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Abstract

Cultural criminological scholarship has impressively theorised and explored the cultural complexities, negotiated meanings, and experiential immediacy of urban crime and its spatialising effects. Nonetheless, this important work tends to gloss over the political dynamics of spatial contestation, and assumes an urban politics which is relatively fixed and static, and is locked into a dichotomy of control and resistance. This obscures the heterogeneity of political relationalities at the interstices of crime and 'the urban'. In this paper, I develop a more nuanced account of the transgressive, affective and performative power of crime; using an offence of 'outraging public decency' as a case study, I delineate some of the myriad ways in which crime continually reconfigures the political co-ordinates of 'the urban'.

Keywords: cultural criminology; urban crime; urban politics; transgression; affect; performance

Criminologies of space/spaces of criminology

Conventional criminological accounts of crime and the city have tended to regard 'the urban' as an inert material backdrop, or an aesthetic surface upon which criminal activities can be mapped as so many spatially discrete practices and experiences. Such an approach may have a recognisable political utility and an immediate policy and popular appeal, but it fails to capture the experiential, organic and fluid relations of the spatialities of crime. In a timely and eloquent research monograph, *City Limits*, Hayward (2004) critically interrogates the history of criminological contributions to our knowledge and understanding of the places and spaces of urban crime. He takes stock of the work of, *inter alia*, Quételet's 19th century statistical mappings of crime, the Chicago School's development of ecological modelling, social disorganisation theory and ethnographies of 'street-level cultures'; the situational crime prevention and routine activity approaches promoted by administrative criminology; and the localised victim surveys indicative of left realism. For Hayward, the cumulative effect of this kind of scholarship has been to produce an 'homogenous modernist space (and a) very rigid formalised geography of crime Such an approach represents nothing less than the deformation of public space, the *hollowing out* of the urban environment' (2004: 101: *Original emphasis*). Hayward's work marks an important and welcome departure in criminological work concerned with questions of place/space and our everyday experiences of crime and the city. Inspired by classic strain theory, Hayward adopts a structurationist orientation to 'fill' the 'hollowed out' urban landscape with a range of highly textured and nuanced insights into the lived realities, existential dilemmas, prosaic routines and everyday contingencies of urban space read through the lens of a rampant, consumer culture. He develops an analysis which firstly, traces the relationship between, on the one hand, an 'ecology of fear' (of

crime), and the desire for safety and protection, as evidenced by the conspicuous consumption of commercial security services and surveillance systems; and on the other, how these affectivities reconfigure the socio-political landscape and spatial and symbolic boundaries of the post-industrial city (*ibid*: 113-146). Secondly, he draws inspiration from the phenomenological and existential traditions within criminology to foreground the emotional, sensual and psychic energies of criminality, and positions this within a broader conceptual framework which recognises the 'linking dynamic' (Fenwick 2004: 383) of an aggressive and pervasive consumer culture which re-orientates the 'crime problem in a number of new and novel ways' (Hayward 2004: 158).

Hayward explores how these 'novel ways' reinvent and transform the fabric of everyday life in particular spatio-social contexts. Reviewing key contributions from the US, UK, Japan, Scandinavia, he critically interrogates how, for example, the symbolism of brand names, designer logos and other displays of prestigious consumption (mobile phones, jewellery, sportswear, watches) create a sense of identity and an illusion of power and control within and over (conventional) 'spaces of deprivation' (Alvelos 2004); how different kinds of 'edgework' activities, such as car cruising, parkour, BASE jumping, train surfing, skateboarding and joyriding, recreate the built environment of inner-city areas as playgrounds of self-actualisation (Ferrell 1998, 2001; Lyng 2005; Saville 2008); how city centre surveillance and security systems paradoxically promote innovation in criminal *modus operandi*, and add to the risks, thrills and excitement of law-breaking (Presdee 2000); and how 'spaces of consumption and pleasure', typified by the shopping mall, can function as sites of transgression, exploration and excitement, especially for the young (Presdee, 1994; Taylor *et al* 1996 – see also Hobbs *et al* 2000; Presdee 2000;

Chatterton and Hollands 2003; Measham 2004; Hayward and Hobbs 2007 on the 'pleasure spaces' of the night-time economy.

This is important work which significantly advances criminological understandings of urban life. Nonetheless, I raise two key concerns here. Firstly, the thesis glosses over the political dynamics of what Hayward refers to as the 'crime-city-nexus'. If, at the very least, this nexus betokens a surface for the exercise of power, we might expect analysis to have been more circumspect about the spectrum and nature of political relationships which traverse it. To be sure, Hayward (and others) talk of the oppositional, resistive and subversive practices of (counter-)cultural actors, but how far (and whether) this constitutes political action is more asserted than demonstrated. It is not so much that the city emerges as a de-politicised milieu, but that a particular kind of political field is imagined – one which is polarised around capitalist usage and spatial management on the one hand, and its re-appropriation by political actors engaged in antagonistic urban practices, on the other. In this scenario, politics is predicated on conflict, control and governance; lost from view is a myriad of alternative political engagements mobilised, for example, through relationships of trust, mutuality, concern, care, compromise, despair, even outrage. Hayward certainly fills the cultural void of administered urban space with a cartography of vibrancy and creativity, but he does not attend to the vivacity of its political life.

A second concern centres on the characterisation of late modern urban life as riven by the 'warped logic of a rampant consumer culture' (Hayward 2004: 145) and productive of 'a "subject adrift", an ontologically insecure actor who epitomises the destruction of the social contract of modernity' (*ibid*: 197). Though Hayward avoids the dystopian rhetoric associated with Mike Davis's

City of Quartz (1990), *Ecology of Fear* (1998) and *Dead Cities* (2002), he nonetheless only dilutes Davis's pessimistic vision rather than offers a more tempered account in which the urban mood is regarded as expressive of a multiplicity of affectivities experienced in heterogeneous ways. There are parallels here with Thrift's (2005) critique of the 'misanthropic city', a trope which has gained the ascendancy in geographical accounts of urban space. Thrift delineates a counter-analysis of the nightmarish scenario of urban misanthropy, and calls for a politics of affect predicated on hope, compassion and kindness. There is certainly merit in Thrift's approach, but his formulation of affective power invites its own criticisms - in particular the notion that affective dispositions serve as the mainspring of political participation and the formation of subjectivities remains problematic. Even so, suitably reworked and adapted, Thrift's insights provide some leverage to open up the affective politics of place and unsettle the prevailing sense of a monolithic urban malaise.

In the remainder of this paper, I work through the possibilities for cultural criminology of an approach which builds heterogeneity and affective energy into the political landscaping of urban life. My point of departure is to question and unpack the key terms which permeate criminological accounts of 'crime and the city', and which inhibit a more nuanced understanding of the crime-city-nexus as a site of power, politics and the political. This prepares the ground for a more detailed analysis of the affective power of 'crime' and its capacity to bring the city into being. However, and though this exploratory work enlivens the criminological imagination about 'crime' and the city, it makes more of an ontological contribution than an epistemological one. That is to say, while it maps out the contours of the embodied and emotional dynamics of 'crime', and how affective power circulates and percolates urban life, it has very little to say about how 'crime' produces and