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Editorial: Hip Hop Graffiti, Mexican Murals and the War on Terror

Crime, Media, Culture: an International Journal was borne out of two thoughts that came to us in the summer of 2002. The first was the realization that the time was right. In an age defined by media saturation and ubiquitous interpretive spin, a constant and inescapable flow and exchange of signs, symbols and codes, the increasingly blurred boundaries between the represented and the real, the rapid advancement and aggressive marketing of new technologies of communication, surveillance and control, and highly mediatized and culturally shifting conceptions of community, identity and membership, a forum for the critical analysis of the relations between crime, media and culture seemed a necessity. Second was the realization was that we were not alone in facing, without such a forum, the dilemma of where to publish such work. The choice for an increasing number of scholars, it seemed, was either to submit articles to mainstream criminology journals, where they would jostle for inclusion with a myriad of criminological topics, or to send them to journals in other fields – media studies, communications, cultural studies, sociology, ethnography, gender and sexuality studies, law, and penology – in the hope that readers with a shared interest would somehow stumble upon the work.

With *Crime, Media, Culture*, we redress this problem – and in fact, we hope that *Crime, Media, Culture* will become the primary vehicle for exchange between scholars working at the intersections of criminological and cultural inquiry. *CMC* will provide a unique and much needed forum for serious scholarly debate and, we trust, for empirically novel and theoretically rigorous research into crime, media, and culture. More specifically, substantive areas of interest for the journal can be noted by way of three broad, overlapping categories.

1. The relationship between crime/criminal justice and media forms, including traditional media, new and alternative media, and surveillance technologies.

2. The relationship between crime/criminal justice and cultural dynamics, with a special focus on cultural criminology and its concerns with image, representation, meaning and style.
3. The intersections of crime/criminal justice, media forms and cultural dynamics, including historical, political, situational, spatial, subcultural and cross-cultural intersections.

These three areas embrace an already vast and ever-expanding array of issues, themes and criminological possibilities. Rather than attempt to list these possibilities here, though, and thus risk subscribing to the kind of prescription and reductionism that CMC seeks to avoid, we hope that the diversity and quality of contributions in this first issue, and those that follow, will demonstrate the range of subject matter and analysis.

It is worth stressing, however, that the debates spawned by these areas of research and analysis are by no means marginal; they lie at the very heart of academic research. The nexus between crime, media and culture must be of central concern to any scholar wishing to make sense of crime and control in late modernity. To explore matters of crime and control without engaging in a serious and sustained way with media and culture is to lose sight of those very forces that today shape how crime, deviance and control are defined and constructed, legitimated and sustained, challenged and undermined. The creation of *Crime, Media, Culture* acknowledges the fundamental importance of these issues to the criminological project, and illustrates our desire to provide like-minded scholars with a forum within which to move these matters forward.

Crime, Media, Culture will be published three times a year. In addition to papers promoting critical scholarship of the kind usually found in academic journals, we welcome a variety of submissions that can encourage new ways of thinking about the interrelationships between theory, research, policy and practice. Given the journal's subject matter and its focus on matters of image, style and diversity, we have in addition given a great deal of consideration to the design of the journal. Our aim has been to create a journal whose 'look' and 'feel' reflects the innovativeness inherent in its subject matter and scholarship.

The journal's cover, for example, includes an image that, by the complex circumstances of its creation, is meant to embody many of the journal's substantive and analytic themes. The image emerged from a series of talks that one of us – Jeff Ferrell – gave in Germany some years ago, on the subject of hip hop graffiti – the distinctively stylized form of visual communication that developed during the 1970s as part of hip hop culture's emergence in New York City and elsewhere in the United States. While in Berlin Jeff's hosts took him to see the city's burgeoning hip hop graffiti scene; arriving at a public housing complex he was astounded to see wall after wall of murals executed elegantly and exactly in the style of US hip hop graffiti. Among those he photographed is the mural that now graces this journal's cover. A careful examination of this cover image reveals that the mural's creators dedicated it to various other hip hop graffiti writers—'This goes 2: Stay...'—and that they did so in English. It also reveals that portions of the mural are missing; this cover image is a cropped version of the original photograph. In this way *Crime, Media, Culture's* cover represents something of the mediated spiral that the journal seeks to address, incorporating as it does an image of an image of an image: a North American criminologist's photograph of a German mural produced in the style and language of an illicit U.S. subculture, and now edited and reproduced on the cover of a journal published in the United Kingdom—and, we hope, read in Berlin and the Bronx.

That a single image could cross so many boundaries suggests something of *Crime, Media, Culture's* transgressive scope as well. As this image implies, neither criminality nor the cultures that construct it can any longer be conceptualized as phenomena contained within the legal borders of the modern nation state. It is not only human bodies that move about the world, dislocated by crimes of war and economy, or sold into transnational sexual and economic slavery; the human cultures within which these crimes carry meaning, and the media through which they are by turns masked and exposed, also migrate (Bovenkerk and Yesilgoz, 2004). Given this, *Crime, Media, Culture's* subtitle—*An International Journal*—is also meant as more than afterthought. It is intended to signify the journal's commitment to the sort of criminology that can account for the increasingly multicultural and cross-cultural dynamics of crime and crime control. Part of this commitment has involved assembling an international editorial board of innovative scholars in the area of

crime, media, and culture. A second part now involves soliciting and publishing scholarship attuned to the sorts of cross-cultural dynamics that our cover image represents.

The placement of this image on the cover of *Crime, Media, Culture* is also intended to signify that the journal will engage with images in a domain other than the decorative. Among the long-standing limitations of conventional criminology has been its soundly logocentric bias, its inability to account for realms of human culture beyond the written and spoken, much less to theorize them adequately. Even as criminologists attempt to analyze and understand a world increasingly awash in visual communication, our books and journals remain largely bereft of images; when images are included, they are mostly presented as adornment, or at best illustration (a number of texts on juvenile delinquency, for example, feature images of hip hop graffiti on their covers without any mention, much less analysis, of the phenomenon in their pages). *Crime, Media, Culture* seeks to address this limitation through critical criminological engagement with the widespread visual cultures that define the contemporary practice of crime and crime control. As such, the journal hopes to foster an ongoing theoretical analysis, a critical aesthetics, of contemporary crime and crime control, and it welcomes photographs and other visual materials that can offer both documentation and analysis. Henri Cartier-Bresson, the great documentary photographer recently deceased, defined photography as “the simultaneous recognition...of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression” (in Miller, 1997: 102). We intend to publish such visual expressions in *Crime, Media, Culture*.

Of course, some might suggest that the inclusion of visual material in an academic journal serves only surfaces, reproducing as it does the shallow, sensationalist tone of much popular visual culture. In counterpoint a handful of contemporary, cross-cultural cases might be noted. In response to the murder of hundreds of young women in and around Ciudad Juarez on the Mexico-US border, for example, visual artists and activists from Mexico, the United States, and other countries are now producing photographs, films, murals, and television dramas designed to heighten public awareness and to push legal authorities into action. Among these activists are four hip hop graffiti artists who have blended popular

visual imagery with traditional Mexican iconography to produce a giant mural that, after being utilized to generate support for the victims in the United States, will be installed in Ciudad Juarez as a memorial to them. And this mural in turn draws on another development of some depth within the worldwide culture of hip hop graffiti: the painting, often by commission, of community-based hip hop graffiti memorials for victims of criminal violence.

Meanwhile, other forms of visual documentation continue to remind us of the power of the image, and to bring new meaning to the already culturally-charged concept of 'reality television'. The September 11 2001 attacks on New York's twin towers were orchestrated with maximum global media exposure in mind and, broadcast 'live' around the world, sought to shatter forever belief in the economic and cultural invincibility of the US. In the midst of the subsequent war in Iraq, Islamic fundamentalists produce successions of videos, transmitted across TV stations and Internet sites, which show kidnapped hostages pleading for their lives before being brutally executed before the eyes of the world. Faced with the unassailable military might of the United States and its allies, insurgents have come to realize that the camera may be the most effective weapon with which to retaliate, bringing violence of an extraordinary intensity into the living rooms of a global audience. As Jason Burke notes, their execution videos combine all the standard elements of the genre: 'they are dramatic productions. There is the main subject centre stage, there is a carefully designed set and backdrop and there are carefully chosen props...that send particular messages to particular audiences...there is [frequently] even a script, carefully drafted statements that have to be read out by victims, often in a hideous duet with their killer' (Burke, 2004). In many cases these chosen 'props' include an orange jumpsuit for the captive, and a cage for imprisonment – a clear, chilling, and parodic reference to those held at Guantanamo Bay.

The terrifying game of mediatized strike and counter-strike continues as US soldiers go about visually documenting their participation in the torture and abuse of Iraqi prisoners. Recalling the 'genocidal tourism' (Morrison, 2004: 341) practiced by German soldiers and policemen during the Holocaust, and by Japanese soldiers during the Rape of Nanking, US soldiers produce photographs that proudly, happily record their own criminality—and so record at the same time, as Susan Sontag

(2004: 2) says, 'complex crimes of leadership, policies, and authority.' After all, Sontag argues, "for a long time – at least six decades – photographs have laid down the tracks of how important conflicts are judged and remembered. The memory museum is now mostly a visual one." And of course the doors to this memory museum today remain, more than ever, wide open; despite the best efforts of US officials, the visual echoes of Abu Ghraib prison reverberate from one soldier's digital camera to the next, through the circuitry of US politics, around the world community—and off the pockmarked walls of Sadr City. There, neighbourhood muralists help organize resistance to US occupation by reproducing one of the more horrific images—the hooded prisoner with hands wired for electrical shock—and by running the wires, visually and politically, straight to the Statue of Liberty.

[photo about here]

It is in this visual context – a context in which images increasingly interweave with the worldwide practice of crime, violence, war, and justice – that *Crime, Media, Culture* offers a cover image of German hip hop graffiti, and includes in this first issue prisoner drawings, photographs, and a review essay on Susan Sontag's latest book. Still, as regards the visual, there is more to say and more to show in future issues of the journal – and of course much of it yet to be imagined or discovered. It's like Subcomandante Marcos said, in the midst of trying to make Chiapas a better world than the one presently on offer in Ciudad Juarez or Sadr City. "We hope you understand that this is the first time we have tried to carry out a revolution, and we are still learning."

Jeff Ferrell, Chris Greer, Yvonne Jewkes

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