CITY LIMITS: CRIME CONSUMERISM AND THE URBAN EXPERIENCE

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Contents

Introduction

> The markets suck us (willingly) out of our cosy, dull niches and turn us into unencumbered actors, mobile in a system, but setting us free they leave us exposed. We feel vulnerable. (Mary Douglas 1992: 15)

> Late modernity is a world of increased difficulty and diversity ... To know that there are indeed other ways of doing things which in their own world are considered just as everyday as one's own takes away security. The plethora of worlds presented to the citizen of late modernity seeks to make every citizen into his or her own phenomenologist! (Jock Young 1999: 98)

In the popular imagination, images of crime and the city are closely connected, yet the exact nature of this relationship remains enigmatic. In the 18th century the perception was of innocent rural migrants preyed upon by urban deceit; in the 19th century the picture was class based and distinguished between the reformable and the unreformable ('deserving' and 'undeserving') urban poor; by the early decades of the 20th century, especially in the United States, the theme of migration resurfaced, but this time with the immigrant cast as the potential criminal. It is to the credit of 20th century socio-criminological theories of crime that this popular image was turned around to become a claim about the particular kind of city environment that new immigrants inhabited. This book continues the long criminological tradition of unravelling the complexities of the 'crime-city nexus', with the specific aim of identifying the myriad forms of relationships that exist between the contemporary 'urban experience', certain forms of criminal behaviour, and the particular social forces and cultural dynamics that one associates with *late modern consumer culture*.

As an object of study, the city is a composite of a physical domain of bricks and mortar, the broader macro cultural and structural forces that determine our relationship to and role within the city, and, importantly (and too often neglected in criminological accounts of the city), the everyday round of urban life – the practicalities, prosaic routines, anxieties and changeable moods that punctuate our existence and serve to make up our biographical lives within the city. The primary assertion here is that, in each of these distinct yet interrelated spheres, late modern consumer culture is bringing about significant change and that, moreover, these transformations, whether manifest or surreptitious, can be seen in several important respects as contributing to the contemporary urban crime problem.

If we are successfully to investigate the impact consumerism is having both on the physical and structural nature of urban space and also at the level of individual subjective emotions – the hidden patterns of behaviour and the new and distinct forms of subjectivity precipitated and engendered by a fast-paced consumer society – we must first address the question of how the city, or, more accurately, the 'urban experience', can be effectively conceptualised. Every city has its own character, its own feel and its own ambience. Some are elegant, some unsightly, some intimidating, and some mundane. Some are planned and imbued with imposed ideologies, while others are more organic and owe their spatial configuration to natural topography. All, however, irrespective of political ideology or national and cultural peculiarities, have at least one thing in common: from out of the cultural collision caused by any substantial concentration of people, industry and capital, emerges a congress of feelings, impressions and emotions that collectively constitute the urban experience.

In his highly inventive work, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau (1984) proposes a tentative framework for thinking about the experiential dimension of urban life. He suggests that if one adopts a type of *distant view* of the city – an abstract 'gaze' that 'lifts one out of the city's grasp' and transforms one into an isolated observer, a 'voyeur' (*ibid*: 92)[1] – it becomes possible, indeed beneficial, to think of the city in terms of a *duality*. On the one hand, there is the 'Concept-city' – a product of what de Certeau calls 'utopian and urbanistic discourse'. This is the city as seen by planners, developers, statisticians and, all too often, criminologists. Here the pluralistic fabric and contradictions inherent in urban life – the other side of the duality – are distilled to leave only quantitative data, demographics and rational discourse. On the other hand, de Certeau suggests that no city can be thought of in such purely conceptual terms. Importantly, de Certeau argues that one also needs to consider the *experiential dimension* of urban existence:

> The problem, de Certeau finds, is that the life of the city, the constellation of lives that make a city what it is, the actual experience of the city, in other words, is not contained in the concept of the city. Lives cannot be mapped in this way – cannot be read – or even truly rendered readable by maps (though of course it is only through maps that they can be read): something always slips away (Buchanan 2000: 110).

Any understanding (or 'mapping') of urban space must therefore place great store in the multi-layered interactivity that takes place at 'street level', the cultural and social dimensions of everyday city-life that enable the formation of a very different interpretative framework: 'Beneath the discourses that ideologize the city, the ruses and combinations of powers that have no readable identity proliferate; without points where one can take hold of them, without rational transparency, they are impossible to administer' (de Certeau 1984: 95). De Certeau was surely correct to suggest that the contemporary city can only really be understood in terms of this duality – not least because that is how it is produced. For the urban experience is a composite of both the formal, rational organising principles of the conceptual 'planned' city, and the subjective and mythical dimensions of what one might call the 'experiential city'.[2]

This duality is also sharply reflected in many of the cultural practices and social dynamics associated with late modern consumerism – indeed, one of the central themes of this work is that consumer culture is best conceptualised in just such dichotomous terms (see Edwards 2000). However, to understand the inherently contradictory nature of 'consumer culture', one must first be clear about what exactly this term means.

If one wishes to understand contemporary society (and particularly urban society), it is essential to understand the role of consumer culture (for a general overview of the literature in this area, see Lury 1996; Slater 1997; Miles 1998a). For many social theorists (eg, Baudrillard 1970, 1981; Bauman 1992, 1998; Campbell 1989; Featherstone

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1   Miles (1997: 19) asserts that de Certeau's 'gaze' on/at the city suggests a similarity with Michel Foucault's formulation in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973) of the 'medical gaze', which many other writers, for better or for worse, have associated with Foucault's later concept of 'surveillance'.

2   I am indebted to James Donald's lucid essay 'Metropolis: the City as Text' (1992) for framing de Certeau's ideas in this manner. For more on the notion of (the city as) 'duality', see Merleau-Ponty's (1962) analytic distinction between 'geometric space' and (the more phenomenologically grounded) 'anthropological space'; and Jonathan Raban's (1974) dual construct of the 'hard city' of buildings and statistics, and the 'soft city' of 'experience, of illusion, myth, aspiration [and] nightmare'.

1994), the culture of consumption is now the most distinctive feature of advanced Western societies.[3] Two major consequences flow from this situation. The first thing to recognise is the extent to which consumerism has permeated all levels of society. The vast majority of people in the industrialised West now live in a world in which their everyday existence is, to a greater or lesser degree, dominated by the pervasive triad of advertising/marketing, the stylisation of social life, and mass consumption. As Philip Sampson has commented: 'Once established, such a culture of consumption is quite undiscriminating and everything becomes a consumer item, including meaning, truth and knowledge' (Sampson quoted in Lyon 1994a: 61). Importantly, in characterising contemporary society as a consumer culture, I am not referring to particular patterns of needs and objects – a particular consumption culture – but rather to a *culture of consumption* (see Fromm 1976; Lasch 1979).[4] *To talk this way is to regard the dominant values of society as deriving from the activity of consumption.*[5]

At this point it is important to address the latent question that constantly overshadows discussions of late (or post) modern consumerism: specifically, how is all this different from classic Marxist accounts of capitalist commodification and the increasing subjection of all aspects of life to mediation through the cash nexus? For example, long before terms such as 'late' or 'post' modernity were being popularised, Raymond Williams (1974, 1981) – echoing the classical tradition of the Frankfurt School (notably Horkheimer and Adorno 1973) – was urging orthodox Marxists toward the study of culture and, in particular, the way that society's needs were increasingly being drawn into the market-place. One important answer can be found in the recent work of Ian Taylor. In a characteristically succinct passage that speaks volumes about the increasing pervasiveness of consumer culture, Taylor asserts that the key difference lies in the fact that 'the "market" is now a *fundamental* motor force in contemporary social and political discourse and practice, in a way that it was not in the 1970s. The market is *hegemonic* in the realm of discourse, and in very many practices (including some domains of that most resistant area of all, the public sector)' (1999: 54). Furthermore, Taylor also makes it clear that currently there is no viable 'oppositional culture' strong enough to challenge the inexorable rise of 'market culture' (compare Ferrell 2001 on various emerging forms of oppositional culture).

I should perhaps make clear at this juncture my own particular position regarding Marxism in what is after all a critique of 'market culture'. The first thing to state is that the present work is not intended as an anti-Marxist thesis. By the same token, neither is it rooted in any sense of structured political ideology or analysis of economics. Rather, the locus of dispute is between a type of Marxism that is capable of taking on board the fundamental shift to the 'consumer society' (and thus is able to work through the full implications of this situation) versus one that cannot or chooses not to do. In this sense, this book can be seen as following the discursive line of inquiry set down by Zygmunt Bauman, Frederic Jameson and David Harvey (see Chapter 2). In particular, the way each of these theorists locates the important cultural and economic

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3   Obviously, the work of the Frankfurt School should also be seen as part of this tradition.

4   Although the present book does not expressly engage with the work of Herbert Marcuse, Eric Fromm and Christopher Lasch, it does acknowledge the range and depth of these works and the centrality of their ideas to subsequent writings on consumer culture.

5   On the subtle distinctions between the terms 'consumerism', 'consumer culture', 'consumer society' and 'consumption', see Edwards (2000: Chapter 1).

transformations of recent years – I am referring here, of course, to the transformation from production based society to one increasingly predicated on consumption and its associated values – within the framework of contemporary 'postmodern' debates. [6]

The second important thing to stress (again diverging from classic Marxist accounts) regarding the cultural significance of market culture is the continued move towards consumption as a *mode of expression*. Again, at one level, this may not seem intrinsically new; after all, conspicuous consumption has long-established antecedents (see Mukerji 1983 on 15th and 16th century Europe; McKendrick *et al* 1982 on 18th century England; and Veblen 1925 – the first to use the concept – on the 19th century American industrial and commercial bourgeoisie; see also Williams 1982; Campbell 1989; Bocock 1993: Chapter 1; and Glennie 1995 for a concise overview).[7] However, what is unique about the last few decades of the 20th century is the way the creation and expression of identity via the display and celebration of consumer goods (see Ewen 1988; Campbell 1995: 114–17; Lury 1996) has triumphed over and above other more traditional modes of self-expression (on this specific point see Bauman 1998). Anderson and Wadkins explain:

> In a culture of consumption, the collective focus is on self definition through the purchase of goods. Status differentials are based less on one's role in the productive sphere than on one's ability to consume. Social relations are mediated through objects. ... As group affiliation at work is replaced by individual achievement, and the role of the family as a source of ascribed status is lessened, individuals attempt to differentiate themselves through their 'lifestyles', a term which largely connotes consumption patterns. (1992: 149–50)

This relationship between consumer goods and the construction of self in late modernity is of great importance. So encompassing is the ethos of consumerism within (late) capitalist society that, for many individuals, self-identity and self-realisation can now only be accomplished through material means – money (in the form of commodities) as 'self-laundering'? Thus, identity, as Christopher Lasch (1979) brilliantly pointed out, takes on the form of a 'consumption-oriented narcissism'. Twenty years after Lasch's seminal monograph, the full force of his message is only now being felt. In the school playground, the pub or restaurant, the nightclub and on the street corner, products and material possessions are now the primary indices of identity for virtually all strata of society, establishing status but, more importantly, imbuing individuals with a (narcissistic) sense of who they are. This is what it means to live in a consumer culture. More problematically, much street crime – from

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6 Very few commentators, it seems, are completely comfortable with the concept of 'postmodernity', which has been plagued by ambiguity, imprecision and debate. Such arguments look set to persist, but what should not be obscured by this theoretical imbroglio is the fundamental fact that society continues to undergo a period of pronounced cultural change, and that whether or not it heralds the onset of an entirely new domain, it does, in my opinion, mark a break (if not a paradigm shift) with what has gone before. Of the various semantics used to characterise the significant economic, social and cultural transformations of the last few decades (ie, postmodernity, late modernity, late capitalism, post-Fordism, risk society, post-industrialism, etc), my personal preference is for the term late modernity (see Giddens 1991; and Garland and Sparks 2000: 198–200 in relation to criminology; see Chapter 2 for more on my particular position regarding these changes).

7 'Consumer culture' does not refer solely to expensive luxury or, more accurately, status goods. As Nava (1992) has pointed out, consumer culture also has much to do with the unprecedented cheapness of all sorts of commodities, even seemingly banal or oblique products.

shoplifting to street robbery – should therefore be seen for exactly what it is: neither as a desperate act of poverty nor as a defiant gesture against the system, but nonetheless as a transgressive act that, at one level, enables a relative (or perceived) material deficit to be bridged and, at another level, represents a form of identity construction – if it's true of shopping then it's also true of shoplifting! Consequently, street criminals in many instances can be seen simply as consuming machines, 'urban entrepreneurs' whose primary aim is the accrual of the latest mobile phone or designer accessory[8] – items that in today's consumer society are no longer simply desirable but are importantly perceived (especially by young people) as essential to individual identity, shifting as that may be from moment to moment. However, before exploring any further the specific relationships that now exist between consumer culture and urban crime, we must return to the question of the inherently contradictory and dichotomous nature of late modern consumerism.

First, and most obviously, there is the question of whether the prevailing systems of consumption represent a positive or negative societal development. On one side of the debate there are those commentators who suggest that consumerism offers up potential social and economic benefits by engendering a sense of enhanced creativity, hedonism and 'self-actualisation'. They point to the pleasurable and emotional dimensions of expressing identity, autonomy and self-interest via the consumption and exhibition of goods and services (see Nava 1992 on 'shopping as salvation'). For example, for Colin Campbell (1989), consumerism in Western society is simply an extension of (modernist) Protestant Romanticism – the belief that individuals are rarely satisfied with reality and instead constantly strive towards an intangible 'other' self. Consequently, advertising (in all its related forms) should be understood simply as a function of this general feature of the culture. An even more 'postmodern' reading of consumerism is provided by Mike Featherstone (1994), who, like Campbell, also sees the consumer as somewhat of a romantic figure – 'a postmodern *flâneur*' if you will – relishing the diversity of commodities and the abundance of new sites and avenues of consumption (only now they have become the observer of their *own* performance!). Featherstone claims that what is new and vital in today's consumer society 'is that the practices of dandyism (art) are no longer confined to the artistic or elite enclaves, but are increasingly widespread. This is the project of turning one's life into a work of art' (1994: 75). The key notion here seems to be that consumerism is now inextricably linked to an expanding culture of aesthetics wherein to look good is to be good – or, as the mass media insist on telling us, 'image is everything'. For slightly different reasons, other commentators also point to consumerism as a potentially liberating phenomenon (see Miller 1995). De Certeau (1984), for example, has suggested that resistance and oppositional practices have a vital role to play in the consumption process. Consider the influence that consumer lobby groups (or indeed the public more generally) had in bringing about recent changes in manufacturers' production and purchasing processes. One thinks immediately of the recent *volte-face* by major British supermarkets in response to widespread public opposition to genetically modified foods, the rise of organic and ecologically sustainable products and, most recently, the new 'ethical eating movement'. (Of course, from a Foucauldian

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8 On this point, it is interesting to note that, in street parlance, mugging is often referred to as 'taxing'.

perspective, this resistance itself might simply be seen as just another part of the very mechanisms of power: see Zizek on Butler's account of Foucault in Butler *et al* 2000.)

Sharply contradicting this position is the more established classical view that casts consumerism in a more negative role. Here it is suggested that the prevailing ethos of consumerism will result only in the continued rise of individualism and the 'death of the social'. There is no room here for the idea that the so-called 'postmodern consumer' might somehow represent the 'hero of the age' (compare with even the supposed 'consumer led' economic recovery post 9/11), capable of 'transcending structural and class hierarchies' and 'renegotiating urban relations'. In fact such thinking is dismissed as little more than theoretical abstraction. Instead, the point is stressed that many of the practices and processes associated with late modern consumer culture, by their very nature, must exclude as many individuals as they include (possibly even more), thus creating an environment in which the distinction between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' becomes ever-sharper (see Bauman 1987: 149–69, 1994; Clarke and Bradford 1998). Furthermore, it is argued that theories of consumption that overplay the self-valorising potential of consumer culture are deeply troubling in the sense that they focus myopically on the consumption practices of the so-called 'new middle-classes' or 'new petit bourgeoisie' (middle income earners who perpetuate shared values based around standard of living, expressive 'lifestyles' and, importantly, consumption patterns,[9] and thus tend to ignore other major demographic groups such as senior citizens and the unwaged (compare Taylor *et al* 1996; and Miller 1995: 34–39).

It is this latter perspective that holds most sway in social theoretical circles where it is argued that, in the majority of circumstances, the perceived benefits of consumerism are far out-weighed by the cultivation of a more damaging and profound set of sensibilities. This is not to suggest that consumer culture is inherently bad in any simplistic sense. On the contrary, certain aspects of consumerism (in particular, the ability to chose from a globalised market-place) can be both rich and invigorating. However, as the French philosopher, Jean Baudrillard (1981), has noted, as the difference between commodities and signs becomes increasingly meaningless and, as one might say, the distinction between the real and the fake becomes evermore redundant, ours will become a world of endless reproduction – a place not simply where everything becomes relative, but where relativism itself becomes just another part of the outmoded way of thinking.[10]

Out of this fundamental opposition emerges a second, less obvious duality, one that in many moments is closely commensurate with de Certeau's evocation of the

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9 See relatedly, Savage *et al* (1992); Mafessoli (1996); Wynne and O'Conner (1998).

10 Consider, eg, the current situation regarding the marketing and packaging of commodities, and the way that many goods are subject to stylisation and aggrandisement to such an extent that the inherent pleasure of consumption is transferred from consuming the product to 'consuming the sign' (in the case of many foodstuffs one might even suggest that you now 'eat the advert'!: see Boyle 2003: Chapter 4). In today's consumer society the sign is no longer simply a promise or an expectation relating to the future, rather it is the immediacy ('the now') of the advert, wrapping, image or sign that is of fundamental importance. Bauman recognises something similar when he states that 'Goods acquire their lustre and attractiveness in the course of being chosen; take their choice away, and their allure vanishes without a trace. An object "freely chosen" has the power to bestow the distinction on its chooser which objects "just allotted" obviously do not possess' (1998: 58–59). For more on the increasing redundancy of the truth–falsehood distinction within contemporary society, see Lyotard's (1984) classic account of the displacement of 'classical' knowledge by 'information' knowledge.

'dual city' – the 'Concept-city' of 'rational discourse' associated with the structural, spatial and institutional aspects of urbanisation on the one hand, and the 'experiential' city (the 'subjective and imaginative dimension of urban existence') on the other. One important way of understanding this is to pose the duality as a contrast between the new and distinct forms of subjectivity engendered by consumerism *at the level of individual consciousness*, and the imposition at the *societal level* of 'rationalising practices' and other intense forms of social control that, as will unfold in later chapters, are the direct corollary of an unmediated consumer society (see Presdee 2000; Hayward 2002). This is a cultural paradox of some significance. Consumerism instills the mistaken belief that identity and self-worth can be constructed through the display and celebration of consumer products, and the perception that, whenever possible, consumption must take the form of an expressive, exciting, even hedonistic experience – sensibilities that no doubt de Certeau would have seen as contributing to the 'experiential' aspect of street/urban life. Yet at the same time, for consumer capitalism to operate effectively it must employ as its handmaiden a pervasive set of regulatory practices such as security, auto surveillance and other rational (and increasingly actuarial) logics – methods that, by definition, are forced to adopt the 'distant (and disassociated) gaze' that, for de Certeau, exemplify the so-called 'Concept-city'.

From a criminological perspective, conceptualising consumer culture in these inherently contradictory terms serves two purposes. First, it corresponds with current thinking concerned with the increasingly polarised nature of chaotic post-industrial Western economies – the type of thinking that underscores the mass of commentaries on 'social exclusion', 'the underclass' and 'the new urban poor'.[11] Secondly, it trains attention on the enhanced consumer expectation and new forms of desire that together constitute a profound, and arguably unprecedented, recipe for dissatisfaction, anxiety and, importantly, acute social strain. Jock Young recognises the growing importance of this second element – the emotive and subjective aspects of consumer culture – when he states: 'The shift from the stolid mass consumption and leisure of Fordism to the diversity of choice and a culture of individualism involving a stress on immediacy, hedonism and self-actualization has profound effects on late modern sensibilities' (1999: 10).

Yet these changing sensibilities, these new (and often destructive) emotional states, feelings and desires engendered by Western consumer society are seldom considered, especially within criminological circles. This is a considerable oversight, for the lessons and messages of consumerism have been closely studied and crisply retained – most obviously by young people, so often the target for pronounced so-called 'lifestyle' advertising. This is not to suggest that criminology has never engaged with questions about the putative nature of market culture and, in particular, how it shapes and influences the actions and sensibilities of young people.[12] The work of the broadly Marxist-inspired Birmingham School in the United Kingdom, for example, took great pains to illustrate the extent to which much working-class youth delinquency was the

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11 Eg, Murray (1984, 1990); Dahrendorf (1985, 1987); Davis (1986); Wilson (1987, 1993); Fields (1989); McDonald (1997); and New Labour's Social Exclusion Unit (1999).

12 The work of the Dutch criminologist, Willem Bonger, provides us with an early example of criminology's engagement with the subject of consumerism (although Bonger preferred the term 'covetousness'). Consider this quote, evocative of the era: 'As long as humanity has been divided into rich and poor ... the desires of the masses have been awakened by the display of wealth; only to be repressed again by the moral teaching impressed upon them, that this was a sinful thing' (1936: 93).

product of symbolic rebellion against the dominant values of society and the contradictions of capitalism (Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hall *et al* 1978). The situation today, however, is a good deal more intense and indeterminate than the one that confronted the members of the Birmingham School in the 1970s, not least because the desire to consume is so universal and pervasive, confronting us at every turn, bombarding us with an unprecedented array of aspirational messages. Moreover, prospects have changed. Class delineations are less highly stratified. People now respond less and less to the inequalities of capitalism by turning inward and creating subcultures of resistance based on a heightened sense of (working) class consciousness and a deep mistrust of all things different or unknown (see Willis 1977). Rather, the market has redirected our gaze outward. As Mary Douglas has commented, capitalism wrests 'us (willingly) out of our cosy, dull niches and turn us into unencumbered actors, mobile in a system, but setting us free they leave us exposed. We feel vulnerable' (1992: 15). With its emphasis on diversity, novelty, play and self-expression, the market attempts to shift parameters of expectation. Consequently, consumer culture and aspirational culture are now locked in a deadly embrace, each begetting the other. In an important and too often overlooked work on the changing nature of everyday culture, Paul Willis articulates this point in clear terms, and by doing so, greatly develops his earlier classic study of working class sensibilities:

> The market is the source of a permanent and contradictory revolution in everyday culture which sweeps away old limits and dependencies. The markets' restless search to find and make new appetites raises, wholesale, the popular currency of symbolic aspiration. The currency may be debased and inflationary, but aspirations now circulate, just as do commodities. That circulation irrevocably makes or finds its own worlds ... Commerce and consumerism have helped to release a profane explosion of everyday symbolic activity. The genie of common culture is out of the bottle – let out by commercial carelessness. *Not stuffing it back in, but seeing what wishes may be granted, should be the stuff of our imagination* (1990: 26–27, emphasis added).

Directing theoretical imaginations toward the study of everyday (urban) culture is one of the implicit aims of this work. To this end, this book should be seen as emerging out of and contributing to the growing field of study collectively referred to as 'cultural criminology' (see Ferrell and Sanders 1995; Ferrell 1997, 1999, 2001; Presdee 2000; Hayward and Young 2004; Ferrell *et al* 2004). Although the rubrics and methods of the 'cultural approach' are still in the process of being formulated, one significant starting point is the Birmingham School's idea that criminological inquiry should set out to reinterpret criminal behaviour (in terms of meaning) as a technique for resolving certain psychic conflicts – conflicts that in many instances are indelibly linked with various features of contemporary life/culture (especially the work of Tony Jefferson).

Already something crucial has been added to the mix by the new wave of cultural criminologists: any understanding of deviance must begin with the individual, with the passions and the exciting and violent feelings which crime induces in both offenders and victims. Crime therefore should be understood as the 'existential pursuit of passion and excitement' – a desperate attempt to escape the humdrum realities and banalities of 'regular' life. Utilising an eclectic mix of intellectual influences, this new body of thought-provoking work sets out to develop an explicitly 'postmodern' theory of crime based in many cases around *the phenomenology of the criminal act* (Katz 1988; Lyng 1990; O'Malley and Mugford 1994; Morrison 1995; Duncan 1996; Henry and Milovanovic 1996; Stanley 1996; Van Hoorebeeck 1997). Within this work, a

'phenomenology of transgression' is fused with a sociological analysis of late modern culture in what O'Malley and Mugford (1994) refer to as an 'historically contextualized phenomenology'. Importantly, the term 'phenomenology' is employed in this work not in any formal or methodological sense, but in a more generalised manner as a means of evoking the dynamic nature of experience generally and the experiential (if not existential) dynamic that underpins transgression more specifically.[13] Whilst it is undoubtedly the case that many of these themes can be found elsewhere in the criminological tradition (most notably in the writings of David Matza and Howard Becker), I contend that this new body of work offers something new, not least because of its engagement with debates on the transition into postmodernity.

Despite the considerable emphasis placed on the emotional and interpretative qualities of crime, cultural criminology also (very importantly) has the added advantage – because of its inherent engagement with culture (in all its range of meanings) – of 'opening up' questions of aetiology to include *the wider social and cultural contexts in which all individual experience takes place*. In this reconstruction of aetiology, cultural criminology arguably returns to the original concerns of mainstream criminology. However, for me, it returns with fresh eyes, offering new and exciting ways in which to reinvigorate the study of crime and deviance. As Ferrell and Sanders have commented, 'bending or breaking the boundaries of criminology ... does not undermine contemporary criminology as much as it expands and enlivens it' (1995: 17). Might cultural criminology then represent a possible way forward for criminology to reconcile many of its polarised theoretical positions? Specifically, could it 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?

At first sight, this line of thinking appears to fit with broader shifts that have taken place within the social sciences over the last three decades, which attempted to draw together dialectically 'social structure' and 'human agency'.[14] Clearly this body of work remains important and insightful (in particular, Giddens's 'structuration theory', in which he attempts to combine structural and action-based approaches into a single

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13 Phenomenology's focus on the shared production of social meaning and its attention to the interactive processes involved have been widely taken up in the social sciences (following the publication of Alfred Schutz's work, *The Phenomenology of the Social Wo*rld (1967); first published in Germany in 1932) and in criminology (eg, Sudnow 1965; Cicourel 1968). However, whether, in the context of the social sciences (Schutz aside), the term indicates the full philosophical rigour of Edmund Husserl's anti-Cartesianism or Heidegger's account of Being is doubtful. Certainly, very little, if any, criminology has been grounded in the more structured phenomenological writings of Husserl, Jaspers, Merleau-Ponty and, more recently, Levinas. Rather, as Downes and Rock have pointed out: '[w]hat passes for phenomenological sociology is a most partial interpretation of the opportunities offered by the [more formalised phenomenological] school ... Our description of phenomenology is simplified and limited. It is confined to a few arguments which are at the centre of the imported version accepted by criminology. The imported version is an incomplete reflection of the wider span of phenomenology but its framework is orthodox enough. It is designed to explore the practical knowledge which people have of their social world, knowledge which is afforded a paramount significance. Society is not taken to be something apart from practical consciousness. Rather, it is represented as an object or process which exists in, wells up from, and *is* the workings of common sense' (1982: 165–66).

14 Eg, in sociology see Berger and Luckmann (1979), Bhaskar (1979), Bronfenbrenner (1979), Dawe (1979), Knorr-Cetina and Cicourel (1981), Giddens (1979, 1984), Bourdieu (1977, 1990) Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), Layder (1981); in human geography Gregory and Urry (1985), Thrift (1996); and historical sociology, Abrahams (1982).

theoretical construct that strongly considers the temporal and spatial dimensions of human existence). However, my work is not intended as an explicit continuation of this tradition. Rather, it has a slightly different, more circumspect aim: to encourage disciplinary reflection on,[15] and to unearth new insights into, what at first sight appear to be diverse and unbridgeable theoretical positions specifically within criminology.

There is, in my opinion, one particular area where this approach might prove very useful: I refer to criminology's enduring relationship with the concept of *urban crime/space*. I should state at this point that although one of the goals of this work is to augment mainstream criminological explanations of urban crime by drawing on certain elements of contemporary 'cultural criminology', what follows should not be read purely as a criticism of more established criminological theories. On the contrary, I believe much of this work to be of great insight and importance. Rather, the contention here is that, given the unique social and economic conditions associated with late modernity – I refer here (though not exclusively) to the conditions associated with 'consumer society' – the need to develop certain theoretical links between the existential concerns and individual anxieties of everyday life,[16] and the key macro structural and (increasingly important) cultural determinants that shape our lives and dictate our social roles, is now greater than ever. Not least because (as mentioned above) many of the features of late modern consumer culture are bringing about significant changes in *both* these key areas.

First, consumer culture and its associated practices are, in a great many instances, contributing to the *substantial spatial and situational reconfiguration of the post-industrial city* (Harvey 1990: Chapter 4; Jencks 1977; Sorkin 1992a; Gartman 1998; Hannigan 1998: Chapters 3–5). More specifically, one of the primary outcomes of the rise and increased dominance of the consumer society is the redrawing of the contours of the urban landscape along the lines outlined by Zygmunt Bauman (1987: 149–69; 1998), Mike Davis (1990, 1998) and, more recently (and more importantly from a purely criminological perspective), in Jock Young's compelling *The Exclusive Society* (1999: Chapters 1 and 2). Certainly, two of the themes identified by Young as instrumental in the onset of the 'exclusive society' of late modernity – namely the rise of individualism (ie, the creation of what Young describes as individual 'zones of personal exclusiveness': Young 1999: 47–55)[17] and pervasive chronic relative deprivation – are also central components of this book. The connection between such ongoing developments and urban space is of crucial importance, not least because it is likely to precipitate the further profusion of 'criminogenic spaces' (see Garland 1997) as society continues to polarise into safe zones (ie, regulated, privatised consumer spaces) and dangerous urban no-go areas (ie, underfunded enclaves of exclusion and repression).

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15 On criminology's profound reluctance to engage in disciplinary reflection see Cohen 1988; Nelkin 1994; and especially Alison Young 1996.

16 For a detailed exposition of the various modes of consciousness and 'finite provinces of meaning' that constitute the experience – or more accurately 'the foundations of knowledge' – of everyday life see Berger and Luckmann (1979: 31–61).

17 It is important to be precise about what Young means when he talks about the 'rise of individualism within late modernity', as the concept of individualism has always been seen as one of the hallmarks of modernity within classical sociology. Basically, Young's reading of 'late modern individualism' is different from previous forms in that he is referring to the breakup of strong models of identity and subjectivity which previously had defined individualism.

Secondly, consumerism is also having considerable impact at the level of *individual subjective emotions*. Emotions do not occur within a vacuum;[18] rather, they are both generated and affected by social conditions and cultural codes – in this case consumption codes (see Richards *et al* 2000; Edwards 2000: Chapter 3). Emotions are, as the criminologist Wayne Morrison suggests, 'stimulated by cultural interpretation, and enjoyed or down-played in social interaction' (1995: Chapter 13). One of the ways in which the forms of subjectivity created by consumer culture are being enjoyed and 'down-played' – or perhaps, more accurately, *downloaded* – in social interaction is through crime. (The term 'downloaded' is useful here in that it helps to explain how certain emotions and social messages can be received and assimilated by the individual despite often being inherently contradictory or paradoxical in nature. For example, the emotions engendered by advertising very often both incite *and* deny, compel *and* preclude.) Indeed, it is one of the central assertions of this work that consumerism cultivates tendencies (especially among the young) that can, in certain circumstances, ultimately find expression in specific forms of expressive criminal behaviour. The importance of these new forms of consciousness for criminological theory will be discussed in detail at various intervals throughout the book and, alongside other themes identified as being constitutive of the contemporary urban experience, will be formulated into a tentative conceptual framework for thinking about a number of urban crimes under conditions of late modernity. However, rather than develop this complex aetiological point in any great detail in the Introduction, I wish instead to focus on a more general question about the nature of social 'strain' under late modern conditions.

One of the unique features of a consumer culture is the way it propagates within individuals the constant demand for more – more products, more stimulation, more experiences. Yet while the late modern subject might initially find solace through participation in the multiplicity of consumption practices associated with the consumer society, these are 'escape routes' (compare Cohen and Taylor 1976) that are ultimately futile. Taken as promises, the fantasies and aspirations propagated within the individual by a consumer culture can never be fully realised. Thus feelings of frustration, social strain and futility abound, a point Celia Lury expresses clearly:

> Consumption expresses the romantic longing to become an *other*, however, whatever one becomes is not what one wants to be. This is because the actual consumption or use of goods becomes a disillusioning experience. The actuality of consumption fails to live up to the dream of fantasy thus we continue to consume endlessly. In the material world, it seems that one's desires can never be exhausted. (1996: 73)

Such sentiments obviously echo the classical 'strain theory' of Robert Merton (1938). However, as Wayne Morrison has pointed out, 'Instead ...of the cultural message being the accumulation of money, *the message now is taking control of our destiny*. Modernity gives us a series of expectations as to self-realization and personal growth ... *but actual human beings have not fully escaped being defined by their location in situations of enablement and restraint*' (1995: 301 emphasis added). This is an important point for it challenges us to reconsider those early strain models in light of pronounced

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18 For a thoughtful introduction to the social theory of emotions see Simon Williams (2001); also Denzin (1984); Kemper 1990; Barbalet (1998). For a criminology-specific example see Fenwick (1996).

cultural and economic transformations and fluctuations. We must develop more sophisticated analyses of the emotional states, the feelings and the contingencies associated with the concept of strain. In particular, we need to look at the way the self is being assailed by the various and competing cultural messages ushered in by the onset of late modernity. Only when this task has been completed can we begin to understand the processes and motivations that contribute to much contemporary criminality. In a passage that I consider to be of great importance, Morrison begins to explain this line of thought:

> To become self-defining is the fate that the social structure of late-modernity imposes upon its socially created individuality. The individual is called into action; actions which are meant to express his/her self and enable the individual's destiny to be created out of the contingencies of his/her past ... And while resources differ, all are subjected to variations of a similar pressure as modernity moves into postmodernism, namely that of the overburdening of the self as the self becomes the ultimate source of security. The tasks asked of the late-modern person require high degrees of social and technical skills. To control the self and guide it through the disequilibrium of the journeys of late modernity is the task imposed upon the late-modern person, but what if the life experiences of the individual have not fitted him/her with this power? ... much crime is an attempt of the self to create sacred moments of control, to find ways in which the self can exercise control and power in situations where power and control are all too clearly lodged outside the self. (*ibid*: iv)

Such thinking is also highly prominent in the work of Anthony Giddens (1991), who suggests that late modernity has brought about new forms of self 'reflection' and changes in the way people relate to themselves in everyday life (to be more precise, reflection/reflexivity refers to self-observation and the application to the self of the same criteria one applies to others, or, more loosely, awareness of the effects of one's actions on the world). He claims that within the open social terrain of late modernity, new modes of subjectivity are created in which the 'self' is thus seen as a 'reflexive project', for which the individual is now solely responsible.

As these passages imply, we now inhabit a world in transition. In recent decades we have witnessed the demise of the modernist project of 'reason and progress', and with it the erosion of a set of 'established' modernist assumptions, norms and sensibilities. The world orientated to work and production, especially as manifested in the manufacture of 'solid' tangible goods, has given way to a world of 'intangibles'. We now reside in a far more 'precarious' world characterised by a 'chaotic reward system' and 'a sense of unfairness and a feeling of the arbitrary' (Young 1999: 9). Consequently, if we are to be successful in tackling the contemporary crime problem, it is essential that we acknowledge what Jock Young, drawing on Giddens, describes as the 'ontological insecurity' that is now such a striking feature of modern life (Young 1999: 97–104). In short, we must engage with the contingencies and dilemmas (the dilemmas of the contingent?) brought about by the late modern condition. Here everything is subject to change and reconstitution. Even previously stable and seemingly inexorable social components – gender, sexuality, the individual subject, the family unit, the human body, etc – have in recent times been rendered mutable. While such a set of social circumstances may in the long term offer society a whole new range of opportunities and possibilities, in the short term they also throw up understandable feelings of melancholia and uncertainty. Large numbers of people are now being forced to reconsider their past, present and future as they face up to the fact that many

of the teleological presuppositions they clung to for so long have collapsed and cannot be reconstructed.

Yet we fail to embrace this 'new world' and our reluctance and scepticism are palpable. We cling instead to the vestiges of the modernist programme. Morrison is acutely aware of the inchoate position in which we find ourselves. While other writers project a fully-formed 'postmodern subject', Morrison is more circumspect, choosing instead to describe the forms of existence that are common to individuals trapped in a partly modern, partly postmodern landscape. For him, the question is straightforward: how can we each reconcile ourselves to newness and change when, all around us, modernity reverberates solemnly in the background? In short, Morrison is attempting to articulate the *dilemmas of transition*:

> It is no longer possible to make sense of the world in its totality, we are adrift in a sea of communication – reality is debauched by signs, it becomes a perversion of reality. Where are we now? What is the meaning of our present times? How can we actually tell? We move inside a spectacular distortion of facts and representations – the triumph of simulation. How can talk of socialisation make sense? What are we going to socialise the next generation into if there is no stable structure for them to find their place? (Morrison 1995: 309)

Such feelings are especially pronounced among young people (Taylor 1999: Chapter 3; Cohen and Ainley 2000: 229–32; Hayward 2002). Consequently, given such a 'culture of uncertainty', is it any wonder that young offenders undertake the vast majority of crime? Is it really surprising that crime becomes a way of navigating a path through such uncertain times? This book takes this line of thinking forward by focusing on the particular relationships that currently exist between crime, consumer culture and the urban experience.

Although crime and criminology are the central locus and destination of this text, the book starts elsewhere. In Chapter 1, focus falls on the various ways in which urban social theorists and other commentators on the city have attempted to conceptualise the subtle yet discernible ways our experience of urban space has been framed by the emergence of the modern industrialised city in the mid-19th century. In the spirit of multidisciplinarity (a key component of cultural criminology), the chapter also discusses changing representations of the city in modern art and architecture. If this opening chapter is about modernity, Chapter 2 engages with the 'postmodern', as we strive to assimilate the many socio-economic transformations and cultural processes that confront us in the 21st-century city – not least late modern consumption and the changing spatial logic of the urban landscape. The prevailing systems of consumption, it is argued, are bringing about macroscopic and microscopic transformations and fluctuations not only in the physical and structural configuration of urban environments, but also importantly at the level of individual subjective experience. One interesting question (not resolved!) that cross-cuts the two chapters is whether these huge changes simply represent a further extension of modernist consumption practices, or are instead bound up in a distinctly postmodern transition.

All the time in the background is the presence of de Certeau. Deliberately, the tenor of these first two chapters reflects his contention that urban experience is best conceptualised as a *duality*. Modern urban planning initiatives and architectural movements provide a clear illustration of the formal, rational organising principles inherent in de Certeau's 'Concept-city' (the design, character and state of the built environment all have a dramatic effect on our physical relationship with the city),

while the changing nature of the subjective urban consciousness more readily corresponds with the experiential dimension of city life 'at street level'.

Having established how social theory has attempted to conceptualise the urban experience, I then turn in Chapter 3 to the particular relationship between *criminological theory* and the city, examining the work of early 'social ecologists' like Quételet and Guerry, the Chicago School, environmental criminology, administrative criminology and – the main focus of the chapter – new left realism. Far from being a simple review of the literature, this chapter seeks to remind criminology what was valuable in its original concerns with the city, mining rich theoretical and experiential traditions that have since been covered over by mainstream criminology's current obsession with theories of (rational) opportunity and control. A key feature of this latter-day shift in criminology has been the marginalisation of social theory as a means of understanding criminality in all its diverse forms (see Fenwick 1996; Van Hoorebeeck 1997: 508).

In examining new left realism, the stance taken here is sympathetic but critical. (Let me make it clear that I distinguish new left realism from Jock Young's more recent work, which moves closer to the new cultural criminology.) What links the present work to left realism is a sense that space and consumerism are central to understanding the complexities of contemporary urban crime – but not if still viewed through the myopic lens of ultimately economistic structural analyses that fail to consider the experiential, cultural dimension of late modern life. It is argued that cultural criminology provides the necessary corrective.

One of the most striking writers on the ills of the contemporary urban condition is Mike Davis, whose *City of Quartz* (1990) dazzled the academic world (criminology aside!) with its post modern parables of metropolitan meltdown, social polarisation and the militarisation of vast swathes of public space in 'Fortress LA'. Offered from a Marxist (or at least Marxisant!) position, his account is a political critique of self-interest and corporate greed in late-millennial Los Angeles. Davis's work is the subject of Chapter 4. Whether LA offers a blueprint for the future – indeed, whether he has even correctly depicted Los Angeles – has generated much controversy, as the chapter documents. Moving on from these debates, the core interest of Davis's work remains the way in which he (sometimes almost incidentally) opens up the importance of emotions and the link to consumerism and urban space. In Davis's reading, the importance of the fear of crime lies in the way that it is redrawing the contours of the urban landscape and the built environment. Yet in my version, safety is only part of the story. The chapter describes the growth of an entire industry of 'security as prestige', with the 'feel-safe' factor constituting a new form of urban conspicuous consumption and lifestyle desire. In this ongoing mutation of urban experience, society's current fascination with security and auto-surveillance has become yet another incitement to consume. In a second inspiration from Davis, the chapter elaborates his overly crude vision of a polarised city – a hyperbolic version of Manuel Castells's (1994) 'dual city' – to reflect on the physicality of boundaries and the feelings and emotions within the zone(s) of 'exclusionary space'.

What Chapter 4 starts, Chapter 5 continues in another register. Now, the exploration of fear and desire in Los Angeles is a prelude to a more developed analysis of the roles played by emotions and feelings – not least the new forms of desire and longing that are such a pronounced feature of consumer culture and late modern life – in the aetiology and commission of urban crime. Concretising these thematics through

urban space as a 'lived experience', this chapter seeks to develop a tentative conceptual framework for thinking about certain urban crimes under conditions of late modernity. The overall goal is to set out the theoretical foundations on which criminology can construct a bridge between existential/psychic concerns, anxieties of everyday city life, and the macro cultural and situational forces that shape our role and status within society and impact on our willingness or reluctance to engage in criminal activity.

The chapter sets up a play between two contrasting writers whose work, strangely, also evokes the themes of 'fear and desire' and their interlocking character in the contemporary urban setting. 'Desire' first, with Jack Katz's *The Seductions of Crime: Moral and Sensual Attractions in Doing Evil* (1988). Here the focus is on the emotionality that, according to Katz, constitutes crime's 'seductive character', especially those 'expressive crimes' that suspend reality and create a 'limit experience' on the metaphorical edge. Fear enters the frame through Jock Young's *The Exclusive Society* and his account of 'ontological insecurity'. I will argue that it is against this backdrop of social anxiety that certain forms of criminal practice become highly attractive as a means of 'exerting control' and 'constructing identity' in increasingly socially precarious lifeworlds. This is more than a matter of different emotionalities in confluence. Rather, Young's work points to what is missing in Katz's focus on individual experience: namely, its failure to consider the broader structural, material and historical contexts within which individual experience occurs (see more recently Young 2003). Notably – and central to the argument of the present book – there is no sense of a historically contingent consumer culture in which the pursuit of excitement through transgression is cultivated via the 'insatiability of desire' and 'the pursuit of the new'; short termism, 'impulsivity' and the desire for immediate gratification. As with ontological insecurity, so too excitement offers a way of seizing control of one's destiny – of 'living' (or at least experiencing) 'a controlled loss of control' in the face of an over-controlled, yet at the same time highly unstable, world. In examining the very different responses of the state and the market to this situation, the chapter focuses on the parasitical spiralling of rationality and resistance, joy riders viewing speed cameras as a challenge, the imperative of a radio ban for hard-core 'gangsta' rap music. The chapter ends with a 'grounding' in the gritty particulars of urban space – the inner city housing estate, the town centre and the new urban consumer zones – both present and the future.