

# Boredom, Crime, and Criminology

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I've been thinking about boredom lately.

The field research that I undertook for a recent book on the politics of urban space, *Tearing Down the Streets* (Ferrell, 2001/2002), first put me onto the subject. Throughout the research "boredom" kept surfacing as a concept, an organizing principle among those whose worlds I shared and studied. Playing music with street buskers night after night, for example, songs by The Sex Pistols, The Clash, and other punk bands regularly elicited a passionate response--with The Clash's 'London's Burning' offering the quickest collective trigger. As we would sing the cutting four-chord chorus of 'London's burning with boredom now!'--or a variation in which we'd sing, in place of 'London,' the name of the town in which we were playing--listeners would shout encouragement, sing along, make up lyrics, pogo up and down, laugh, yell for more. The song seemed to serve for them as a sort of anthem, an affirmation of something--or something missing--in their lives. And it wasn't just these street audiences; from gang members experiencing gang life as '90 percent boredom' (Rodriguez, 1998: 177) to patrons confronting Disneyland's pleasure-world of 'mechanized boredom' (Kunstler, 1993: 225), the anthem had a wide audience indeed.

Meanwhile, I discovered progressive urban space groups like Critical Mass and Reclaim the Streets were 'dis-organizing' larger illicit gatherings designed to salvage city streets from automotive traffic and to reinstate instead public life founded on fluid, face-to-face community. Moreover, activists in these and similar groups emphasized to me that the automobile, while a deadly problem in itself, was in reality symptomatic of a larger set of contemporary problems regarding the mass extermination of human spontaneity, the routinization of everyday existence, and the 'enclosure of human life within the boundaries of buying and selling...[within a] web of exploitative and demeaning activities, behaviors that impoverish the human experience and degrade planetary ecology' (Carlsson, 2002: 76, 82). So, for example, when Reclaim the Streets illegally shut down London's M41 motorway in 1996, the subsequent festival of resistance' featured booming music, street dancers, carnival figures, and a big banner warning of enforced boredom's apocalyptic consequences: 'The Society That Abolishes Every Adventure Makes Its Own Abolition the Only Possible Adventure.'

Of course this banner wasn't just a warning; it was a ghost. More than a quarter century earlier the Situationist International, a ragtag assembly of artists, writers, and cultural revolutionaries, had already launched this and other subversive slogans--slogans that animated the uprising of Paris '68. The uprising lasted only a short while, and by 1972 Situationist figureheads like Guy Debord had consigned the Situationist International itself to the dustbin of cultural history; but as Greil Marcus (1990) has shown, this lost cultural undercurrent nonetheless continued to percolate, bubbling over some years later in the howling incantations of Johnny Rotten and the incendiary cultural

politics of punk. And as I discovered in researching *Tearing Down the Streets*, this same undercurrent continues today, as urban activists in the United States, Great Britain, and Europe call forth the spirit of Paris '68, model their actions on the do-it-yourself ethos of punk and Situationist subversion, and otherwise go about resurrecting the Situationist critique of contemporary society.

That critique, it turns out, was built directly on boredom. Writing in 1953, Ivan Chtcheglov launched his 'Formulary for a New Urbanism'--one of the Situationists' foundational documents--with a straightforward negation: 'We are bored in the city, there is no longer any Temple of the Sun.' He continued, by way of explanation and threat: 'We don't intend to prolong the mechanistic civilizations and frigid architecture that ultimately lead to boring leisure.... A mental disease has swept the planet: banalization....as all the reasons for passion disappear' (Chtcheglov 1953). Refining the Situationist critique, Raoul Vaneigem set a similar tone, locating boredom amidst the great horrors of modern life. 'The promised land of survival will be the realm of peaceful death...' he wrote in *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. 'No more Guernicas, no more Auschwitzes, no more Hiroshimas.... Hooray! But what about the impossibility of living, what about this stifling mediocrity and this absence of passion...? Let nobody say these are minor details or secondary points' (Vaneigem, 2001: 35).

When such texts were translated onto city walls during Paris '68, this precise tone remained. 'We don't want a world where the guarantee of not dying of starvation brings the risk of dying of boredom' said one swatch of graffiti. Another hit the politics of boredom head-on: 'Boredom,' it declared, 'is counterrevolutionary.' A few years later the punks were just as blunt about boredom. As manager for the proto-punk New York Dolls in 1974, Malcolm McLaren's first press release asked, 'What are the politics of boredom?' (Taylor, 1988: 22). Three years later, Jamie Reid--the Situationist-inspired 'art director' for McLaren and the Sex Pistols--offered an answer of sorts in a poster he designed for the band's song 'Pretty Vacant': The poster featured two city buses, the first headed for 'Nowhere,' the second for 'Boredom.' Indeed, music historian Jon Savage argues, the entire punk style 'spoke of boredom,' became 'a theatrical expression of boredom's prison.' 'Boredom,' he adds, 'described the expansive, occluded, utopian politics that built up at the Sex Pistols' core... everyone involved with the Sex Pistols instinctively realized Boredom's spatial aspect and used its rhetoric as a key' (Savage, 1988: 48, 52, 54; see Hebdige, 1979: 27-29).

So, as I say, I've been thinking about boredom. Boredom seems to have emerged over the past few decades as some sort of subterranean motif, an experiential and conceptual context for activism and critique, a thread of politics pulling the past close to the present. Given this, I've found myself considering boredom's broader social and cultural conditions as well, and its consequences. Maybe there is indeed a 'politics of boredom.' Maybe to claim that 'boredom is counterrevolutionary' is to reveal something about 'utopian politics,' about revolutions real and imagined, about the possibilities of social change and social justice. And maybe boredom can tell us a good bit about crime, and about criminology as well.

## A Politics and Criminology of Boredom

In her literary history of boredom, Patricia Meyer Spacks (1995: ix, 219) notes that her account 'begins in eighteenth-century England because the concept of boredom begins there,' and adds, fictional (and poetic) evocations of boredom multiply exponentially in the twentieth century, partly for reasons implicit in the common understanding of modernism, which posits an isolated subject existing in a secularized, fragmented world marked by lost or precarious traditions: a paradigmatic situation for boredom.' Though hers is a 'literary history' of a 'state of mind,' Spacks' specificities of time and place, and her invocation of modernism, suggest a political and economic history of boredom as well. Put simply, they suggest that Situationists and others have confronted not just their own ennui over the past few decades, but something more: the emergence and maturation of modern boredom.

If we add to Spacks' characterization of modernism some further features perhaps more familiar to the sociologist--bureaucratic rationalization, efficiency, routinization, regulation, standardization--we do indeed find ourselves, it seems, in 'a paradigmatic situation for boredom.' In fact, the many trajectories of modernism seem to coalesce quite clearly into a vast machinery of boredom. As the repetitive hum of the factory replaces the localized rhythms of handcraft, the dulling sameness of alienated labor evacuates meaning from everyday work and strains against the fraudulent promise of modern progress. As efficiency develops into an organizational and cultural value, predictability proliferates; statistical summaries emerge as measures of worth; and quirks of individuality and personal innovation become detriments that modernism's many organizations can ill afford. As obedience to external rules and rationalized regulations comes to define success, even morality, sameness becomes a virtue, independence of mind a problem, and rulebooks the essential literature of the modern canon.

Looking back at the long maturation of the modern world, we can actually see collective boredom institutionalized within the practice of everyday life--and worse, institutionalized in existential counterpoint to the modernist ethos of each citizen's meaningful, democratic participation in the construction of everyday life. Frederick Taylor's divorcing of mental craft from manual labor in the interest of constructing the perfectly predictable 'human machine' (*Southwest*, 1915: 19); Henry Ford's attack on 'wasted motion' (in Braverman, 1974: 310n) by way of the fixed-station assembly line; modern bureaucracy, 'eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation' (Weber, 1946: 216)--each traces the same dulling trajectory. Following and reinforcing this trajectory, public schools emerge as training centers for the new boredom, rehearsal halls for the sublimation of individuality to disciplined efficiency; and for those insufficiently socialized to the new order, the mental hospital, the prison, the juvenile lockup offer entire institutions dedicated to the enforcement of tedium. Against this trajectory, it seems, a revolution is launched--except that Lenin himself eagerly embraces Taylorism, seeking to combine it with 'the Soviet organisation of administration' (in Braverman, 1974:12). And today? We might consider the employees of fast food chains, of Mexican *maquiladoras* and modern universities, their working lives and on-

the-job emotions all managed with assembly-line efficiency (Hochschild, 1983).

Then again, the same machinery of modernism that mass-produced these everyday conditions of boredom has been credited with mass-producing their counterweight and corrective: a new cultural world of mediated entertainments and pre-arranged excitements, available to the production clerk and the professor alike. And yet, it seems, each assembled moment of excitement has served only to amplify the rhythmic vacancy of everyday life. Thorstein Veblen understood this early on; he knew that Henry Ford's conveyer belts hummed inside the factory and out. 'To take effectual advantage of what is offered as the wheels of routine go round, in the way of work and play, livelihood and recreation,' Veblen (1990: 313-314) wrote in 1914, the consumer 'must know by facile habituation what is going on and how and in what quantities and at what price and where and when.... The mere mechanics of conformity to the schedule of living implies a degree of trained insight....'

By the 1940s the Frankfurt School understood as well--understood that boredom and its mass-made alternatives formed a closed circle of control, an ever-spinning cycle of empty consumption. 'The culture industry endlessly cheats its consumers out of what it endlessly promises. The promissory note of pleasures issued by plot and packaging is indefinitely prolonged,' wrote Horkheimer and Adorno (2002: 111, 113). 'Entertainment fosters the resignation which seeks to forget itself in entertainment.' Soon enough the Situationists understood, too, watching in horror as boredom, alienation, estrangement leaked out the factory door and into the entirety of everyday living. Occupying 'the main part of time lived outside of modern production,' the spectacle, Debord (1983: 6, emphasis in original) argued, becomes 'the present *model* of socially dominant life,' whether experienced as 'information or propaganda, as advertisement or direct entertainment consumption.' Vaneigem (2001: 25-26, emphasis in original) was more explicit:

The affluent society is a society of voyeurs. To each his own kaleidoscope: a tiny movement of the fingers and the picture changes.... But then the monotony of the images we consume gets the upper hand...The same energy is torn from the worker in his hours of work *and* in his hours of leisure, and it drives the turbines of power....

So, it seems, those caught under the crush of modern boredom can find little relief in work or in consumption--in fact, their boredom becomes all the more visceral, all the more unbearable, as the unrequited promises of mass-produced excitement accumulate, and the modernist ethos of meaningful work and democratic participation becomes just another cheap con. Closing in from all sides, the contradictions of modern boredom create a strain of Mertonian (1938) proportions, an existential disjunction between expectation and experience. What then to do about this cultural claustrophobia, so deadening that it seems to stifle each attempt at escaping it?

Existential despair is one option, a Mertonian retreat into fatalistic somnambulism. Resistance is another. Even as Taylor and Ford were

calibrating their instruments of organized boredom, radical movements like the Industrial Workers of the World (The Wobblies), for example, were already organizing against them. Conceptualizing sabotage as the 'conscientious withdrawal of efficiency' (Kornbluh, 1998: 37; Veblen, 1948), the Wobblies utilized sabotage to interrupt work's mind-numbing repetition. Similarly, The Wobblies employed poems, parables, songs, jokes, parodies, and cartoons in their everyday organizing, sang bawdy Wobbly hymns during strikes and street fights, staged pageants. The Wobblies were, by intention, not boring.

A century later, groups like Critical Mass and Reclaim the Streets aren't boring either. A rolling mix of bicycle activists and cultural revolutionaries, Critical Mass participants define their exuberantly collective bicycle rides not as traditional political protests, but as do-it-yourself celebrations enlivened by music, decoration, and play. Reclaim the Streets activists likewise set out to disrupt the regularities of modern life, seizing city streets for spontaneous community festivals of pleasure and creativity. For these and other groups, the goal is to 'rupture the normalcy' of everyday boredom, and to reinstate in everyday life the possibility of surprise.

It's a long way from The Wobblies to the Situationists, and on to the punks and Critical Mass and Reclaim the Streets, and yet they all seem to find common ground in modern boredom, and in their impassioned assault on it. 'The society that abolishes every adventure,' that builds collective boredom into the practice of everyday life, does appear to spawn those who find adventure in abolishing just such a world. In this sense, as the Situationists argued, boredom is indeed counterrevolutionary--if by revolution we mean the fight against modernism's dehumanizing standardization of experience and commodification of emotion. Like Vaneigem, those waging this fight envision a 'revolution of everyday life' sparked by ephemeral situations of risk and uncertainty. 'We will only organize the explosion,' said the Situationists. 'The free explosion must escape us and any other control forever' (in Marcus, 1990: 179-180)

Yet an important qualifier to any such free-form solution to organized boredom: Explosive situations, whether Critical Mass rides or moments of punk street music, are generally and increasingly deemed illegal by the authorities, emerging as they do without benefit of permits or permission. And there are countless other out-of-control explosions, little revolutions against the routinization of everyday life that are likewise not boring, and not legal. Flying with skydivers, riding fast motorcycles, Steve Lyng (1990: 869) finds in 'edgework' an intoxicating experiential counterpoint to a 'social system associated with class conflict, alienation, and the consumption imperative.' Riding those same fast motorcycles, later immersing myself in the adventures of the hip hop graffiti underground, I (Ferrell, 1996) find in the 'adrenalin rush' the same vivid experiential and emotional resistance to rationalized control. Dragan Milovanovic, Steve Lyng, and I (Ferrell et al, 2001) record a similar emotional reclamation of deadened human identity in the over-the-edge experiences of high-risk BASE jumpers. Mike Presdee (2000) documents carnival's dissolution within the atomization of modern mass society, exhuming its shattered emotional remains to discover some dangerous fragments now regulated, even criminalized, others sold back as commodified excitement. Jack Katz (1988: 73) explores moments of sensual excitement in which 'the protagonists...thrill to the expanded possibilities of the self'--

moments that Pat O'Malley and Stephen Mugford (1994: 190) characterize as 'reactions against mundane, secular rationality and against the (especially modern) forms of social setting in which they are inextricably implicated.'

Together, these studies--often grouped under the rubric of 'cultural criminology'--reveal criminal or criminalized groups busily inventing experiences that variously violate the modernist project of boredom. The deployment of carefully honed survival skills in dangerous situations, the on-the-spot integration of practiced artistry and illicit adventure, the embracing of emotional rituals that pre-date modernist rationality--all suggest experiences that are not boring, and not boring precisely because they recapture, if momentarily, the lost immediacy of self-made human experience. They suggest a broader question as well: Are certain crimes committed not against people or property as such, but against boredom?

Vanegiem offers an answer. 'A sixteen-year-old murderer recently explained: 'I did it because I was bored'', Vanegiem (2001: 42-43, 162) tells us. And then Vaneigem tells us something worse. 'Anyone who has felt the drive to self-destruction welling up inside him knows with what weary negligence he might one day happen to kill the organisers of his boredom.' Later, he reveals more about the crimes of a social order so boring that it offers only 'death on an installment plan.' 'A world that condemns us to a bloodless death is naturally obliged to propagate the taste for blood...the desire to live lays hold spontaneously of the weapons of death; senseless murder and sadism flourish. For passion destroyed is reborn in the passion for destruction.'

Answers like this confirm that criminologists must continue to investigate the circumstances of collective boredom, circumstances both historically structured and situationally negotiated. Such stultifying circumstances shape not just moments of illicit excitement, but the politics of social movements and the dynamics of cultural rebellion; for Wobblies and Situationists as for BASE jumpers and graffiti writers, boredom constitutes the unbearable experiential foreground of modernity. In daily life alienation is no Marxist category, rationalization no Weberian construct; the alienation and rationalization of modernism play out instead as an endless monotony, a stale sickness, for some a plodding death so 'insistent' that it 'strips real death of all terror' (Vaneigem, 2001: 163).

Looking in this way at boredom, we see the long front of late modernism unfold. As Jock Young (2003) and Mike Presdee (2000) have reminded us, we find that the criminal, the consumer, and the cultural revolutionary are perhaps more alike than different--that for them boredom creates a certain vacant commonality. After all, desperately looking for life amidst boredom's deteriorating death, the line between pleasure and pain, between crime and commodity, can be a thin one indeed. That sidewalk full of respectable revelers, shouting lyrics, finding affirmation in a punk anthem to boredom, may stand closer to the illicit anarchy of Reclaim the Streets and the fleeting kicks of a stolen car chase than some would like to imagine. 'A man shooting heroin into his vein does so largely for the same reason you rent a video,' says the poet Joseph Brodsky (in Rivenberg, 2003: 1F). 'To dodge the redundancy of time.'

In the same way boredom offers us an emotional and experiential window into the failures of the modernist project. The boredom proffered by

the office cubicle and the shopping mall is no unfortunate side-effect; it stems directly from the dehumanizing processes and fraudulent promises on which these situations are founded. Such situations are boring precisely because they are systematically drained of human skill and possibility, devoid of the uncertainty and surprise that comes with human creativity. They share in the intentional erasure of human possibility, the preclusion of self-made variations in pace, meaning, and intentionality; relentless in their governance of detail, they leave room for little but boredom in their effect. So, while some die a day at a time, others seek to overturn organized boredom, here with a spray can, there with a swirling interruption of automotive traffic. And in many of these large and small revolutions there is clearly something more being sought than excitement. Excitement, it seems, is in reality a means to an end, a subset of what ultimately emerges as the antidote to modern boredom: human engagement (Ferrell, 2004).

Excitement, engagement, illicit kicks and explosive possibilities, all thrown up against the relentless machinery of modern boredom--this suggests something else as well.

### **And Nothing to Lose But Boredom**

If we widen our inquiry into organized boredom further still--this time to include our own institutional and professional lives as criminologists--we discover a parallel trajectory: In the same way that modernism's other institutions have operated over time to expunge craft and creativity from the practice of life, the modern machinery of criminology has functioned to exhaust the hand-made creativity of alternative criminological inquiry. In the same way that the factory, the agency, and the marketplace were rationalized in the interest of efficient control, the enterprise of criminology has been shaped toward scientific efficiency in such a way as to dehumanize both its practitioners and those it is designed to investigate and control. In the same way that the larger evolution of modernism has organized a vast collectivity of boredom, the evolution of modern criminology has produced a stale commonality of boredom between its practitioners, its students, and its prisoners. And yet, in the same way that modernism's systemic boredom has set in motion revolts against boredom itself--revolts defined by their invention of engagement and excitement--the blanketing boredom of mainstream criminology has, more than once, spawned its own edgy countercurrents.

As Patricia and Peter Adler (1998: xiii) have argued, many of criminology's foundational works emerged out of an idiosyncratic, impressionistic approach to ethnographic inquiry that by the mid-twentieth century had been usurped by 'a tradition of survey research that has held sway within the discipline ever since.' Tracing a similar trend, Joe Feagan, Tony Orum, and Gideon Sjoberg (Feagan et al, 1991) likewise argue that 'mainstream article sociology'--the efficient, routinized production of article-length research reports--has over time displaced the deeper intellectual and temporal commitments of 'book sociology' as the measure of professional success and achievement. In the United States at least, these shifts toward rationalized research methodologies and objectivist measures of disciplinary productivity have been replicated in the universities themselves--organizations increasingly defined by corporate management practices and a bureaucratic

culture of actuarial control. For United States criminologists especially, this academic machinery has increasingly been coupled, through criminal justice departments and state research grants, to a similarly dehumanizing state machinery of surveillance, imprisonment, and control. Not surprisingly, the Adlers (1998: xiv) label the present period 'The Dark Ages'--though 'Modern Times' might be more apt.

As a result, the majority of mainstream criminological scholarship today can only be described as...boring. Like other forms of modern boredom, this academic boredom results directly from the conditions of its production, from the methodological and analytic routinizations enforced against human beings in order to drain dry words and data sets from their lives. The vivid experiential agony of crime victimization transmogrified into abstract empiricism, the sensuality of the criminal event tabulated and footnoted--it would be a remarkable achievement in public sanitation, I suppose, if it weren't so boring. Remembering in addition the mechanisms of bureaucratic oversight through which these data sets have passed in order to see print, one realizes that the pages reference precisely what the Situationists pronounced: an intellectual world in which every adventure has indeed been abolished.

And yet criminologists have more than once revolted against criminology's manifest boredom. There are, for example, what the Adlers (1998: xiii-xiv) call the 'Renaissance' and 'Abstract Expressionism' periods in American criminology and sociology--periods when the ascension of the survey research/abstract empiricist mainstream was challenged by an efflorescence of vivid subcultural ethnographies. At around the same time in Great Britain, there's that moment of abandonment and abandon that Sir Leon Radzinowicz (in Young, 2003) recalls in terms of 'naughty schoolboys,' a moment that gave rise to the National Deviancy Conference, and to manifold innovations in the study of crime and culture. Jock Young's (2003) description of the NDC as 'hectic, irreverent, transgressive and, above all, fun' confirms what its books and papers have long proven: that it was...not boring. And today, cultural criminology isn't boring either.

Why isn't it? I suspect even cultural criminology's harshest critics from within mainstream criminology would agree that it's not boring--and, they would argue, that's just the problem. Like their colleagues in cultural studies, they would argue, cultural criminologists pander to popular culture, picking and choosing amidst the cultural detritus for oddities and titillations. Dressing up this degraded subject matter with a style closer to romanticism or reporting than to scientific analysis, they would say, it's no wonder cultural criminology manages to generate some degree of interest.

But in actuality, I would argue, the excitement of cultural criminology doesn't reside essentially in its subject matter; after all, this same subject matter, these same outlaws and adrenalin junkies, could just as easily be reduced to tabulated abstractions--that is, to boredom--by any good abstract empiricist. Instead, the excitement, the vigor of cultural criminology comes from its *engagement* with its subjects of study, and from its willingness to confront the social and cultural conditions of boredom that pervade mainstream criminological practice. Put differently, cultural criminology's assault on boredom originates as much in the politics of its theory and method as in the promise of its subject matter. And so, as cultural criminologists go



about rehumanizing the process of criminological inquiry and analysis, they replicate the work of Wobblies and Situationists, of edgeworkers and Reclaim the Streets activists; they undertake a revolt against boredom that is, like these others, equal parts intellectual resistance and disorganized transgression. In particular, they launch a revolt made up of method and moments.

### *Method*

The importation of 'scientific' methodologies into criminology in the hope of positioning criminology as an objective social science of crime paralleled, in consequence, the introduction of scientific management into the office and factory: both resulted in the systematic dehumanization of those involved, and in the institution of pervasive boredom. Just as the broader boredom of modernism results from the reduction of human subjects to rationalized categories of work and consumption, the boredom of mainstream criminology results in large part from methodologies designed, quite explicitly, to reduce human subjects to carefully controlled categories of counting and cross-tabulation. Just as the boredom of modernism in turn stems from the systematic exhaustion of uncertainty and possibility in everyday life, the boredom of mainstream criminology stems in large part from methodologies designed, again quite explicitly, to exclude ambiguity, surprise, and 'human error' from the process of criminological research. Coupled with a state control apparatus organized around similar ends, these methodologies bankrupt the promise of meaningful scholarship, becoming instead the foundation for the sort of 'courthouse criminology' described by Ned Polsky (1998: 136)--the criminology of the 'technologist or moral engineer.'

While no one method defines cultural criminology, ethnographic methodologies have been utilized widely as an alternative avenue into the situated dynamics of crime and culture since, as Paul Willis (1977: 3) says, such methodologies offer 'a sensitivity to meanings and values as well as an ability to represent and interpret symbolic articulations, practices and forms of cultural production.' Offering researchers vulnerability, humility, danger, and deep involvement with subjects of study as well, such methodologies also serve to reclaim the criminological enterprise from a courthouse criminology of scientific rationalization and methodological objectification. Undertaken appropriately, ethnographic studies are suffused with surprise and uncertainty. By nature, such studies are profoundly inefficient, all but guaranteed to seduce the researcher out of professionally appropriate schedules and into a temporal netherworld of dawdling and delay. By definition, such studies embrace the cultural meanings of those studied, and in so doing affirm both the complex humanity of people otherwise reduced to statistical residue, and the dangerous ambiguities of crime and crime control that disappear within the pseudo-precision of 'social science.'

Given this, ethnographic studies and ethnographic sensibilities regularly generate, for all involved, a level of engagement and excitement absent from efficient accumulations of survey data. Just as skilled craft work produces idiosyncratic designs unimaginable within the repetitions of the assembly line, skilled ethnographic research and writing produces vivid images, oddball insights, and illicit vignettes that remain unimaginable, not to

mention unmanageable, within objectivist methodologies. Continuing to take ethnographers and their audiences inside marginalized cultural meanings and edgy social situations, ethnographic methodologies at their best eventually become no methods at all, but rather a way of life for those willing to explore the uncertain, evolving textures of crime and crime control. As such, they allow us to lose ourselves and our skills as researchers inside a series of illicit situations, and so to embrace an ongoing criminology of moments.

### *Moments*

Many of the political and cultural revolts against modern boredom have shared a common strategy: the manufacture of moments that transcend structures of boredom, and in so doing embody self-made dynamics of engagement and excitement. Employing cultural weapons like *de'tournement* (a radical reversal of meaning) and the *de'rive* (a disorienting drift through the urban landscape), the Situationists sought to overturn the markers of everyday boredom, and so to create moments so epistemically unstable, so contrary to usual understanding, as to subvert the tedium of daily life. Shunning representational politics and long-range planning, Critical Mass and Reclaim the Streets likewise embrace the dynamics of direct action, seeking to create celebratory moments in which the unplanned pleasures of spontaneous interaction retake the streets from the drudgery of traffic and commerce. Those pursuing edgework and the adrenalin rush themselves undertake this sort of impermanent revolution, finding an ephemeral unity of skill and adventure in moments that last only until the parachute opens or the paint dries. All of these groups counter ongoing boredom with momentary excitement, creating what Hakim Bey (1995: 39) calls 'temporary autonomous zones' of human engagement and possibility carved from the predictable alienation of everyday existence. And for all of these groups, these moments are not merely means to some larger revolution; they *are* the revolution, a revolution of everyday life that maintains its human immediacy and outlaw excitement precisely because it does not endure (Ferrell, 2004). Though ethnographic research often and appropriately unfolds as a long-term process, it is just such moments, it seems, that define its potential--and that in turn define cultural criminology's experiential immediacy and theoretical vivacity. Pursuing ethnographic projects, cultural criminologists find themselves caught up in moments an edgeworker might appreciate, moments in which analytic skills collide with danger and uncertainty. Losing ourselves, unleashing our abilities as researchers, we find in these moments something more than we could imagine; we discover that, like edgeworkers and Critical Mass activists, we've been carried beyond the boundaries of the everyday. As with the Situationists, our critique comes alive in the phenomenological foreground of experience, its analytic elegance polished by the grit of everyday crime and crime control. Up against 'that obdurate English preference for the particular, for the thing itself' (Hebdige, 1988: 12), analysis becomes animated; intertwined with 'innumerable riotous angelic particulars' (Kerouac, 1955: 172), analytic insight takes on the vivid textures of lived experience.

A while back, for example, while digging through a trash pile behind a mansion, I ran into Thorstein Veblen. Engaged in a long-term ethnography of

illicit trash pickers and urban scroungers, I've been spending a good bit of time at trash piles--and one day, behind this big mansion, I discovered a pile of expensive party favors, decorations, and baby gifts, many of the gifts still sealed new in their boxes, the aftermath of a baby shower meant mostly for show. And there was Veblen (1948: 112, 116), reminding me that in a society defined by the acquisition of commodities, consumption becomes not only conspicuous, but 'honorific,' even 'ceremonial,' an ongoing ritual and addiction, a matter mostly of symbolism and status.

Other times I've found myself sharing a moment with Jean Genet. He was there the afternoon an old homeless woman and I were digging through a big trash pile, watching as she generously gave me first choice on all the clothes she pulled from the pile. He's been there at the scrap metal yard, swapping stories with the old scroungers--a sorry but independent lot that's likely to sport 'I Love My Boss--Self-Employed' stickers on the back bumpers of their beat-up pickups. Genet was there the day I met a snagged-toothed homeless man riding a bicycle he'd rebuilt for better scrap runs, with me another day when I met an old guy who scrounges while rolling his wheelchair down the gutter. Considering this empire that exists only at the trashy margins, Genet (1964: 19) recalled his own empire of existential marginality. 'Never did I try to make of it something other than what it was,' he said. 'I did not try to adorn it, to mask it, but, on the contrary, I wanted to affirm it in its exact sordidness, and the most sordid signs became for me signs of grandeur.'

For that matter, I can't seem to find an ethnographic moment away from Max Weber. His notion of *verstehen* all but overwhelms me every time I engage the generosity and ingenuity of those exiled to the margins of the legal order (Weber, 1949, 1978; Ferrell, 1997). He shows up regularly in another of my research projects, too: the documentation of the roadside shrines that families and friends build for loved ones lost to automotive violence (Ferrell, 2003). Sometimes the rush of sympathetic understanding overtakes me at the edge of the roadway as a big automobile blasts by, offering me the visceral proximity of violent death. Other times it's the shrines themselves, photos of orphaned kids nailed to their crosses, 'we-love-you-forever' written on their decorations. And once out at an isolated shrine, as I discovered coins, gifts, and notes of sympathy left there, Emile Durkheim (1933) appeared, reminding me that such shrines accumulate into a symbolic community, a living social solidarity emerging out of lonely death itself.

In moments like these we as cultural criminologists reinvent the modern world by paying attention to it. Drifting down back alleys or open roads, we encounter every new trashpile or roadside shrine as an epistemic surprise, a frontier of possibility and understanding. Along the way moments of *de'tournement* unfold as the sensual immediacy of situations intertwines with our own analytic predilections to subvert usual understandings of safety, decency, criminality, and law. Such moments sparkle with human possibility, with intellectual excitement, because they ground analysis in experience--and because they situate our analysis and experience inside the everyday lives of others. Engaged with the generosity of a homeless scrounger, confronted with the tragic beauty of a roadside shrine--lost in any of the moments that make up cultural criminology--we enlist the help of those we study in sabotaging the

machinery of boredom and dehumanization that defines modernism and modern criminology alike.

If we continue in this way to confront the organized boredom of mass obedience--if we continue constructing an orientation that is 'hectic, irreverent, transgressive and, above all, fun'-- we might even make cultural criminology into a revolution of everyday life. The odds are against it, but then they always are. Even Vaneigem, who understood such long odds as well as anyone, was willing to bet on his 'presentiment that a passion for life was on the increase.' I'm willing to make that bet as well on behalf of cultural criminology. After all, 'we have a world of pleasure to win,' Vaneigem (2001: 7, 279) wrote, 'and nothing to lose but boredom.'

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