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SOCIIOLOGICAL THEORIES OF CRIME

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INTRODUCTION

The Oxford English Dictionary defines sociology as ‘the study of social organization and institutions and of collective behaviour and interaction, including the individual’s relationship to the group’. That is a catholic definition which encompasses almost every situation in which individuals or groups can influence one another. Sociological theories of crime are themselves correspondingly catholic: they extend, for example, from an examination of the smallest detail of street encounters between adolescents and the police to comparative analyses of very large movements in nations’ aggregate rates of crime over centuries, and it is sometimes difficult to determine where their boundaries should be drawn.

There is no one, royal way to lay out the sociology of crime; some have classified its component theories by their supposed political leanings (liberal, conservative, and radical, for instance); some by their attentiveness or inattentiveness to gender; some by their alleged foundational assumptions about the character of the social world (classical, positivist, ‘social constructionist’, and the like); some by their chronology; some by the great men and women who propounded them; and others by schools of thought.

In an empirically-driven sub-discipline where the frontiers between theories and parent disciplines are frequently frail and deceptive, where formally different theories often contend with the same problems in very much the same way, as useful a procedure as any is to identify and describe a number of broad families of theories that share some big idea or ideas in common. The organization of this chapter will therefore follow intellectual themes more closely than chronologies or hierarchies of thought in an attempt to convey some small part of the present preoccupations and environment of sociological criminology.

I shall take it that those themes, in their turn, seem quite commonly to take the form of different combinations of ideas about the key issues of control, signification, and order. Crime, after all, is centrally bound up with the state’s attempts to impose its will through law; with the meanings of those attempts to law-breaker, law-enforcer, observer, and victim; and with concomitant patterns of order and disorder. Criminologists differ about the weights and meanings that should be attached to
those attributes: some, and control theorists in particular, would wish to be what Matza once called ‘correctionalist’, that is, to use knowledge about crime to suppress it. Others would look upon the exercise of control more critically. But they all feed off one another’s ideas even if their practices and politics diverge. The attributes are visible features of the discipline’s landscape, and I shall employ them to steer a more or less straight route through Durkheimian and Mertonian theories of anomie; control theories; rational choice theory; routine activities theory; the work of the ‘Chicago School’; studies of the relations between control and space, including Newman’s ‘defensible space’, and more recent ideas of risk and the marshalling of dangerous populations; radical criminology and left realism; functionalist criminology; and ‘labelling theory’ and cultural and subcultural analyses of crime as meaningful behaviour. I shall take it that such a grand tour should take in most of the major landmarks which criminologists would now consider central to their field.

What this chapter cannot do, of course, is provide much context, history, criticism and detail. That would be impossible in a short piece. I can hope at best to select only a few illustrative ideas that are of current or recent interest, as well as discussing some of the older arguments that informed them.

Further, like any scheme of classification, this chapter will inevitably face problems of anomaly and overlap, not only internally but also with other chapters in the Handbook. If the study of crime cannot be severed from the analysis of control, the state, or gender, there will always be such problems at the margins. But the chapter should furnish the larger contours of an introductory map of contemporary sociological theories of crime.

**CRIME AND CONTROL**

**ANOMIE AND THE CONTRADICTIONS OF SOCIAL ORDER**

I shall begin by describing anomie theory, one of the most enduring and, for a while, hard-researched of all the ideas of criminological theory, and one that still persists in disguised form.

At heart, many theories take it that crime is a consequence of defective social regulation. People are said to deviate because the disciplines and authority of society are so flawed that they offer few restraints or moral direction. The idea is a very old one, antedating the emergence of sociology itself, but its formal birth into theory is linked indissolubly with anomie and the French sociologist, Émile Durkheim.

Durkheim awarded two rather different meanings to anomie, or normlessness. In *The Division of Labour in Society*, published in 1893, and in *Suicide*, published in 1897, he asserted that French society was in uneasy transition from one state of solidarity or integration to another. A society without an elaborate division of labour rested on what he called (perhaps misleadingly) the mechanical solidarity of people who not only reacted much alike to problems, but who also saw that everyone about them reacted alike to those problems, thereby lending objectivity, scale, and solidity to
moral response, and bringing a potential for massive disapproval and repression to bear on the deviant. Such a social order was conceived to lie in the simpler past of pre-industrial society. The future of industrial society would be distinguished by a state of organic solidarity, the solidarity appropriate to a complex division of labour. People would then be allocated by merit and effort to very diverse positions, and they would not only recognize the legitimacy of the manner in which rewards were distributed, but also acknowledge the indispensability of what each did in his or her work for the other and for the common good. Organic solidarity would thus have controls peculiar to itself: ‘Sheerly economic regulation is not enough . . . there should be moral regulation, moral rules which specify the rights and obligations of individuals in a given occupation in relation to those in other occupations’ (Giddens 1972: 11). People might no longer think wholly in unison, their moral response might not be substantial and unanimous, but they should be able to compose their differences peaceably by means of a system of restitutive justice that made amends for losses suffered.

Durkheim’s distinction between the two forms of solidarity and their accompanying modes of control was anthropologically suspect, but it was in his analysis of the liminal state between them that criminologists were most interested. In that transition, where capitalism was thought to impose a ‘forced division of labour’, people acquiesced neither in the apportionment of rewards nor in the moral authority of the economy or state. They were obliged to work and act in a society that not only enjoyed little legitimacy but also exercised an incomplete control over their desires. In such a setting, it was held, ‘man’s nature [was to be] eternally dissatisfied, constantly to advance, without relief or rest, towards an indefinite goal’ (Durkheim 1952: 256). Moral regulation was relatively deficient and people were correspondingly free to deviate. That is the first meaning Durkheim gave to anomie. His second will be visited below.

Given another, distinctively American, complexion by Robert Merton, anomie became a socially-fostered state of discontent and deregulation that generated crime and deviance as part of the routine functioning of a society which promised much to everyone but actually denied them equal access to its attainment (Merton 1938). People might have been motivated to achieve in the United States, but they confronted class, race, and other social differences that manifestly contradicted the myth of openness. It was not easy for a poor, inner-city adolescent to receive sponsorship for jobs, achieve academic success, or acquire capital. In a society where failure was interpreted as a sign of personal rather than social weakness, where failure tended to lead to guilt rather than to political anger, the pressure to succeed could be so powerful that it impelled people thus disadvantaged to bypass legitimate careers and take to illegitimate careers instead: ‘the culture makes incompatible demands . . . In this setting, a cardinal American virtue—“ambition”—promotes a cardinal American vice—“deviant behavior”’ (Merton 1957: 145).

Merton’s anomie theory was to be modified progressively for some thirty years. In the work of Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin, for example, his model was elaborated to include illegitimate routes to success. Their Delinquency and Opportunity (1960) described the consequences of young American men (in the 1950s and 1960s the criminological gaze was almost wholly on the doings of young American men) not
only being pushed into crime by the difficulties of acquiring money and position in conventional ways, but also being pulled by the lure of lucrative and unconventional criminal careers. There would be those who were offered an unorthodox path in professional or organized crime, and they could become thieves, robbers, or racketeers. There would be those for whom no path was available, and they could become members of conflict gangs. And there were those who failed to attain admission to either a law-abiding or a law-violating group, the 'double failures', who would, it was conjectured, give up and become drug-users and hustlers. Each of those modes of adaptation was, in effect, a way of life, supported by a system of meanings or a subculture, and Cloward and Ohlin provided one of the bridges between the structural and the interpretive models of crime which will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

In the work of Albert Cohen, anomie was to be synthesized with the Freudian idea of 'reaction formation' in an effort to explain the manifestly expressive and 'non-rational' nature of much delinquency. The prospect of failure was depicted as bringing about a major psychological rejection of what had formerly been sought, so that the once-aspiring working-class adolescent emphatically turned his back on the middle-class world that spurned him and adopted a style of behaviour that was its systematic inversion. The practical and utilitarian in middle-class life was transformed into non-utilitarian delinquency; respectability became malicious negativism; and the deferment of gratification became short-run hedonism. Again, in the work of David Downes, conducted in London in the early 1960s to explore how far beyond America anomie theory might be generalized, the ambitions of English adolescents were found to be so modulated by what was then a stable and legitimated system of social stratification that working-class youth did not seem to undergo a taxing guilt or frustration in their failure to accomplish middle-class goals. They neither hankered after the middle-class world nor repudiated it. Rather, their response was 'dissociation'. Where they did experience a strong dissatisfaction, however, was in their thwarted attempts to enjoy leisure, and their delinquencies were principally hedonistic, focused on drinking, fighting, and malicious damage to property, rather than instrumentally turned towards the accumulation of wealth. And that theme—of the part played by the adolescent 'manufacture of excitement' and the courting of risk—was to be echoed repeatedly in the empirical and theoretical work of criminologists. Making 'something happen' in a world without significant cultural or material resources could easily bring about a drift into delinquency (see Matza 1964; Corrigan 1979; and Cusson 1983).

ANOMIE AND SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION

The second reading of anomie stemming from Durkheim touched on moral regulation that was not so much flawed as in a critical or chronic state of near collapse. People, he argued, are not endowed at birth with fixed appetites and ambitions. On the contrary, their purposes and aspirations are shaped by the generalized opinions and reactions of others, by a collective conscience, that can appear through social ritual and routine to be externally derived, solid, and objective. When society is
disturbed by rapid change or major disorder, however, that semblance of solidity and objectivity can itself founder, and people may no longer find their ambitions subject to effective social discipline. It is hard to live outside the reassuring structures of social life, and the condition of anomie was experienced as a ‘malady of infinite aspiration’ that was accompanied by ‘weariness’, ‘disillusionment’, ‘disturbance, agitation and discontent’. In extreme cases, Lukes observed, ‘this condition would lead a man to commit suicide and homicide’ (1967: 139).

Durkheim conceived such anomic deregulation to be a matter of crisis, innately unstable and short-lived. Disorganization could not be tolerated for very long before a society collapsed or order of a sort would be restored. Indeed, sociologists are generally ill-disposed towards the term, believing that it connotes a want of understanding and perception on the part of the observer (see Anderson 1976; Katz 1997; and Whyte 1942). They would hold that, even in Sierra Leone, Bosnia, or Rwanda at their most devastated, people were able to sustain a measure of organization within disorganization. Yet, on both the small and the large scale, there are clear examples of people living in conditions where informal control and cooperativeness are only vestigial; where formal control is either absent or erratic; where others are, or are seen to be, predatory and dangerous; where life is unpredictable; and where, as cause and consequence, there is little personal safety, much anxiety, and abundant crime. Take William Julius Wilson’s description of life in the poorest areas of the American city: ‘broken families, antisocial behavior, social networks that do not extend beyond the ghetto environment, and a lack of informal social control over the behavior and activities of children and adults in the neighborhood’ (1996: xvi). On some housing estates in Paris, London (see Genn 1988), Nottingham (Davies 1998), and St Louis (Rainwater 1970), social groupings have been portrayed as so lacking in cohesion that they enjoyed no shared trust, neighbour preyed on neighbour, and joint defensive action was virtually impossible.

Rampant anomie has been well documented (Erikson 1994). Consider Davis’s half-prophetic description of MacArthur Park, one of the poorest areas of Los Angeles, as ‘feral’ and dangerous, ‘a free-fire zone where crack dealers and street gangs settle their scores with shotguns and Uzis’ (1992a: 6). Consider, too, Turnbull’s description of the condition of the Ik of northern Uganda, a tribe that had been moved to a mountainous area after their traditional hunting grounds had been designated a national park. They could no longer live, cooperate, and work as they had done before; familiar patterns of social organization had become obsolete; and the Ik were portrayed as having become beset by ‘acrimony, envy and suspicion’ (1973: 239), ‘excessive individualism, coupled with solitude and boredom’ (ibid.: 238), and the victimization of the weak: ‘without killing, it is difficult to get closer to disposal than by taking the food out of an old person’s mouth, and this was primarily an adjacent-generation occupation, as were tripping and pushing off balance’ (ibid.: 252).

A number of criminologists and others are beginning to prophesy a new apocalypse in which anomie will flourish on such a massive scale that entire societies will dissolve into chaos and lawlessness. There are parts of the world whose political structures are so radically disordered that it becomes difficult to talk about legitimate governments.
operating effectively within secure national boundaries at all (see Bayart, Ellis, and Hibou 1999). So it was that Kaplan wrote graphically about the road-warrior culture of Somalia, the anarchic implosion of criminal violence in the Ivory Coast, and Sierra Leone, which he depicted as a lawless state that had lost control over its cities at night, whose national army was a ‘rabble’, and which was reverting to tribalism. The future for many, he luridly predicted, would be a ‘rundown, crowded planet of skinhead Cossacks and juju warriors, influenced by the worst refuse of Western pop culture and ancient tribal hatreds, and battling over scraps of overused earth in guerilla conflicts …’ (1994: 62–3). So, too, Martin van Creveld analysed what he called the ubiquitous growth of ‘low-intensity conflict’ waged by guerillas and terrorists who threatened the state’s conventional monopoly of violence: ‘Should present trends continue, then the kind of war that is based on the division between government, army, and people, seems to be on its way out. … A degree of violent activity that even as late as the 1960s would have been considered outrageous is now accepted as an inevitable hazard of modern life …’ (1991: 192, 194). If Kaplan and van Creveld are even partially gifted with foresight (and much of their argument is quite stark), the trends they foretell will be of major consequence to criminology. Without a viable state legislature, laws, and law enforcement, without adequate state control over the distribution of violence, how can one write intelligently about a discrete realm of crime at all? Crime, after all, is contingent on a state’s ability clearly to define, ratify, and execute the law. When the police of a state are massively and routinely corrupt (as they appear to be in Mexico); when, for example, the Colombian president’s aeroplane was found to be carrying large quantities of cocaine in September 1996 (see the New York Times, 22 September 1996); when the President of Liberia has been accused of cannibalism (The Times, 2 November 1999); it is not difficult to acknowledge the disarray to which Stan Cohen pointed when he asked whether it was possible any longer to distinguish firmly between crime and politics. There has been, Cohen asserted, a widespread decline of the myth that the sovereign state can provide security, law, and order; a decline in the legitimacy of the state through corruption scandals; a growth of international crime and a rise of criminal states such as Chechnya; and, in Africa particularly, the emergence of barbarism, horror, and atrocity. In some settings, he remarked, ‘lawlessness and crime have so destroyed the social fabric that the state itself has withdrawn’ (1996: 9).

CONTROL THEORY

A second, large cluster of theories centres loosely around the contention that people seek to commit crime because it is profitable, useful, or enjoyable for them to do so, and that they will almost certainly break the law if they can. Even if that contention, with its covert imagery of feral man (and woman), is not strictly ‘correct’, control theorists would argue that it certainly points enquiry in a helpful direction. They are interested less in the fidelity of description than in its yield for policy intervention and prediction in concrete situations. Theirs is a theory of practical rather than of observational truths, and the practical is thought to suggest that more will be learned by exploring a few, uncomplicated factors that seem to prevent people from offending
than by investigating all the complicated motives, meanings, and antecedents of their actions. Travis Hirschi put the issue baldly: ‘The question “Why do they do it?” is simply not the question the theory is designed to answer. The question is, “Why don’t we do it?”’ (1969: 34). Such a doctrine is a recognizably close neighbour of anomie theories in its focus on the regulation of potentially unbridled appetites; and, indeed, it is occasionally very difficult to distinguish one set of ideas from the other.

Earlier variants of control theory, compiled in the 1960s and 1970s, proceeded by drafting lists of the constraints which could check the would-be offender, an offender who, it was assumed for analytic purposes, could be much like you, me, or anyone. Thus, arguing against subcultural theory, and grounded in a Freudian conception of human impulses that required taming, Hirschi claimed that ‘delinquent acts result when the individual’s bond to society is weak or broken’ (1969: 16). Four chief elements were held to induce people to comply with rules: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. Attachment reflected a person’s sensitivity to the opinions of others; commitment flowed from an investment of time, energy, and reputation in conformity; involvement stemmed from engrossment in conventional activity; and belief mirrored a person’s conviction that he or she should obey legal rules. There is tautology and repetition in that formulation, but Hirschi nevertheless usefully directed the criminological mind towards answering his one big question, ‘why don’t we do it?’

Later, with Gottfredson, Hirschi developed control theory by turning to self-control and impulsivity. Crime, they claim, flows from low self-control: it provides a direct and simple gratification of desires that is attractive to those who cannot or will not postpone pleasure. In the main, it requires little skill or planning. It can be intrinsically enjoyable because it involves the exercise of cunning, agility, deception, or power. It requires a lack of sympathy for the victim. But it does not provide medium- or long-term benefits equivalent to those that may flow from more orthodox careers. In short, it is, they say, likely to be committed by those who are ‘impulsive, insensitive, physical . . . Risk-taking, short-sighted, and non-verbal . . . ’ (1990: 90).

David Matza would not have called himself a control theorist, but in Delinquency and Drift he did effectively straddle theories of control, anomie and signification, and he did portray delinquents and delinquency in a manner that control theorists would find complementary. It was indeed he who later wrote an eloquent case for what he called an appreciative criminology (Matza 1969). Delinquents are not very different from us, he argued. Most of the time they are conventional enough in belief and conduct, and it is difficult to predict who will conform and who will not. But there are occasions when the grip of control loosens, adolescents fatalistically experience themselves as if they were object and effect rather than as subject and cause, as if they were no longer morally responsible for their actions, and they will then find themselves released to drift in and out of delinquency. What eases that process of disengagement are widely-circulating accounts or ‘techniques of neutralization’ (an idea that he had developed earlier with Gresham Sykes (Sykes and Matza 1957)) which enable people methodically to counter the guilt and offset the censure they might experience when offending. Matza claimed that delinquents could be fortified in their resolve by their ability to condemn their condemners (by asserting that police and judges were
themselves corrupt and invalid critics, for instance); to deny injury (by asserting that no significant harm was done); to deny the victim (by asserting that the victim was of no consequence, or deserved what happened); or to appeal to higher loyalties (a noble motive could be cited for an ignoble deed).

Steven Box attempted to take analysis yet further by reconciling Hirschi's emphasis on social bonds with Matza's conception of drift. He compiled his own new alliterative list of variables that were held to affect control: secrecy (the delinquent's chances of concealment); skills (a mastery of knowledge and techniques needed for the deviant act); supply (access to appropriate equipment); social support (the endorsement offered by peers and others); and symbolic support (the endorsement offered by accounts available in the wider culture) (1971: 150). The greater the access to requisite skills, secrecy, supplies, and social and symbolic support, the greater would be the likelihood of offending.

Perhaps one of the most telling and economical contributions to control theory was supplied by Harriet Wilson. Examining 'socially deprived' families in Birmingham, England, she was to conclude that what most sharply differentiated families with delinquent children from those with none was simply what she called the exercise of 'chaperonage' (1980). Parents who acted as chaperons effectively prevented their children from offending: they were so convinced that the neighbourhood in which they lived was dangerous and contaminating that they sought to protect their children by keeping them indoors or under close supervision, escorting them to school, and prohibiting them from playing with others defined as undesirable.

Control theory has also been applied with effect to the problem of gender differences in offending. Apart from age, no other demographic feature at present so powerfully discriminates between offenders and non-offenders. At one time, however, scant criminological attention was paid to female crime because there was so very little of it. As Lemert once said, like Custer's men, criminologists rode to the sound of the guns, and there were few female guns indeed firing. By contrast, what made male offending appear so interesting was its sheer seriousness and scale.

However, when feminist criminologists and others began to ask Travis Hirschi's central question (without actually citing Hirschi himself), female offending became analytically transformed precisely because it was so rare. There was the new and intriguing riddle of the conforming woman, and the riddle was answered, in part, by reference to the effects of differentials in control. In particular, John Hagan and his colleagues put it that deviation as a form of fun and excitement was more commonly open to males than to females because daughters are more frequently subject to intense, continual, and diffuse family control in the private, domestic sphere. That control, by extension, not only removed girls from the purview of agents of formal social control, the criminal justice system, and the possibility of public identification as criminal; it also worked more effectively because it rested on the manipulation of emotional sanctions rather than the imposition of physical or custodial controls. Shaming strategies and the withdrawal of affection are seemingly more potent than fines, probation, or prison. It followed that the more firmly structured and hierarchical the family, the sharper the distinction drawn between male and female roles, the more women were confined to private space, the greater would be the disparity
between rates of male and female offending (see Hagan et al. 1979, 1985, and 1988). Pat Carlen gave that analysis yet another twist by reflecting that female criminals were most likely to emerge when domestic family controls were removed altogether, when what she called the 'gender deal' was broken, young women left home or were taken into the care of the state, and were thereby exposed to controls characteristically experienced by men (1988). The answer to the 'crime problem', Frances Heidensohn once concluded, would have to lie in the feminization of control.

RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY
An increasingly important, but not indispensable, foundation for control theories is 'rational choice theory', a resuscitation of old utilitarian theories that preceded sociology and were once linked with Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, Cesare Beccaria, and James Mill. Rational choice theory has recently been re-introduced to criminology through the medium of a revived economics of crime, and it brings with it the convenient fiction of economic man, a fiction which has an immediate affinity with the criminal man (or woman) of control theory. Economic man, deemed to be continually looking about him for opportunities, making amoral and asocial choices to maximize his personal utility, may not be an empirically-grounded or well-authenticated entity, but, it is argued, he does help to simplify model-making, strip away what rational choice theorists conceive to be unessential theoretical and descriptive clutter, and aim directly at what are conceived to be practically useful policy questions (see Clarke and Cornish 1985). Economic man in his (or her) criminal guise does not have a past, complex motives, rich social life, or, indeed, a recognizable social identity (a 'disposition' is how Ron Clarke would put it (1992)). He or she does not need to have any of those attributes. Indeed, he or she may not be perfectly rational, muddling through, as we all do, on the basis of imperfect information and the presence of risks and uncertainty. He or she is very much like any one of us or, better still, like some Everyman who stands abstractly and plainly for all of us. He or she needs no such complexity, because what weighs in control theory is the piecemeal theoretical analysis of discrete instances of disembodied offending behaviour conducted by people making decisions about the issues of risk, effort, and reward (Clarke and Cornish 2000: 7) in the settings in which they may take place (see introduction to Clarke and Felson 1993).

In Ron Clarke's particularly influential formulation, the rate of crime was held to vary in response to three broad configurations of factors. The first grouping revolved around increasing the effort Everyman would have to expend in committing a crime, and that entailed what was called 'target hardening' (by defending objects and people by shields and other devices); 'access control' (and that involved making it difficult for predators to approach targets); deflecting offenders (by encouraging them, for example, to act in a legitimate rather than an illegitimate manner through the provision of graffiti boards, litter bins, and spittoons); and 'controlling facilitators' (through gun control or checks on the sales of spray cans, for instance). The second revolved around increasing the risks of offending through the screening of people (by means of border searches, for example); formal surveillance by police, security guards, and
others; surveillance by employees such as bus conductors, concierges, and janitors; and 'natural surveillance' (aided by lowering or removing obstacles such as hedges and shrubs, installing closed circuit television cameras, lighting the interiors of stores, and enhanced street lighting). The final grouping was 'reducing the rewards' of crime, itself composed of 'target removal' (using electronic transactions to reduce the number of cash payments, and thus the accumulation of cash in single places, for instance); property identification; removal of inducements (by the rapid cleaning of graffiti or repair of vandalized property); and rule setting (through income tax returns, customs declarations, and the like) (taken from Clarke 1992: 13). A pursuit of those common-sense, sometimes indistinguishable, but nevertheless practical ideas allowed research officers at the Home Office to undertake a long chain of illustrative studies, discovering, for example, that compact, old school buildings on small sites were a third as likely to be burgled as large, sprawling, modern buildings with their many points of access and weak possibilities of surveillance (see Hope 1982); or that there was some twenty times as much malicious damage on the upper than on the lower decks of 'one man', double-decker buses whose drivers' powers of surveillance were confined to one level only (Mayhew et al. 1976: 26).

None of those variables touched on conventional sociological questions about who offenders might be, what they think, and how they act (and for that rational choice theorists have been criticized (see Wright and Decker 1997)). They concentrated instead on the imagined impact of different forms of control on Everyman or Everywoman abroad in space, and from that it was but a short step to extend control theory to an analysis of the disciplines that are built into everyday social practices, on the one hand, and into the social uses of space, on the other.

**ROUTINE ACTIVITIES THEORY**

Ron Clarke, the situational control theorist, and Marcus Felson, the theorist of crime and routine activities, agreed that they shared ideas in common (see Clarke and Felson 1993) as well as ideas apart (thus situational control theory is microscopic, routine activities theory largely macroscopic in its application (Clarke and Cornish, undated 25)). Clarke and his colleagues had asked what prevented specific criminal incidents from occurring in specific situations. Felson asked how such incidents originate or are checked in the routine activities of mundane social life (1994). Just as Clarke and others had emphasized how, for explanatory purposes, it was convenient to assume that offenders were little different from anyone else, so Felson and his colleagues argued that most criminals are unremarkable, unskilled, petty, and nonviolent people much like us. Just as control theorists made use of a tacit version of original sin, so routine activities theory adopted a series of presuppositions about basic human frailty, the importance of temptation and provocation, and the part played by idleness ("We are all born weak, but ... we are taught self-control", Felson claimed (1994: 20)).

The routine activities criminologist would argue that the analysis of predatory crime does not necessarily require weighty causes. Neither does it demand that the theorist commit the 'like-causes-like' fallacy which covertly insists that a
'pathological' phenomenon such as crime must be explained by a pathological condition such as alienation, poverty, family dysfunction, or oppression. Crime was taken to be embedded in the very architecture of everyday life. More precisely, it was to be found in the convergence in space of what were called motivated offenders, suitable targets, and capable guardians (see Cohen and Felson 1979): being affected by such matters as the weight, value, incidence, and distribution of stealable goods (the growth in the quantity of portable, high-cost goods such as video-recorders will encourage more theft, for instance); the impact of motor cars (they aid rapid flight, permit the discreet transportation of objects, and give rise to a geographical dispersal of the population which dilutes surveillance); habits of leisure (adolescents now have larger swathes of empty time than did their predecessors, time in which they can get up to mischief); habits of work (when all members of a household are in employment, there will be no capable guardians to protect a home); habits of residence (single people are less effective guardians of property than are larger households); the growth of technology (telephones, for instance, amplify the public's ability to report crime); and so on. It is an uncomplicated enough theory but again, like its near neighbour, control theory, it does ask empirically productive questions.

CRIME, CONTROL, AND SPACE

THE CHICAGO SCHOOL

Routine activities theory and control theory both talk about convergence in space, and space has always been analytically to the fore in criminology. Indeed, one of the earliest and most productive of the research traditions laid down in criminology was the social ecology and urban mapping practised by the sociology department of the University of Chicago in the 1920s and beyond (see Park 1925; Thrasher 1927; and Landsco 1968).

As cities grow, it was held, so there would be a progressive and largely spontaneous differentiation of space, population, and function that concentrated different groupings in different areas. The main organizing structure was the zone, and the Chicago sociologists discerned five principal concentric zones shaping the city: the central business district at the very core; the 'zone in transition' about that centre; an area of stable working-class housing; middle-class housing; and the outer suburbia.

The zone in transition was marked by the greatest volatility of its residents. It was an area of comparatively cheap rents, weak social control, internal social differentiation, and rapid physical change. It was to the zone in transition that new immigrant groupings most frequently came, and it was there that they settled into what were called 'natural areas', small communal enclaves that were relatively homogeneous in composition and culture. Chicago sociologists plotted the incidence of social problems on to census maps of the city, and it was the zone in transition that was found repeatedly to house the largest proportions of the poor, the illegitimate, the illiterate, the mentally ill (see Faris and Dunham 1939), juvenile delinquents (Shaw and McKay
1942), and prostitutes (Reckless 1933). The zone in transition was virtually co-extensive with what was then described as social pathology. Not only were formal social controls held to be at their weakest there (the zone in transition was, as it were, socially dislocated from the formal institutions and main body of American society (see Whyte 1942)); but informal social controls were eroded by moral and social diversity, rapid population movement, and a lack of strong and pervasive local institutions: 'contacts are extended, heterogeneous groups mingle, neighborhoods disappear, and people, deprived of local and family ties, are forced to live under . . . loose, transient and impersonal relations' (Wirth 1964: 236).

A number of the early Chicago sociologists united social ecology, the study of the patterns formed by groups living together in the same space, with the fieldwork methods of social anthropology, to explore the traditions, customs, and practices of the residents of natural areas. They found that, while there may well have been a measure of social and moral dislocation between the zone in transition and the wider society, as well as within the zone in transition itself, those natural areas could also manifest a remarkable coherence and persistence of culture and behaviour that were reproduced from generation to generation and from immigrant group to immigrant group within the same terrain over time. Delinquency was, in effect, not disorganized at all, but a stable attribute of social life, an example of continuity in change: 'to a very great extent . . . traditions of delinquency are preserved and transmitted through the medium of social contact with the unsupervised play group and the more highly organized delinquent and criminal gangs' (Shaw and McKay 1971: 260). Cultural transmission was to be the focus of the work pursued by a small group of second generation Chicago sociologists. Under the name of 'differential association', it was studied as a normal process of learning motives, skills, and meanings in the company of others who bore criminal traditions (see Sutherland and Cressey 1955).

That urban research was to prepare a diverse legacy for criminology: the spatial analysis of crime; the study of subcultures (which I shall touch on below); the epidemiology of crime; crime as an interpretive practice (which I shall also touch on); and much else. Let me turn first to some examples of spatial analysis.

CONTROL AND SPACE: BEYOND THE CHICAGO SCHOOL

The Chicago sociologists' preoccupation with the cultural and symbolic correlates of spatial congregations of people was to be steadily elaborated by criminologists. For instance, Wiles, Bottoms, and their colleagues, originally working at the University of Sheffield, added two important observations. They argued first that, in a then more tightly regulated Britain, social segregation did not emerge, as it were, organically with unplanned city growth, but with the intended and unintended consequences of policy decisions taken by local government departments responsible for housing a large proportion of the population in municipal accommodation. Housing allocation was an indirect reflection of moral judgements about tenants that resulted, or were assumed to result, in the concentration of criminal populations (see Bottoms et al. 1989). Further, and partly in accord with that argument, the reputations of natural areas themselves became a criminological issue: how was it that the moral meanings
attached to space by residents and outsiders affected people’s reputations, choices, and action? One’s very address could become a constraining moral fact that affected not only how one would be treated by others in and about the criminal justice system (see Damer 1974), but also how one would come to rate oneself as a potential deviant or conformist (see Gill 1977).

Secondly, Bottoms and his colleagues argued, while the Chicago sociologists may have examined the geographical distribution of offenders, it was instructive also to scrutinize how offending itself could be plotted, because the two measures need not correspond (Baldwin and Bottoms 1976). Offending has its maps. Indeed, it appears to be densely concentrated, clustered around offenders’ homes, areas of work and recreation, and the pathways in between (Brantingham and Brantingham 1981–2). So it was that, pursuing routine activities theory, Sherman and his colleagues surveyed all calls made to the police in Minneapolis in one year; and they discovered that a few ‘hot spots’ had exceptional densities of crime: only 3 per cent of all places produced 50 per cent of the calls; all robberies took place in only 2.2 per cent of places, all rapes in 1.2 per cent of places, and all car thefts in 2.7 per cent of places (Sherman et al. 1989; see also Ronceck and Maier 1991).

DEFENSIBLE SPACE

If offending has its maps, so does social control; and criminologists and others have become ever more interested in the fashion in which space, conduct, and control intersect. One forerunner was Jane Jacobs, who speculated about the relations between city landscapes and informal controls, arguing, for example, that dense, busy thoroughfares have many more ‘eyes on the street’ and opportunities for witness reporting and bystander intervention, than sterile pedestrian zones or streets without stores and other lures (Jacobs 1965).

The idea of ‘defensible space’, in particular, has been borrowed from anthropology and architecture, coupled with the concept of surveillance, and put to work in analysing formal and informal responses to different kinds of terrain. ‘Defensible space’ itself leans on the psychological notion of ‘territorality’, the sense of attachment and symbolic investment that people can acquire in space. Territoriality is held by some to be a human universal, an imperative that leads people to wish to guard what is their own. Those who have a stake in a physical area, it is argued, will care for it, police it, and report strangers and others who have no apparent good purpose to be there.

What is quite critical is how space is marked out and bounded. The prime author of the idea of defensible space, Oscar Newman (1972), claimed that, other things being equal, what induces territorial sentiments is a clear demarcation between private and public areas, even if the demarcations are only token. The private will be protected in ways that the public is not, and the fault of many domestic and institutional buildings is that separations and segregations are not clearly enough inscribed in design. Alice Coleman and others took it that improvements to the physical structures of built space could then achieve a significant impact on crime: above all, she insisted on restricting access to sites; reducing the interconnections between buildings; and emphasizing the distinction between public and private space and minimizing what
Oscar Newman called 'confused space', the space that was neither one nor the other (Coleman 1985, 1986). She has been roundly faulted, both methodologically and analytically, for her neglect of dimensions other than the physical, but she and Newman have succeeded in introducing an analytic focus on the interrelations between space and informal control that was largely absent before. Only rarely have criminologists such as Shapland and Vagg enquired into the informal practices of people as they observe, interpret, and respond to the ambiguous, the deviant, and the non-deviant in the spaces around them (1988). It is Shapland and Vagg's contention that there is a continuous, active, and often informed process of surveillance transacted by people on the ground; a process which is so discreet that it has escaped much formal notice, and which meshes only haphazardly with the work of the police.

CRIME, POWER, AND SPACE

Surveillance has not always been construed as neutral or benign, and there are current debates about what its newest forms might portend. Even its sponsors in government departments and criminal justice agencies have spoken informally about their anxiety that people are being encouraged to become unduly fearful of crime and to retreat into private fastnesses. It began to be argued, especially by those who followed Michel Foucault, that a 'punitive city' was in the making, that, in Stan Cohen's words, there was 'a deeper penetration of social control into the social body' (1979: 356).

Some came to claim not only that there had been a move progressively to differentiate and elaborate the distribution of controls in space, but also that there had been a proliferating surveillance of dangerous areas, often conducted obliquely and with an increasingly advanced technology. Michel Foucault's (1977) dramatic simile of Jeremy Bentham's model prison, the Panopticon, was to be put to massive use in criminology. Just as the Panopticon, or inspection house, was supposed to have permitted the unobserved observation of many inmates around the bright, illuminated rim of a circular prison by the few guards in its obscured centre, just as the uncertainty of unobserved observation worked to make the controlled control themselves, so, Foucault and those who followed him wished to argue, modern society is coming to exemplify the perfection of the automatic exercise of power through generalized surveillance. The carceral society was a machine in which everyone was supposed to be caught (even, it seems, the police, who may survey one another as well as the wider population (see The Times, 4 November 1999)); it relied on diffuse control through unseen monitoring and the individualization and 'interiorization' of control (Gordon 1972). Public space, it was said, was becoming exposed to ever more perfunctory, distant, and technologically-driven policing by formal state agencies; while control in private and semi-private space (the space of the shopping malls, university campus, and theme park) was itself becoming more dense, privatized, and widespread, placed in the private hands of security guards and store detectives, and reliant on a new electronic surveillance (Davis 1992b: 233).

A paradigmatic case study has been supplied by Shearing and Stenning's ethnography of Disney World as a 'private, quasi-feudal domain of control' (Shearing and Stenning 1985: 347) that was comprehensively, discreetly, and adeptly controlled
by employees, extensive surveillance, the encouragement of self-discipline, and the very physical configuration of space. The nature of crime and deviance itself can undergo change in such a transformed environment: they are no longer always and everywhere so markedly affronts to deep values but are, instead, very often breaches of impersonal, morally-neutral, technical controls (see Lianos and Douglas 2000: 270–71).

What also underlies much of that vision is a new, complementary stress on the sociology of risk, a focus linked importantly with the work of Ulrich Beck (although he did not himself write about crime (1992)). It has been argued that people and groups are becoming significantly stratified by their exposure to risk and their power to neutralize harm. The rich can afford private protection, the poor cannot, and a new ecology emerges (Simon 1987). Phrased only slightly differently, and merged with the newly-burgeoning ideas about the pervasiveness of surveillance by machine and person (Gordon 1986–7 and Lyon 1994), those theories of risk suggest that controls are being applied by state and private organizations not on the basis of some moralistic conception of individual wrong-doing, but on a foundation of the identification, classification, and management of groups categorized by their perceived dangerousness (Feeley and Simon 1992; Simon and Feeley 1995). Groups are becoming ever more rigidly segregated in space: some (members of the new dangerous classes or under-class) being confined to prison, semi-freedom under surveillance, or parole in the community; others (the more affluent) retreating into their locked and gated communities, secure zones, and private spaces. There are new bifurcations of city space into a relatively uncontrolled ‘badlands’ occupied by the poor and highly-controlled ‘security bubbles’ inhabited by the rich. Geographical and social exclusion thereby conspire to corral together populations of the unprotected, victimized and victimizing—the mentally disordered, the young, and the homeless—reinforcing both their vulnerability and their propensities to offend (Carlen 1996; Hagan and McCarthy 1998).

**RADICAL CRIMINOLOGY**

So far, control has been treated without much direct allusion to the power, politics, and inequalities that are its bedfellows. There was to be a relatively short-lived but active challenge to such quiescence from the radical, new, or critical criminologies of the late 1960s and 1970s, criminologies that claimed their mandate in Marxism (Taylor, Walton, and Young 1973), anarchism (Kittrie 1971; Cohen 1985), or American populism (Quinney 1970), and whose ambitions pointed to political activism or praxis (Mathiesen 1972).

Crime control was said to be an oppressive and mystifying process that worked through legislation, law-enforcement, and ideological stereotyping to preserve unequal class relations (Chambliss 1976; Box 1983). The radical political economy of crime sought chiefly to expose the hegemonic ideologies that masked the ‘real’ nature of crime and repression in capitalist society. Most mundane crime, it was argued, was
actually less politically or socially consequential than other social evils such as alienation, exploitation, or racism (Scraton 1987). Much proletarian offending could be redefined as a form of redistributive class justice, or as a sign of the possessive individualism which resided in the core values of capitalist society. Criminal justice itself was engineered to create visible crowds of working-class and black scapegoats who could attract the public gaze away from the more serious delicts of the rich and the more serious ills of a capitalism that was usually said to be in terminal crisis. If the working class reacted in hostile fashion to the crime in their midst then they were, in effect, little more than the victims of a false consciousness which turned proletarian against proletarian, black against black, inflated the importance of petty problems, and concealed the true nature of bourgeois society. So construed, signification, the act of giving meaning, was either manipulative or misconceived, a matter of giving and receiving incorrect and deformed interpretations of reality. Indeed, it was in the very nature of subordination in a capitalist society that most people must be politically unenlightened about crime, control, and much else, and the task of the radical criminologist was to expose, denounce, and demystify.

It was concluded variously that crime was not a problem which the poor and their allies should actually address (there were more important matters for socialists to think about: Hirst 1975); that the crime which should be analysed was the wrong-doing of the powerful (the wrong crimes and criminals were being observed: Chapman 1967; Reiman 1990); or that crime and its problems would shrivel into insignificance as a criminogenic capitalism gave way to the tolerant diversity of socialism (Taylor, Walton, and Young 1973). The crime and criminals that chiefly warranted attention were those exceptional examples of law-breaking that seemed to represent an incipient revolt against the state, and they demanded cultivation as subjects of study, understanding, and possible politicization. Black prisoners, in particular, were sometimes depicted, and depicted themselves, as prisoners of class or race wars (Cleaver 1969). Prisons were the point of greatest state repression, and prison riots a possible spearhead of revolution.

In its early guise, radical criminology withered somewhat under a quadruple-barrelled assault. In some places, and in America especially (where it had never been firmly implanted), it ran foul of university politics, and some criminology departments, such as that of the University of California at Berkeley, were actually closed down. More often, radical criminology did not lend itself to the government-funded, policy-driven, 'soft money', empiricist research that came to dominate schools of criminology in North America in the 1970s and 1980s.

Second was the effect of the publication of mass victim surveys in the 1970s and 1980s (Hough and Mayhew 1983) which disclosed both the extent of working-class victimization and the manner in which it revolved around intra-class, rather than inter-class, criminality. It was evident that crime was a manifest problem for the poor, adding immeasurably to their burdens, and difficult to dismiss as an ideological distraction (David Downes called it a regressive tax on the poor). Two prominent radical criminologists came frankly to concede that they had believed that 'property offences [were] directed solely against the bourgeoisie and that violence against the person [was] carried out by amateur Robin Hoods in the course of their righteous
attempts to redistribute wealth. All of this [was], alas, untrue’ (Lea and Young 1984: 262).

Third was the critique launched from within the left by a new generation of feminist scholars, who asserted that the victimization of women was no slight affair or ideological diversion, and that rape, sexual assault, child abuse, and domestic violence should be taken very seriously indeed (Smart 1977). Not only had the female criminal been neglected, they said, but so had the female victim, and it would not do to wait until the revolution for matters to be put right. Once more, a number of radical criminologists gave ground. There had been, Jones, Maclean, and Young observed, ‘a general tendency in radical thought to idealize their historical subject (in this case the working class) and to play down intra-group conflict, blemishes and social disorganization. But the power of the feminist case resulted in a sort of cognitive schizophrenia amongst radicals . . . ’ (Jones et al. 1986: 3). The revitalized criminology of women is the subject of Chapter 4 in this handbook.

Fourthly, there was a critique launched belatedly from non-feminist criminologists who resisted the imperious claims of radical criminology to be the lone fully social theory of crime (Downes and Rock 1979; Inciardi 1980). Marxist and radical theories of crime, it was argued, lacked a comparative emphasis: they neglected crime in ‘non-capitalist’ and ‘pre-capitalist’ societies and crime in ‘socialist’ societies. There was a naivety about the expectation that crime would wither away as the state itself disappeared after the revolution. There was an irresponsibility about radical arguments that ‘reformism’ would only strengthen the grip of the capitalist system.

‘Left realism’ was to be the outcome, and it was represented by Jock Young, one of its parents, as a novel fusion of analyses of crime in the vein of anomie theory and symbolic interactionist analyses of the reactions which crime evokes (Young 1997: 484). It was ‘realist’ because, refusing to accept the so-called ‘left idealists’ dismissal of crime as an ideological trick, it acknowledged the practical force of crime in society and its especially heavy impact on the poor, minority ethnic people and women. It was ‘left’ because it focused descriptively and politically on the structural inequalities of class, race, and gender. Its project was to examine patterns of crime and control as they emerged out of what Young came to call the ‘square of crime’, a field of forces dominated by the state, the victim, the offender, and the public.

Left realism was to follow the earlier radical criminologist’s injunction to act, but action was now as much (if not more) in the service of more effective and practical policing and crime reduction strategies as in the cause of revolution. Left realists joined the formerly disparaged ‘administrative criminologists’ working in and for the state to work on situationally-based projects to prevent crime and the fear of crime. They designed new and confusing configurations of streets to make it more difficult for ‘kerb-crawlers’ to cruise in search of prostitutes. They explored the impact of improved street lighting on the fear of crime. They assisted in the rehabilitation of delapidated housing estates. Were it not for their theoretical preambles, it was at times difficult to distinguish between the programmes of the Home Office Research Unit or the Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada, on the one hand, and of left realism, on the other.

If left realism was radical criminology’s praxis, its more scholarly current continued
to evolve, and it evolved in diverse directions. A number of criminologists began to turn away from analyses of causation towards studies of current (Cohen 1985; Simon 1993) and historical forms of social control (see Scull 1979), originally under the influence of E.P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm and latterly under that of Michel Foucault. Others responded to the wider theories that began to dominate sociology proper in the 1980s and 1990s, incorporating them to write about crime, postmodernism (or late modernity), and globalization, and producing what was, in effect, the ‘fully social theory’ promised by the new criminologists back in 1973. Above all, that promise was fulfilled by books published in 1999 by two of the original troika of new criminologists: Ian Taylor’s *Crime in Context* and Jock Young’s *The Exclusive Society*.

*Crime in Context* catalogues a series of crises flowing from transitions in the political and economic structures of society, and the manner in which they bear down upon poverty, class, gender, race, and the family to affect the national and transnational environments of crime and control. *The Exclusive Society* is subtitled ‘Social Exclusion, Crime and Difference in Late Modernity’, and its focus is more narrow but nevertheless effective, concentrating upon the social and political consequences of vast increases in crime in the West. Crime is held by Young to be no longer regarded as abnormal, the property of a pathological few who can be restored therapeutically to the security of a moral community at one with itself, but *normal*, the actions of a significant, obdurate minority of Others who are impatiently excluded and demonized in a world newly insecure, fractured, and preoccupied with problems of risk and danger.

**FUNCTIONALIST CRIMINOLOGY**

Another, apparently dissimilar but substantially complementary, theory presented deviance and control as forces that worked discreetly to maintain social order. Functionalism was a theory of social systems or wholes, developed at the beginning of the twentieth century within a social anthropology grown tired of speculative accounts of the origins and evolution of societies which lacked the written history to support them, and dedicated to what was seen to be the scientific pursuit of intellectual problems. It was argued that the business of a social science necessitated moving enquiry beyond the reach of common sense or lay knowledge to an examination of the unintended, objective consequences of action that were visible only to the trained eye.

There were three clear implications. First, what ordinary people thought they were doing could be very different from what they actually achieved. The functionalist was preoccupied only with objective results, and people’s own accounts of action held little interest. Secondly, the functionalist looked at the impact made by institution upon institution, structure upon structure, in societies that were remarkable for their capacity to persist over time. Thirdly, those consequences, viewed as a totality, constituted a system whose parts were thought not only to affect one another and the whole,
but which also affected them in return. To be sure, some institutions were relatively detached, but functionalists would have argued that the alternative proposition—that social phenomena lack all influence upon one another, that there was no functional reciprocity between them—was conceptually unsupportable. Systemic interrelations were an analytic a priori, a matter of self-evidence so compelling that Kingsley Davis could argue that 'we are all functionalists now' (Davis 1959).

There have been very few dedicated functionalist criminologists. Functionalists tend to deal with the properties of whole systems rather than with empirical fragments. But crime and deviance did supply a particularly intriguing laboratory for thought-experiments about social order. It was easy enough to contend that religion or education shaped social cohesion, but how much harder it would be to show that crime succeeded in doing so. After all, 'everyone knew' that crime undermined social structures. It followed that functionalists occasionally found it tempting to try to confound that knowledge by showing that, to the contrary, the seemingly recalcitrant case of crime could be shown scientifically to contribute to the working of the social system. From time to time, therefore, they wrote about crime to demonstrate the potency of their theory. Only one functionalist, its grand master, Talcott Parsons, ever made the obvious, and therefore unsatisfying, point that crime could be what was called 'dysfunctional' or injurious to the social system as it was then constituted (Parsons 1951). Everyone else asserted that crime actually worked mysteriously to support it.

The outcome was a somewhat miscellaneous collection of papers documenting the multiple functions of deviance: Kingsley Davis showed that prostitution shored up monogamy by providing an unemotional, impersonal, and unthreatening release for the sexual energy of the promiscuous married male (Davis 1937) (Mary McIntosh once wondered what the promiscuous married female was supposed to do about her sexual energy); Ned Polsky made much the same claim for pornography (Polsky 1967); Daniel Bell showed that racketeering provided 'queer ladders of success' and political and social stability in the New York dockside (1960); Émile Durkheim (1964) and George Herbert Mead (1918) contended that the formal rituals of trial and punishment enhanced social solidarity and consolidated moral boundaries; and, more complexly, Mary Douglas (1966), Kai Erikson (1966), Robert Scott (1972), and others argued that deviance offered social systems a dialectical tool for the clarification and management of threats, ambiguities, and anomalies in classification systems. The list could be extended, but all the arguments tended to one end: what appeared, on the surface, to undermine social order accomplished the very reverse. A sociological counterpart of the invisible hand transmuted deviance into a force for cohesion.

Functionalism was to be discarded by many criminologists in time: it smacked too much of teleology (the doctrine that effects can work retrospectively to act as the causes of events); it defied rigorous empirical investigation (see Cotterrell 1999: 75); and, for some liberal and radical criminologists, it represented a form of Panglossian conservatism that championed the status quo. But its ghost lingers on. Any who would argue that, contrary to appearances, crime and deviance buttress social order; any who argue for the study of seamless systems; any who argue that the sociologist
should mistrust people’s own accounts of their actions; any who insist that social science is the study of unintended consequences; all these must share something of the functionalist’s standpoint. Anomie theories that represented crime as the system-stabilizing, unintended consequence of strains in the social order are one example (see Merton 1995): deviance in that guise becomes the patterned adjustments that defuse an otherwise disruptive conflict and reconcile people to disadvantage (although, as I have argued, the theories can also envisage conditions in which crime becomes ‘system-threatening’). Some versions of radical criminology provide another example. More than one criminologist has argued that crime, deviance, and control were necessary for the survival of capitalism (Stinchcombe 1968). For instance, although they did not talk explicitly of ‘function’, the neo-Marxists, Hall (1978), Pearce (1976), and Reiman (1990), were recognizably functionalist in their treatment of the criminal justice system’s production of visible and scapegoated roles for the proletarian criminal, roles that attracted public anxiety and outrage, deflected anger away from the state, and thereby emasculated political opposition. Consider, for example, Ferrell and Sanders’s observation that ‘the simplistic criminogenic models at the core of ... constructed moral panics ... deflect attention from larger and more complex political problems like economic and ethnic inequality, and the alienation of young people and creative workers from confining institutions’ (1995: 10).

SIGNIFICATION

LABELLING THEORY

Perhaps the only other outstanding big idea is signification, the interpretive practices that order social life. There has been an enduring strain of analysis, linked most particularly to symbolic interactionism and phenomenology, which insists that people do not, and cannot, respond immediately, uncritically, and passively to the world ‘as it is’. Rather they respond to their ideas of that world, and the business of sociology is to capture, understand, and reproduce those ideas; examine their interaction with one another; and analyse the processes and structures that generated them. Sociology becomes the study of people and practices as symbolic and symbolizing processes.

Central to that idea is reflectivity, the capacity of consciousness to translate itself into its own object. People are able to think about themselves, define themselves in various ways, toy with different identities, and project themselves imaginatively into any manner of contrived situation. They can view themselves vicariously by inferring the reactions of ‘significant others’, and, in so ‘taking the role of the other’, move symbolically to a distance outside themselves to inspect how they might appear. Elaborating action through ‘significant gestures’, the symbolic projection of acts and identities, they can anticipate the likely responses of others, and tailor their own prospective acts to accommodate them (Mead 1934). In all this, social worlds are compacted symbolically into the phrasing of action, and the medium that makes that possible is language.
Language is held to objectify, stabilize, and extend meaning. Used conversationally in the anticipation of an act, it permits people to be both their own subject and object, speaker and thing spoken about, 'I' and 'me', opening up the mind to reflective action. Conferring names, it enables people to impart moral and social meanings to their own and others' motives (Mills 1940; Scott and Lyman 1970), intentions, and identities. It will matter a great deal if someone is defined as eccentric, erratic, or mad; a drinker, a drunk, or an alcoholic; a lovelorn admirer or a stalker. Consequences will flow from naming, consequences that affect not only how one regards oneself and one's position in the world, but also how one may be treated by others. Naming creates a self.

Transposed to the study of crime and deviance, symbolic interactionism and phenomenology gave prominence to the processes by which deviant acts and identities are assembled, interpreted, judged, and controlled (Katz 1988). A core pair of articles was Howard Becker's 'Becoming a Marihuana User' and 'Marihuana Use and Social Control' (1963), both of which described the patterned sequence of steps that could shape the experience, moral character, and fate of one who began to smoke marihuana. Becoming a marihuana user was a tentative process, developing stage by stage, which required the user satisfactorily to learn, master, and interpret techniques, neutralize forbidding moral images of use and users, and succeed in disguising signs of use in the presence of those who might disapprove. It became paradigmatic.

Deviance itself was to become more generally likened to a moral career consisting of interlocking phases, each of which fed into the next; each of which presented different existential problems and opportunities; each of which was populated by different constellations of significant others; and each of which could distinctively mould the self of the deviant. However, the process was also assumed to be contingent. Not every phase was inevitable or irreversible, and deviants could often elect to change direction. Luckenbill and Best provide a graphic description:

Riding escalators between floors may be an effective metaphor for respectable organizational careers, but it fails to capture the character of deviant careers. A more appropriate image is a walk in the woods. Here, some people take the pathways marked by their predecessors, while others strike out on their own. Some walk slowly, exploring before moving on, but others run, caught up in the action. Some have a destination in mind and proceed purposively; others view the trip and enjoy it for its own sake. Even those intent on reaching a destination may stray from the path; they may try to shortcut or they may lose sight of familiar landmarks, get lost, and find it necessary to backtrack [1981: 201].

What punctuates such a career is acts of naming, the deployment of language to confer and fix the meanings of behaviour, and symbolic interactionism and phenomenology became known within criminology as 'labelling theory'. One of the most frequently cited of all passages in sociological criminology was Becker's dictum that 'deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an "offender". The deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label' (1963: 9).

Labelling itself is contingent. Many deviant acts are not witnessed and most are not
reported. People may well be able to resist or modify deviant designations when attempts are made to apply them: after all, we are continually bombarded by attempts to label us and few succeed. But there are special occasions when the ability of the self to resist definition is circumscribed; and most fateful of all may be an encounter with agents of the criminal justice system, because they work with the power and authority of the state. In such meetings, criminals and deviants are obliged to confront not only their own and others’ possibly defensive, fleeting, and insubstantial reactions to what they have done, their ‘primary deviation’; but also contend publicly with the formal reactions of others, and their deviation can then become a response to responses, ‘secondary deviation’: ‘When a person begins to employ his deviant behavior or a role based upon it as a means of defense, attack, or adjustment to the overt and covert problems created by the consequent societal reaction to him, his deviation is secondary’ (Lemert 1951: 76).

What is significant about secondary deviation is that it will be a symbolic synthesis of more than just the meanings and activities of primary deviation. It will also incorporate the myths, professional knowledge, stereotypes, and working assumptions of lay people, police officers, judges, medical practitioners, prison officers, prisoners, policy-makers, and politicians. Drug-users (see Schur 1963), mental patients (Goffman 1968; Scheff 1966), homosexuals (Hooker 1963), and others may be obliged to organize their significant gestures and character around the public symbols of their behaviour. Who they are and what they do may then be explained as much by the symbolic incorporation of a public response as by any set of original conditions. Control will be inscribed into the very fabric of a self.

What is also significant is that secondary deviation entails confrontations with new obstacles that foreclose future choice. Thus, Gary Marx has listed a number of the ironic consequences that can flow from forms of covert social control such as undercover policing and the work of agents provocateurs: they include generating a market for illegal goods; the provision of motives and meanings for illegal action; entrapping people in offences they might not otherwise have committed; the supply of false or misleading records; retaliatory action against informers, and the like (Marx 1988: 126–7). Once publicly identified as a deviant, moreover, it becomes difficult for a person to slip back into the conventional world, and measures are being taken with increasing frequency to enlarge the visibility of the rule-breaker. In the United States, for instance, ‘Megan’s Law’ makes it mandatory in certain jurisdictions for the names of sex offenders to be publicly advertised, possibly reducing risk but certainly freezing the criminal as a secondary deviant. An answering response to the dangerously amplified problems of the outlawed deviant is the increasing adoption by states of strategies of restorative justice, based largely on the work of Braithwaite (1989), which attempt to unite the informal control of shaming by significant others with rituals of reintegration that work against the alienating consequences of secondary deviation.

Borrowing its ideas from Durkheim and labelling theory and its procedures from a number of forms of dispute resolution, but from Maori practice in particular, Braithwaite took it that shaming is at its most effective when it is practised by those whose opinions matter to the deviant—his or her ‘significant others’; and that it would work only to exclude and estrange the deviant unless it was accompanied by
rituals of reparation and restoration, effected, perhaps, by the tendering and acceptance of a public apology. Reintegrative shaming is currently one of the 'big ideas' underpinning criminal justice policy across the Western world, but also in South Africa and elsewhere, where it is seen to be a return to the practices of aboriginal justice.

**CULTURE AND SUBCULTURE**

Meanings and motives are not established and confirmed by the self in isolation. They are a social accomplishment, and criminology has paid sustained attention to signification as a collaborative, subcultural process. Subcultures themselves are taken to be exaggerations, accentuations, or editings of cultural themes prevalent in the wider society. Any social group which has permanence, closure, and common pursuits is likely to engender, inherit, or modify a subculture; but the criminologist's particular interest is in those subcultures that condone, promote, or otherwise make possible the commission of delinquent acts. A subculture was not conceived to be utterly distinct from the beliefs held by people at large. Neither was it necessarily oppositional. It was a subculture, not a discrete culture or a counterculture, and the analytic stress has tended to be on dependency rather than conflict or symbolic autonomy.

The materials for subcultural theory are to be found across the broad range of criminology, and they could be combined in various proportions. *Anomie* theory supplied the supposition that social inequalities generate problems that may have delinquent solutions, and that those solutions, in their turn, could be shared and transmitted by people thrown together by their common disadvantage. Albert Cohen, the man who invented the phrase 'delinquent subculture', argued: 'The crucial condition for the emergence of new cultural forms is the existence, in effective interaction with one another, of a number of actors with similar problems of adjustment' (1957: 59). The social anthropology of the Chicago school, channelled for a while into differential association theory, supplied an emphasis upon the enduring, intelligible, and locally-adapted cultural traditions shared both by professional criminals and by boys living, working, and playing together on the crowded streets of morally-differentiated areas. Retaining the idea of a 'subculture of delinquency', David Matza and a number of control theorists pointed to the manner in which moral proscriptions could be neutralized by invoking commonly-available extenuating accounts. Strands of 'Left realism' could be described as little more than early subcultural theory in a new guise. And symbolic interactionism supplied a focus on the negotiated, collective, and processual character of meaning. In all this, an argument ran that young men (it was almost always young men), growing up in the city, banded together in groups or 'near-groups' (Yablonsky 1962) in the crowded public life of the streets, encountering common problems, exposed to common stereotypes and stigmas, subject to similar formal controls, setting themselves against common Others who are used to define who they are, are likely to form joint interpretations that are sporadically favourable to delinquency. Subcultural theory and research were to dominate explanations of delinquency until they exhausted themselves in the 1960s.

Subcultural theory lent itself to amalgamation with radical criminology, and
particularly that criminology which was preoccupied with the reproduction of class inequalities through the workings of ideology. In Britain, there was to be a renaissance of anomie-derived subcultural theory as a group of sociologists centred around Stuart Hall at the University of Birmingham gave special attention to the existential plight of young working-class men about to enter the labour market. The prototype for that work was Phil Cohen’s analysis of proletarian cultures in London: young men responded to the decline of community, loss of class cohesion, and economic insecurity by resurrecting in subcultural form an idealized and exaggerated version of working-class masculinity that ‘express[ed] and resolve[d], albeit “magically,” the contradictions which remain hidden or unresolved in the parent culture’ (1972: 23). Deviance became a form of symbolic resistance to tensions perceived through the mists of false consciousness. It was doomed to disappoint because it did not address the root causes of discontent, but it did offer a fleeting release. There was a contradiction within that version of subcultural theory because it was not easy to reconcile a structural Marxism which depicted adolescent culture as illusory with a commitment to understanding meaning (Willis 1977). But it was a spirited and vivid revival of a theory that had gone into the doldrums in the 1960s, and it continues to influence theorizing (see Ferrell 1993). Indeed, interestingly, there are strong signs of a rapprochement between critical cultural studies and symbolic interactionism (see Becker and McCall 1990).

CRIMINOLOGY AS AN ECLECTIC DISCIPLINE

It would be misleading to conclude that criminology can easily be laid out as an array of discrete clumps of theory. On the contrary, it has continually borrowed ideas from other disciplines, and has compared, contrasted, amalgamated, reworked, and experimented with them to furnish an eclectic discipline marked by an abundance of theoretical overlaps, syntheses, and confusions.

There are exchanges and combinations of criminological ideas within disciplines. For instance, sociological criminologists are exposed to changes in intellectual fashion in their parent discipline, and the result has been that almost every major theory in sociology has been fed in some form into criminology at some time, undergoing adaptation and editing in the process, and occasionally becoming very distant from its roots. Indeed, one of the distinctive properties of that process is that criminology can sometimes so extensively rework imported ideas that they will develop well beyond their original limits in sociology, becoming significant contributions to sociological theory in their own right. Anomie, the symbolic interactionist conception of the self and its others, and feminism are examples of arguments that have grown appreciably in scale and sophistication within the special environment of criminology.

There are exchanges and combinations between disciplines. Criminology is what David Downes would call a rendez-vous discipline that is defined principally by its attachment to an empirical area. The study of crime gives unity and order to the enterprise, not adherence to any particular theory or social science. It is in the
examination of crime that psychologists, statisticians, lawyers, economists, social anthropologists, sociologists, social policy analysts, and psychiatrists meet and call themselves criminologists, and in that encounter, their attachments to the conventions and boundaries of their parent disciplines may weaken. So it is that sociological criminologists have confronted arguments born and applied in other disciplines and, from time to time, they have domesticated them to cultivate new intellectual hybrids. Stan Cohen (1972) and Jock Young (1971) did so in the early 1970s when they married the symbolic interactionism of Edwin Lemert (1951) and Howard Becker (1963) to the statistical theory of Leslie Wilkins (1964). Wilkins had argued that deviant events fall at the poles of normal distribution curves, that knowledge about those events will be distorted by the ensuing social distance, and that patterns of control and deviant responses are likely to become ever more exaggerated as they are affected by those distortions. That concept of deviance amplification married well with interactionist ideas of secondary deviation.

Thus constituted, the development of sociological criminology is at once marked by discontinuities and continuities. It may be represented as a staggered succession of interchanges with different schools and disciplines which do not always sit well together. It is evident, for instance, that the feminist may entertain a conception of theory and the theorist very unlike that of the functionalist or rational choice theorist. Yet there are also unities of a kind. All competent criminologists may be presumed to have a rough working knowledge of the wide range of theory in their discipline; theory once mastered is seldom forgotten or neglected entirely, and there is a propensity for scholars overtly and covertly to weave disparate ideas together as problems and needs arise. Quite typical was an observation offered in the author’s introduction to a work on the lives of urban street criminals in Seattle, Washington: ‘I link . . . ethnographic data to criminological perspectives as a bricolage seeking numerous sources of interpretation. Had I selected just one criminological perspective to complement these ethnographic data, the value of these firsthand accounts would be constrained . . . ’ (1995: 5). Scholars thus tend frequently to be more accommodating in practice than in principle, and if there is an ensuing gap between a professed purity of theory and an active pragmatism of procedure, it may well be masked by the obliteration of sources or the renaming of ideas. Seemingly distinct sociological theories are open to continual merging and blurring as the practical work of criminology unfolds, and in that process may be found opportunities for theoretical innovation.

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

What is uncertain, and what has always been uncertain, is how those criminological theories may be expected to evolve in the future. Very few would have predicted the rapid demise of radical criminology, a brand of theorizing that once seemed so strong that it would sweep all before it, at least in large parts of Europe, Canada, and Australasia. Few would have predicted the resurgence of utilitarian theories of rational choice—they seemed to have been superseded forever by a sociology that pointed
to the part played by social and moral contexts in the shaping of meaning and action.

What may certainly be anticipated is a continuation of the semi-detached relations between criminology and its parent disciplines, and with sociology above all. The half-life of sociological theories is brief, often bound up with the duration of intellectual generations, and sociological theory is itself emergent, a compound of the familiar and the unfamiliar. It is to be assumed that there will always be something new out of sociology, and that criminology will almost always respond and innovate in its turn.

Other matters are also clear. First, criminology remains a substantively-defined discipline, and it tends not to detain the intellectual system-builders. Those who would be the sociological Newtons, the men and women who would explain the great clockwork of society, are often impatient with the limitations imposed by analysing the mere parts and fragments of larger totalities. Almost all the grand theorists have made something of a mark on criminology, but they, or their disciples, have rarely stayed long. Their concern is with the wider systemic properties of society, not the surface features of empirical areas. Thus the phenomenologist, Phillipson, once remarked that '[w]e should] turn away from constitutive and arbitrary judgements of public rule breaking as deviance towards the concept of rule itself and the dialectical tension that ruling is, a subject more central to the fundamental practice of sociology ...' (1974: 5). And Marxists (Bankowski et al. 1977) and feminists (Smart 1989) have said much the same about the relations between their theories and the sub-discipline of criminology.

Secondly, criminology will probably persist in challenging economics as a contender for the title of the dismal science. Criminologists are not professionally optimistic. A prolonged exposure to the pain of crime, rates of offending that (until very recently at least) had seemed prone inexorably to rise, frequent abuses of authority, misconceived policies, and 'nothing' or very little appearing to work, seems to have fostered a propensity amongst the larger thinkers to infuse their writing with gloom and to argue, in effect, that all is really not for the best in the best of all possible worlds. Stan Cohen once confessed that 'most of us—consciously or not—probably hold a rather bleak view of social change. Things must be getting worse' (1979: 360). Prophecies of a criminological future will still be tinged at the margins with the iconography of Mad Max, Neuromancer and Blade Runner.

Thirdly, there is the growing influence of government and government money in shaping criminological work. Policies and politics have conspired to make restorative justice and rational choice theory, the criminological anti-theory, particularly attractive to criminal justice agencies. Restorative justice is new, modest in its reach, and it seems to 'work'. Rational choice and control theories lay out a series of neat, inexpensive, small-scale, practicable, and noncontroversial steps that may be taken to 'do something' about crime. Moreover, as theories that are tied to the apron strings of economics, they can borrow something of the powerful intellectual authority that economics wields in the social sciences.

Fourth is the persistence of a feminist influence. Crime is clearly gendered, the intellectual yield of analysing the connections between gender and crime has not yet
been fully explored, and women are entering the body of sociological criminology in ever greater numbers (although, to be sure, some feminists, like Carol Smart, are also emigrating and absolute numbers remain small). Criminological feminisms and feminist criminologies (Gelsthorpe and Morris 1988) will undoubtedly sustain work on gender, control, and deviance and, increasingly, on masculinity. After all, if crime is largely a male preserve, criminology should ask what it is about masculinity that seems to have such an affinity with offending. Connell (1987), not himself a criminologist, has sketched the possibilities of an answer in his writing on ‘hegemonic masculinity’—the overriding ideology of male power, wealth, and physical strength—that lends itself to exploit, risk-taking, and aggression. Messerschmidt (1997), Bourgois (1995), and Polk (1994) have pursued that model of masculine behaviour into criminology. Bourgois exploring the work done to maintain ‘respect’ by cocaine-dealing Latin Americans on the streets of New York, and Polk describing how the defence of masculine conceptions of honour and face can precipitate homicide.

A role will continue to be played by the sociological criminology that attaches importance to the ethnographic study of signifying practices. Symbolic interactionism and phenomenology have supplied an enduring reminder of the importance of reflectivity; the symbolically-mediated character of all social reality; and the sheer complexity, density, and intricacy of the social world. And, lastly, one would hope that criminology will continue to contribute its own distinct analysis of the wider social world, an analysis that can take it beyond the confines of a tightly-defined nexus of relations between criminals, legislators, lawyers, and enforcement agents. A criminology without a wider vision of social process would be deformed. A sociology without a conception of rule-breaking and control would be an odd discipline indeed.

Selected further reading

There is no substitute for the original works, some of the more important of which are Howard Becker’s Outsiders (1963); John Braithwaite’s Crime, Shame and Reintegration (1989); Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin’s Delinquency and Opportunity (1960); David Matza’s Delinquency and Drift (1964); Ian Taylor, Paul Walton, and Jock Young’s The New Criminology (1973); and Jock Young’s The Exclusive Society (1999). Among the secondary texts are David Downes and Paul Rock’s Understanding Deviance (1998), and John Tierney’s Criminology: Theory and Context (1996).

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