic, violent and irascible affair, nor do the international aspects of its trade make them cartels like the corporations that deal in margarine or aluminium.

The 'crime as work' metaphor is one that is hopelessly overburdened. In its higher echelons organised crime has always involved the brash, the brazen and the extravagant. Dick Hobbs, in his excellent obituary of John Gotti, the New York Mafia boss, cites him as saying to his underlings 'You got to go in there with your suits and your jewellery ... Put it in their face. When people go to the circus, they don't want to see clowns. They want to [p. 56 ↓] see lions and tigers, and that's what we are' (2002,

p. 18). And lower down the pile anyone who believes that cocaine dealers are lower managers of a distribution company and that their guns are just there to enforce contracts because of the lack of legal protection, are suffering from an acute dose of neo-liberalism. Just go to the right club in Dalston, East London, or Brixton in the South, look at the gold, the jewellery, watch how the action mixes with the ragga and the jungle, look at the swagger, listen to the patois: the guns are not just instruments they are sexy, his is not a job, it's excitement, this is not an alternative to work, it is a sensual riposte to labour. Jack Katz in an exemplary passage cites Robby Wideman,

Straight people don't understand. I mean, they think dudes is after the things straight people got. It ain't that at all. People in the life ain't looking for no home and grass in the yard and shit like that. We the show people. The glamour people. Come on the set with the finest car, the finest woman, the finest vines. Hear people talking about you. Hear the bar get quiet when you walk in the door. Throw down a yard and tell everybody drink up. ... You make something out of nothing. (1988, p. 131)

Wideman must have had Merton in mind, Katz notes ironically, and adds:

The aspiration is not what is advertised on television. Robby Wideman was not incapable of identifying what drove him; it was to be a star – something literally, distinctively transcendent. (ibid., p. 315)

Edgework, Ontological Certainty and Utopia

Roger Matthews, in his study of armed robbers (2002), makes the important point that much of the mundane descriptions of crime emanating from offenders, particularly prison studies, are learnt responses which play down the attractiveness of robbery, pretend remorse, and explain their behaviour in terms of a need for money or unfortunate circumstances. These, he feels, are part of the repertoire of excuses strategically developed in prison with an eye on parole and early release. He notes, amusingly, how his interviews suddenly liven up and become more animated and excited when describing the *actual* robberies. Matthews proceeds to incisively demolish

rational choice theory. The actual motivation of many, he argues, is the feeling of control and the adrenaline buzz of excitement rather than the rational pursuit of money. These two quotes from armed robbers illustrate his point well:

It's just like when you do coke, you get a rush out of it, but when you've got a gun in your hands, people are listening to you. They're doing as they are told. You're in full control. It's just brilliant. You're just there. You're the man. You're like God.

[p. 57 ↓] Always high, always on a high like, get off on doing the buzz, the buzz of actually doing the whatever like, job, 'cos we do burglaries as well, like, get off on that get off on whatever. To actually do a job and walk out of a sort of like bank, post office, when you got sort of like twenty or thirty grand, you can't get a better buzz than that. (2002, p. 36)

To explain this he turns to cultural criminology and particularly Stephen Lyng's concept of 'edgework' (1990). Here, as I noted earlier, in a world where pleasure is increasingly commodified and control of one's life extremely limited: going to the edge and grasping control out of chaos can be both reassuring and immensely pleasurable. Ontological certainty is seized from a situation of uncertainty and threat to being. Armed robbery fits this bill, as does hard drug use and even the more minor crimes of shoplifting and casual violence can have their satisfactions. Mike Collinson captured this well when he wrote:

Edgework represents a sometimes spontaneous search for dramatic self within a world of alienation and over-socialisation. Being on the edge, or over it – beyond reason and in passion – is momentarily to grasp a spiritual and a romantic utopia. (1996, p. 435; see O'Malley and Mugford, 1994, Matthews, 2002, p. 145)

From Turf War to Real War

We have seen in Carl Nightingale's study of the black ghetto of Philadelphia the extent of the immersion of the urban poor in the consumer culture of the United States. This is paralleled by an embracing of the notion of violence as an immediate and ready means of solving problems, whether it is in the advocacy of 'forceful parenting', the enthusiasm for Hollywood 'action' movies, or support for Bush I in the first Gulf War. And, of course, it is precisely the young men of such a culture who provide a high proportion of the front line soldiers. For, as John Galbraith has pointed out, the poor contribute greatly to the soldiers who risk death, whereas the children of the middle-class 'community of contentment' provide very few combat troops. Thus, at the time of the first Gulf War, he notes 'writing this during the days when the conflict was under way and much applauded, I asked the Harvard dean responsible for student matters how many of his charges had rallied to the war or been commanded thereto, he replied 'very few'. I pressed for a precise figure. He replied 'zero' (1992, p. 141).

Paul Willis depicts the development of the culture of lower working-class boys as a 'Pyrrhic victory'. First they see through their predicament and then create a culture of hardness and machismo to protect them against humiliation. Yet it is this heavy culture of resistance which traps them in this [p. 58 ↓] predicament. 'The cultural celebration', he notes wryly, 'has lasted it might seem just long enough to deliver him through the closed factory doors' (1977, p. 107). In these days of unemployment and 'new wars' the contemporary culture of machismo delivers, not so much to the factory floor, as to the front line.

Hip Hop Across the Borders

I have argued against the use of binaries, against the current discourse on social exclusion which contrasts an included citizen who is contented, secure and ontologically certain over against the excluded member of the underclass who lacks all of these positives. I have criticised the notion of the dual city where lines are not crossed and where each part of the binary inhabit different moral universes. None of this dismisses

the very real physical and social exclusions which rack late modern societies and the system driven stigmatisation and othering which characterise these relations. But such an intensity of exclusion – and the corresponding resentment of the excluded – is propelled by the similarities of values and the transgression of borders. The world of late modernity abhors separateness just as it avidly sets up barriers. Globalisation means nothing if it does not imply transgression: of a world brought closer together and the diminishing of cultural differences. How often does one have to say there are no strict lines of demarcation in late modernity? Even in the most ethnically segregated cities of the West – Washington D.C., Philadelphia and Los Angeles – the barriers are daily breached by the mobility of labour and the all pervasive penetration of the mass media. The values of the majority constitute the normative life of the minority and generate the bulimia which fuels their discontent. The very similarity of the underclass, indeed its over-identification with the values of consumerism and hedonism, sets itself up almost like an unwitting target for the resentment of the included. Each facet of their behaviour mocks the daily restraints of the included. Yet there is fascination here as well as disliking and fear. The culture of the underclass with its compensatory masculinity, resorts to violence and rampant individualism – all over-accentuations of the wider culture, which in turn influences film, fashion and popular music. The street scripts the screen and the screen scripts the street. The culture of the excluded becomes the culture of the included, or at least the young and those precariously included, who grow to be a larger and larger part of the population. Hypermasculinity resonates far out of the ghetto: the swagger and misogyny of rap stirs the resentment of the white poor and extends further to the swathes of young men in the respectable and lower middle classes who no longer can feel continuity and certainty in their lives. The borders are transgressed, the boundaries are criss-crossed, the centre begins to resemble the margins just as the margins resemble the centre.

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