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Situational Crime Prevention and its Discontents: Rational Choice Theory versus the 'Culture of Now'

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Abstract

The rational choice theory of crime and its cognate field of study, situational crime prevention, have exerted a considerable influence in criminal justice policy and criminology. This article argues that, while undeniably useful as a means of reducing property or acquisitive crime, rational choice-inspired situational crime prevention initiatives are limited when it comes to offering protection against a growing number of so-called 'expressive crimes'. Developing this critique, the article will criticize the sociologically hollow narrative associated with rational choice theories of crime by drawing on recent research in social theory and consumer studies. It argues that the growing tendency among many young individuals to engage in certain forms of criminal decision-making 'strategies' may simply be the by-product of a series of subjectivities and emotions that reflect the material values and cultural logic associated with late modern consumerism.

Keywords

Criminal justice; Situational crime prevention; Rational choice theory; Cultural criminology; Consumerism

Introduction

According to many criminal justice policy-makers, the migration of rational choice theory (RCT) into criminology has been a major success. Criminology and criminal justice journals abound with the latest iterative tests of RCTs of offending, and proponents of this approach regularly secure major research grants. Taken together, RCT and its cognate field of study, situational crime prevention (SCP), exert a major influence on contemporary crime reduction practice, with many supporters claiming that such strategies represent the most efficient and cost-effective approach to current crime problems. This article will argue, however, that, despite considerable success in combating certain forms of economic/acquisitive criminality (e.g. Ken Pease's work on preventing repeat burglary victimization; see Farrell and

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Pease 2001 for a summary), much of this *RCT-inspired SCP* lacks reflexivity. More specifically it has failed to pay sufficient attention to the array of criticisms of RCT that have emerged from disciplines such as behavioural psychology, political science and sociology that centre around the simple alternative hypothesis that 'not all actors are economically self-interested'. Developing these critiques, this article will further criticize the rather sociologically deracinated narrative associated with RCTs of crime by drawing on some of the theoretical innovations that have come to define critical and cultural criminology.

Rational Choice Theories of Crime: The Basics

There is nothing intrinsically new about RCTs of crime. Indeed, on at least one reading the criminological tradition owes its very origins to the eighteenth-century 'classical' ideas of Cesare Beccaria ([1764] 1963) and Jeremy Bentham ([1789] 1982), figures who in turn were inspired by the (then radical) utilitarian philosophies of Locke and Hume. Central to these writers' accounts of criminality was the belief that human nature was predicated upon the search for pleasure and the avoidance of pain, and that human action was consequently organized around calculative strategies aimed at utility maximization: 'Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do' (Bentham [1789] 1982). Guided by such principles, 'classical' scholars employed the new intellectual instruments of modernity, not in a bid to understand the ultimate causes of human behaviour, but rather to initiate new ways of controlling behaviour by affecting rational motivation. In sum, the underlying social conditions of crime were unimportant: 'Instead the emphasis was on administration, ordered systems that would free society from arbitrary authority and open it up so that the basic true forms of the human condition would be visible' (Hayward and Morrison 2005: 62). It was such thinking that ultimately helped create both a legitimated system of criminal justice based on equality and proportionality, and the development of the modern prison as we know it today.

Despite its considerable influence on both jurisprudence and criminal justice policy, the classical tradition was largely eclipsed throughout most of the twentieth century by what the American sociologist Edwin Sutherland (1947) termed 'dispositional theories of crime and deviance'. According to Sutherland's useful shorthand framework, dispositional theories are all those approaches that seek an answer to that fundamental aetiological question: 'why do some people feel compelled to break rules and transgress social norms?' Without going into detail, one could say that dispositional theories of crime (whether genetic, psychological or socio-cultural) have comprised the standard reference points of the criminological enterprise, from Lombroso to Durkheim, from Marxist criminology to the most recent work on the possible genetic basis of antisocial behaviour. Certainly, dispositional theories of crime have held most sway in terms of shaping Western governments' thinking regarding the twentieth-century crime problem, influencing

such diverse policy initiatives as the 1970s 'welfarist' movement within youth justice, to recent interest in restorative justice programmes.

However, by the 1980s, many policy-makers had grown disillusioned with the dispositional approach and especially its failure to isolate the specific causes of criminality. With crime rates rising throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and recidivism rates similarly increasing (despite attempts by most Western governments to implement prison regimes based – albeit in piecemeal fashion – around welfarist ideals), there was, as Garland (1999: 353) suggests, a palpable lurch within mainstream criminal justice away from theories of crime based on notions of social deprivation, towards 'explanations [of crime] couched in terms of social control, and its deficits'. These factors, alongside the rise of the conservative right, saw many criminologists revisit the fundamental principles of the 'classical school' (Clarke and Cornish 1985; Cornish and Clarke 1986a, 1986b).

Importantly, these 'neo-classical' criminologists were not interested in simply resuscitating old utilitarian calculations of pleasure versus pain. Rather, their aim was to update the model by considering more recent theoretical research into rationality undertaken within disciplines such as economics (Becker 1968, 1976), economic psychology (Tversky 1972; Kahneman *et al.* 1982), law (Posner 1973, 1980) and sociology (e.g. Coleman 1973; Heath 1976). The result was a reasonably eclectic amalgam that drew together the utilitarian ideas of Beccaria and Bentham with more recent 'deterrence' theories (Gibbs 1968; Zimring and Hawkins 1973), and (related) economic theories of crime (Becker 1968; Hirschi 1969). Consider, by way of exposition, the following definition by Ken Pease, one of the high priests of the neo-classical revival: 'The starting point of RCT is that offenders seek advantage to themselves by their criminal behaviour. This entails making decisions among alternatives. These decisions are rational within the constraints of time, ability and the availability of relevant information' (2006: 339).

This reliance upon 'cost-benefit' constructs such as the *homo economicus* model of human action led to the creation of a series of (deliberately) aetiological impoverished models of criminal behaviour in which, just like classic control theory (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990), there is no special deviant/pathological criminality. Reaching its highest form in sophisticated algebraic expressions, contemporary RC theorists of crime now test the efficacy of crime prevention initiatives by reducing the mind of the potential offender to a statistical formula: e.g. $Y_i = \alpha + \beta_1(X_{bi}) + \beta_2(X_{ci}) + \epsilon_i$, (as utilized, for example, in Exum 2002). Under the rubric of RC, the human purposes and existential meanings of crime are thus literally banned from the equation. Thus is the intractable question of criminality reduced to a two-inch formula – at least for the purposes of statistical policy analysis.

Situational Crime Prevention: The Basics

At this point, it is important to acknowledge the convergence that took place between RCTs of offending and a number of other related areas of theoretical and practical criminological inquiry – not least, of course, SCP, which, as Pease (2006: 339) points out, is tightly bound up with the RCT of crime.

Put simply, SCP is 'the use of measures directed at highly specific forms of crime which involve the management, design or manipulation of the immediate environment in which these crimes occur . . . so as to reduce the opportunities for these crimes' (Hough *et al.* 1980: 1).¹ In other words, the emphasis is squarely on micro-preventative crime strategies, and as such local authorities, businesses and the public at large are encouraged to employ practical deterrents to ensure that buildings, public spaces and people do not provide 'soft targets' for the criminal. Great store is therefore placed on increased physical security and, importantly, high-profile surveillance, both public and private. The preventative value of closed-circuit television is also crucial in the 'fight against crime'. Similarly pragmatic deterrents such as secure perimeters, barred windows, 'vandal-proof' public facilities, the encryption of digital financial data, the spatio-environmental design of business premises and domestic residences, airport and school metal detectors, alarms and even better locks and bolts, all feature prominently on the SCP agenda.² With its emphasis on immediate short-term, crime prevention strategies, rather than expensive, macro-level socio-political intervention, this new so-called 'administrative criminology' (see Young 1994: 91–7 for a commentary) sat well with the political ethos of the period, and was thus roundly welcomed on both sides of the Atlantic as an immediate and comparatively inexpensive way of combating spiralling crime rates.³

While it is important not to elide these two separate fields, one should be aware that, since the 1980s, RCTs of crime were increasingly utilized within an expanding array of SCP strategies. This marriage of motivational model and practical crime prevention initiative was largely facilitated by the (then) UK Home Office criminologist, Ron Clarke, who emerged as 'the leading proponent both of RCT and the crime prevention approach with which it is consistent' (Pease 2006: 339). The key distinction, however, is that, unlike RCTs of crime, SCP makes no claim to motivational comprehensiveness; nor for that matter does it claim to constitute a theory of all types of crime (as Clarke and others were at pains to point out).⁴ Rather, crime preventionists sought simply to 'reduce the risk of occurrence and the potential seriousness of criminal events' by intervening in 'those causes which the offender encounters, or seeks out, in the immediate circumstances of the criminal event' (Eckblom 2006: 383). In other words, SCP advocates promoted a more 'crime-specific'⁵ approach that included a greater emphasis on *situational factors*, as these are held to be the most susceptible to manipulation in a way that might reduce the occurrence of crime.

Given this sustained interest in the causal influence of situational/environmental factors, SCP practitioners began to draw on commensurate developments in the (related) field of Routine Activity Theory (RAT). Like RCT, RAT proceeds with the belief that criminal motivation is a given (Clarke and Felson 1993); only, now, focus is extended to consider in more detail 'the manner in which the spatio-temporal organization of social activities helps people translate their criminal inclinations into action' (Cohen and Felson 1979: 592). In this sense, it is concerned with *three* core concepts: 'likely (motivated) offenders', 'suitable (soft) targets', and (the absence of) 'capable guardians' (1979: 588). Drawing also on related research in environmental

criminology (a field of inquiry that seeks to unearth ‘marked geographical skews in the patterning of offence locations’ and how ‘these can vary significantly by type of offence’: Bottoms 1994: 602), SCP had two goals: first, to understand (and importantly predict) the ways in which these three core elements came together; and, second, to reduce crime opportunities in these specific locations.⁶ An example of this dual approach in action was the emergence of so-called ‘crime hot spots’ (Sherman *et al.* 1989). Under this rubric, once a ‘hot spot’ such as a run-down housing estate, an unsupervised car-park, a troublesome public house or take-away restaurant, bus stop, train station, etc. is identified – typically via a combination of crime pattern analysis and police-call data – the goal of SCP is to ‘block crime opportunities’, and bring these ‘criminogenic’ pockets of urban space back in line with the ordered processes of city planning.

While in many cases the SCP approach has been very successful in reducing certain forms of ‘shallow-end’ property or acquisitive crime such as shop-lifting or theft from vehicles⁷ – and for this it should be roundly commended – for many commentators such a pragmatic approach to the crime problem was a major step back. Indeed, some even suggested that it heralded the advent of a new ‘criminology of normality’ or ‘culture of control’ (Garland 2001), a strategy of crime control closely attuned to the fields of risk and resource management and related calculative government approaches to the control and management of social problems (Garland 1997: 190).

Quite obviously, the SCP approach to crime and criminality represents almost the exact opposite approach to that favoured by most dispositional theorists. Certainly, the more attention SCP practitioners focused on the combination of rationality and spatial/situational factors, the less it afforded the offender. In other words, while RCTs of offending were boosted by their new association with RAT theory and environmental criminology (a relationship that, of course, worked both ways), what emerged ultimately was, for many commentators, a sociologically deracinated discourse (Cohen 1996: 5), that served to hollow out both the socio-cultural specificities that are often at play within urban space, and the complex existential motivations associated with much criminality (see Katz 1988; Hayward 2004a: ch. 5). Our concern here is with *the particular relationship between RCTs of offending and SCP practices* (processes that, as we have seen, are closely interrelated; see Newman *et al.* 1997). The remainder of this article, therefore, will concentrate on the ongoing value and practical relevance of this relationship within the context of contemporary unmediated consumer societies (for a separate, yet related, critique of the spatio-situational aspect of contemporary SCP theory, see Hayward 2004b).

The ‘Rhetorical Duet’: The Normative–Affective Critique of Rational Choice Theory

As Adam Stone notes, critiques of the rational actor model are almost as old as the model itself (Stone website). Anthropology, sociology, psychology and economics have all taken a bite out of the subject, each one postulating variations on the so-called ‘normative’ and ‘affective’ [i.e. emotional] critique

of RC. Simply stated, this critique turns around the argument that extra emotional or irrational factors are 'sometimes so powerful they seem to make traditional modes of rational decision making inconceivable' (*ibid.*).

The normative–affective model of rationality essentially argues that the majority of human choices are defined by normative factors and affect, and that instrumental thinking and logical empirical analysis, rarely if ever, factor into decisions. Further, when conditions are favourable to 'logical/empirical' analysis, actors tend to infuse these methods with N/A biases. The conclusion is that any model, which relies on a core of logical/empirical thinking, is inherently misleading, since it inaccurately describes the basis of human decision-making.

Over the years, many of these criticisms have been put forward in an effort to construct more rounded conceptualizations of human choice that go beyond straightforward consideration of exogenous factors, to consider instead *internal* psychic–emotive processes. Yet, as many have suggested, rather than the emergence of a more accurate understanding of human choice, what occurred has been the frustrating conflation or, more accurately, the binding together of the theory and the critique in what Kelman describes as 'a rhetorical duet' or 'ritualized dance' (1998: 1580). This article will consider this rhetorical dialectic below, in particular how it might be used as a reflexive tool for enhancing RCT-inspired SCP initiatives. In the meantime, however, let us consider what a normative–affective critique of the RCT of crime might look like.

Set against the mass of acquisitive/property crimes that are the stock-in-trade of RC theorists are the growing number of crimes containing a high emotional or 'expressive' element⁸ – what I have referred to elsewhere as the world of the 'irrational' actor (Hayward 2004a). While undeniably useful as a means of reducing certain forms of 'shallow end' or 'volume' crime, the situational/RC approach may be a less effective tool against the chaotic, violent or so-called 'expressive crimes' that cause most public distress and community disharmony (see Trasler 1986; Morrison 1995; ch. 16; de Hahn and Vos 2003). Consider the inherent problems RC theorists might encounter when trying to devise initiatives to stem offences such as gang-related crime, hoax emergency service call-outs, hedonistic drug use, child molestation, rape, or drunken assault.⁹

Even within the camp, cracks in the RC model are beginning to show. One recent test of the RC perspective by Exum is particularly illuminating. In an all-too-typical empirical study of the effects of alcohol and anger on violent decision-making, he states that 'the [RC] perspective may not be the general explanation for crime it is proclaimed to be', concluding later:

[t]he current study suggests that emotional states such as anger may impact the perceived consequences of a violent, criminal act. Future researchers should therefore consider expanding tests of the rational choice perspective to include the role of the emotions, an area of study that has been commonly omitted from choice based theories of offending. At the same time . . . rational choice should also recognize the potential

impact psychopharmacological agents such as alcohol may play in the decision-making processes . . . Finally, future research is necessary to examine the rational choice model's assumption of generality. Perhaps the rational choice model does not explain violent behaviour equally well across different states of mind. Instead . . . perhaps the model may only explain 'cool-headed' behaviour but then breaks down when individuals are in an emotionally charged state. (2002: 961; emphases added)

It is this 'emotionally charged state' that is of interest here, especially in the way it opens up RCT to the type of critical analysis already under way within the burgeoning field of cultural criminology (Hayward and Young 2004; Ferrell 1999).

At this point, it is important not to fall foul of what Felson (1998: 3–6) describes as 'the dramatic fallacy' (i.e. the tendency to over-emphasize dramatic, salacious, and expressive crimes at the expense of the more mundane, everyday offences that constitute the rump of police reports and crime statistics), especially given that much of the critical element of this article turns around the distinction between expressive crimes and those that can be described as 'acquisitive'. While cultural criminology has been criticized for its over-interpretation of crimes that involve the 'pursuit of passions', it is unfair to claim its analytical framework is blind to the more mundane aspects of criminality (see Ferrell 2004; Yar 2005b). Cultural criminology's focus on meaning, representation and subcultural milieu ensures that it is equally at home explaining the monotonous activities associated with DVD piracy or the illegal trade in counterfeit automotive components, as it is unravelling the *sub rosa* world of illegal graffiti artists.¹⁰

Cultural criminology points to the subjective experiences and highly textured socio-cultural situations behind all crimes. For example, with regard to the specific issue of alcohol-related violence, the question policy-makers should be asking is not: how can we control alcohol-related crime by employing measures such as controlling 'barhopping', lowering the prices of non-alcoholic drinks, and serving drinks in smaller glasses? (all suggestions offered by Felson 1998: 171–6). Rather, what has happened from a cultural perspective to create a situation where, in the UK, over 80 per cent of the near 1 million violent assaults recorded last year (up 30 per cent on 1997) involved the use of alcohol in one form or another?¹¹

The subject of alcohol consumption more generally illustrates the limitations of the RC perspective. Consider so-called 'binge' drinking (something closely associated with various forms of urban incivility and crime). Not only do binge drinkers only realize they have reached the point of declining marginal utility after they have passed it, but the whole premise behind the activity is to 'unashamedly defy the normal injunction to think and act rationally' (de Haan and Vos 2003: 45). Unless, of course, one actually believes that people systematically and rationally set themselves the task of projectile vomiting in the street, falling asleep in doorways, or verbally abusing perfect strangers!¹²

It is this idea that certain forms of decision-making are as much illogical and irrational as they are logical and empirical that is of interest to cultural criminologists. More specifically, I wish to develop this point by drawing on

my recent work on the relationship between late modern consumer culture and certain forms of expressive criminality. The point being that, what at first sight may appear to be a growing tendency for individuals to engage in irrational criminal decision-making 'strategies' may in fact be the by-product of a series of subjectivities and emotions that are themselves simply a reflection of the central logic and material values associated with late modern consumerism.

Emotionality, 'Sensation Gatherers' and the 'Pursuit of the Now': Consumer Culture and 'Expressive' Criminality

Focusing on the deregulation and privatization of desire within contemporary consumerism, Zygmunt Bauman coins the phrase 'sensation-gatherers' to characterize a peculiarly late modern form of subjectivity (1997: 146). He describes how the 'soldier-producer' of industrial capitalism has been supplanted by a different type of subject, one who constantly craves *new experience*.¹³ Bauman describes a series of emotions that might be seen as characterizing the 'sensation-gatherer': dissatisfaction, narcissism, impulsivity and spontaneity – frequently the very emotions behind a whole host of risk-laden criminal acts such as joyriding, drug use, football hooliganism, fire-setting (Presdee 2005), street robbery,¹⁴ 'binge' drinking (Hayward and Hobbs forthcoming), gang membership (Katz 1988: ch. 4) and peer group fighting. These illegal forms of excitement represent a break with the banalities of everyday life and mark an entry into a new world of possibilities and pleasures. The seductiveness of crime may thus derive, in large part, from the new kinds of *sensations* it offers. From the youthful excesses associated with 'E', 'rave' and 'binge' culture to the increased use of hard drugs like cocaine and heroin, it seems that for many people, the greater the risk, the greater the attraction. Bauman captures this when he observes that the 'arousing of new desires' has replaced 'normative regulation'. Not only are we constantly on the lookout for new and ever more thrilling experiences, but we inhabit a world where old normative systems cease to matter, or at least they are momentarily repressed during the act of transgression.

The significance of this change lies not least in its implications for our experience of time. If, in the past, personal identity was forged through a 'temporal unification of the past and the future with the present before me', then, today, the *privileging of the present* associated with consumerism cultivates 'an inability to unify the past, present and future of our own biographical experience of psychic life' (Jameson 1991: 26). Thus, experience is reduced to 'a series of pure and unrelated presents', a series of 'nows' (see Harvey 1990: 54). As for the past, so for the future: the idea of saving, of any sort of postponement predicated on an expected future, becomes meaningless. Interestingly, this point has been rehearsed in recent behavioural economic critiques of the RC model of law. Jolls *et al.* (1998: 1538–41) point out that many young offenders are highly 'present-oriented' (see, relatedly, Laibson's (1997) notion of 'hyperbolic discounting'; and Elster's (1979, 2000) work on 'time-inconsistency'). Contrasting the hypothesized model of rational action employed in the economic analysis of law with the belief that people exhibit 'bounded rationality', 'bounded self-interest', and 'bounded willpower', they

argue that criminals are frequently neither amenable to future (long-term) rewards, nor strongly deterred by anything less than the most immediate and certain punishments (cf. Posner 1998 for a counter-argument).

Elsewhere (Hayward 2004a) I have explored this line of inquiry through a number of different theoretical models, including Lyng's work (1990) on the existential nature of voluntary risk-taking – or, as he prefers to call it, 'edge-work'; Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) notion of 'flow experience', the holistic sensation achieved during 'autotelic' experiences such as intense game-playing or rock-climbing; Featherstone's (1994) notion of a 'controlled sense of loss of control' (i.e. the idea that certain individuals are increasingly using risk and associated practices as a means of achieving a semblance of existential control in the face of the instabilities and upheavals associated with late modernity); and Ikuya Sato's (1991) work on the self-reported motivations and 'self actualization' processes experienced during illegal Japanese street racing. Rather than elaborate on these models here, the article will now consider another (clearly related) subjectivity closely associated with consumerism: namely, the way consumer culture cultivates a desire for *immediate, rather than delayed, gratification*. This might help us better understand why many individuals seem increasingly separated from prevailing normative values.

For some time, instant gratification (at the individual level) has been recognized within psychological circles as a vital element in explaining antisocial and criminal behaviour (e.g. Buss 1966; Maher 1966; Eysenck 1970). Despite often conflicting opinions regarding the nature of the category of 'willpower', psychologists have continued to develop explanatory models and theories of criminality that draw heavily upon the constructs of impulsivity, instant gratification and the delay of gratification paradigm. Similarly, failure to delay gratification has long been a central feature of a number of psychological disorders associated with criminality (Unikel and Blanchard 1973; Widom 1977; Newman *et al.* 1990). Considerable work has also been undertaken into the way in which supposed deficits in impulse control can bring about delinquent behaviour by interfering with children's ability to control their behaviour and to think of the future consequences of deviant acts (Moffitt 1993; White *et al.* 1994).

Most famously from a crime perspective, Wilson and Herrnstein (1985) asserted that personality differences in traits such as impulsivity may be strongly related to the development of long-term antisocial behaviour. Central to their controversial reading of criminality is the concept of 'present orientation': the idea that a 'rapid cognitive tempo' and 'shortened time horizons' are responsible for impulsive and disinhibited behaviour. This line of thinking is extremely apparent in neo-conservative (or right realist) criminology more generally. On the face of it, while right realists might appear to be agnostic about why someone sets out to commit a crime, buried deep within these criminologies is an implicit concern with the emotional element of criminality – namely the conceptions of 'self-expression' and 'self-control'. Consider, Wilson's text *Thinking about Crime* (1985), perhaps the cornerstone of populist conservative criminology. Often neglected in this work is the great store Wilson places on the emotions that act on and affect 'internalized commitment to self-control' (see Jolls *et al.* 1998: 1538–9).

It is interesting to note that the development of an (allegedly) more 'fully inclusive' concept of impulsivity is well under way elsewhere, albeit from a strictly non-criminological perspective and, not surprisingly, where one would most expect it, in *the market*. In the fields of economic psychology and consumer research, traditional RC models of self-control and consumer decision-making are being significantly revised as researchers factor in the important visceral and emotional factors that are seen by many as a major feature of what has been described as 'hedonic consumption' (Williams and Burns 1994; see relatedly Campbell's notion of 'mentalist hedonism' 1995: 118–19). If conscious impulsivity is indeed becoming a nascent characteristic of late modern society, might it be the case that further exploration of this line of inquiry could point a way forward for criminology to reconcile some of its more polarized theoretical positions?

Bridging the Divide between Rationality and Emotionality: What Consumer Studies can Teach Criminology

Traditionally, in the field of consumer research, consumer choices and behavioural patterns have been understood via RC models that explain purchases in terms of consumers weighing the costs and benefits of alternatives. In these normative models – just as in RCTs of crime – consumers are viewed as 'dispassionate information processors' (e.g. Katona 1975; Bettman 1979). Such purely rational models, however, have (unsurprisingly) proven unable to answer the important question with which much of this literature concerns itself: *why do consumers frequently act against their own better judgement and engage in spending they later regret?*¹⁵ Consequently, the last two decades have seen the emergence of an opposing school of thought that focuses instead on the role played by short-term *emotional* factors in the consumption process (e.g. Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; Holbrook and Hirschman 1986; Mick and DeMoss 1990; Williams and Burns 1994; Wood 1998). (The division in the field of consumer research can be conceptualized as a trade-off between 'interests' (normative rational behaviour) and 'passions' (impulsive or *akratic* action).)¹⁶ This counter-move closely retraces the contours of the 'normative-affective' critique above. Moreover, it is also redolent of the staunch opposition that exists within contemporary criminology between, on the one hand, theories of crime predicated on classical notions of rationality, and, on the other, aetiological explanations that stress the centrality of individual emotions and cultural concerns in the commission of the criminal act.

However, rather than pulling in different directions (as has so long been the case with 'situational' and 'dispositional' theories of crime), research into consumer behaviour is attempting to bridge the division between rationality and emotionality. Economic psychologists like Hoch and Lowenstein claim the only way forward is to collapse these two very separate literatures into one, because they claim, 'although each perspective adequately describes a wide range of consumer behaviours, neither alone can provide an adequate account of the decision-making process' (1991: 504). This approach seems increasingly popular. For example, consider the recent debate on this subject in the *Stanford Law Review*. In a 70-page article, Jolls *et al.* (1998)

seek to augment the concept of rationality within economic models of law by drawing on cognitive and motivational research from the field of behavioural psychology: 'We wish to retain the power of the economist's approach to social science while offering a better description of the behaviour of the agents in society and the economy' (1998: 1487). Likewise in his response, the legal scholar, Mark Kelman, sees this process as working both ways – although he is keen to temper some of Jolls *et al.*'s more exaggerated claims about easily 'spinning free' of the 'point/counterpoint dialectical dance':

We should understand that imbedding ourselves in the dialectic dialogue between RCT and its critics will make us wiser users of the rich, inexorably overwhelming data with which we have to deal. It is constructive, not merely 'skeptical,' to anticipate more fully the range of plausible interpretations of human conduct, and constructive to understand that open-textured interpretivism is not the enemy of knowledge but of rigidity and self-delusion. (1998: 1591)

So, might it be possible to refine the RCT of offending so that it considers the type of expressive ('affective') crimes that are on the increase within contemporary consumer societies? One possible strategy that embraces the 'view from below' and centres around notions of individual self-expression might be found in the sociology of Max Weber. His assertion that the causes of action lie in their meaning was an attempt to avoid constructing rationality in straightforward one-dimensional terms (he talked, of course, of there being a rationality of morality, and of understanding religious and metaphysical beliefs through the rational purposes they serve for the believer). Could such an approach help us in the development of what one might call *multiple registers of rationality*? (Boudon 1998). Two brief examples: prior to asking someone out on a date, many individuals – in a highly instrumental decision – will drink just enough alcohol to achieve a sufficiently relaxed and uninhibited state in which to approach someone they find attractive. Here we see 'rationality' and 'pleasure/excitement' (emotions that, as we have seen, are often operative in many forms of expressive criminality) working *in tandem*, illustrating a more rounded, multifaceted concept of apparently 'rational' action. Similarly, while a bank robber certainly receives 'instrumental economic pay-off' from the completion of a successful robbery, s/he also reaps considerable cultural and symbolic rewards from the act. (Bank robbers are often feted within the criminal fraternity, with even unsuccessful exponents being afforded high status within institutional settings.) Our goal, then, should be the creation of a 'more capacious conception of rationality (which includes aesthetic and affective dimensions)' (Yar 2005a: 414), based on a more rounded understanding of the emotions and real-world socio-interactional settings (including perhaps even factors such as the role of the community?) in which they both emerge and are played out (Archer 2000). Unfortunately, for all its merits, contemporary SCP is not famed either for its inter-disciplinarity or its ability to ground itself within wider discussions of social and cultural contexts. Instead, crime prevention micro-specialists continue to plough their

own furrow, with associated criminal justice policy-makers being especially guilty of ignoring the wider context in which crime occurs.

‘We’re All Criminals Now’: Rationality as the *Lingua Franca* of Neo-liberalism

One aspect of the ‘wider context in which crime occurs’ germane to discussions of RCT and SCP is the roll-out of neo-liberal forms of governance and control and the accompanying cultures of risk and resource management. Increasingly prevalent across the spectrum of social life, from primary education to health care, these managerial, ‘government-at-a-distance’ techniques frequently incorporate the principles of rational calculation and interest maximization in their analyses. The result is a totalizing language that speaks not of difference, contradiction or alternative moralities and subjectivities, but of a single, unquestioned rationality that sets itself up as the enemy of all forms of ‘irrationality’:

Having circumscribed reason to a very stunted version of means and ends, a mixture of micro-economics and what the middle class actually do, neo-liberalism proceeds to banish unreason from its theoretical compass . . . Whereas fifty years ago talk of the repression of motives, of displacement and hidden desire, would have been commonplace, nowadays none of this is allowed to disturb the petty rationalism of neo-liberalism. Today the world is transparent. We can no longer hint at the real motives of transgression or most pertinently the true motives of those who seek to ratchet up systems of control and punishment . . . Not only, then, is rationality made one-dimensional and absolutist, but irrationality is ignored and denied. (Young 2007)

This ‘denial of irrationality’ is much in evidence within the UK criminal justice system, featuring in everything from local fear of crime surveys to institutional and probationary cognitive behavior programmes. A full analysis of this situation is clearly beyond the scope of this article (see Garland 2001; Stenson 2001, for overviews). However, it is important to stress how attempts to inculcate ‘normal’ moral responsibility within offender populations are serving to further de-pathologize and de-moralize the late modern offender.

Previously, RC theorists believed there was only ever a small number of determined, predisposed individuals willing to commit crime as long as sufficient opportunities existed. Today, in contrast, contemporary SCP theorists proceed from the standpoint that ‘we are all criminals now’ – almost as if criminality was a shared or universal social norm. For Garland, this denial of irrationality, this highly managerialist approach to the high ‘crime budgets’ that characterize liberal democracies in the twenty-first century, is a problem in itself: ‘In the recent past, crime was always a sign or a symptom, indicative of social dislocation or personal maladjustment. Now crime is what it is and nothing more. It is a reality – a normal social fact’ (1999: 360).

Likewise, in the realm of public space, it seems that the so-called ‘criminogenic situation’ is also the norm rather than the exception; an inextricable

part of the fabric of everyday life. For example, in such seminal works as Felson's *Crime and Everyday Life* (1998), criminal opportunities arise out of the banal routines and transactions that characterize the everyday round within contemporary urban society. Under this rubric, spatial managerialism is a project of semiotic disambiguation, the aim being to recouple 'space' and 'use' in one unequivocal functionality. As the metric of administrative criminology seeks to return spaces that have lost their function back *within* the ordered planner's fold, it serves to push the offender to the very edges of the criminological viewfinder: abstracted, normalized, disappeared.

As long as crime prevention theorists continue to prioritize RCTs of crime over and above any concern with the multifarious subjective experiences of the offender, their usefulness when it comes to the control of the growing number of so-called expressive crimes – everything from fire-starting¹⁷ to 'happy slapping' – will inevitably be limited. Consider the slow response of situational practitioners to the changing nature of street crime over the last few years (i.e. the shift in crime targets from hard targets – or, to use the correct SCP vernacular, 'target hardened crime opportunities' – to soft targets, namely people). While this could be seen as testimony to the success of SCP measures, it also illustrates the inability of SCP scholars to predict and react expediently to changes in patterns of criminal behaviour – not least because it casts real doubt on the ability of empirically-based administrative criminology to be able to identify, analyze and confront new modes of criminality while they are still current/operative. It might not be going too far to suggest that we could soon have a situation when, long before the research grant has even been approved, the proposed object of criminal activity to be studied has disappeared, or more likely morphed into a slightly different form.

Consider also a more minor strand of critique stemming from the interaction between certain forms of transgressive behaviour and the formalized conception of 'deterrence'. Here the very steps taken to stave off (or accurately 'manage') risk actually serve to produce new risks or exacerbate older ones. What this means in effect is that certain SCP measures actually add to the thrill of crime, as the 'game' takes on an even greater risk. For example, 'joyriders' often view speed cameras as a challenge, while graffiti artists, skateboarders, illegal 'BASE jumpers', train surfers, Parkour 'free runners', street protesters and other urban-adventurer criminals actually admit to being drawn to the very signs erected to deter their activities.

Conclusions

The increased emphasis placed by SCP on normalcy and instrumental rationality is, by definition, blind to the drive to transcend the mundane, the prosaic – the very routines whose ordinariness strangles everyday life. This is not to say that RCT-inspired SCP initiatives are not a very useful and effective tool in the fight against crime – far from it. Indeed, as has been stated at various points in this article, in many social settings and against many forms of everyday crime it frequently represents the most viable and cost-effective form of policy intervention. Rather, the aim of this article has been to stress the need to invigorate existing models within this field, and by

so doing highlight many of the taken-for-granted assumptions that currently underpin the spatio-temporal narratives associated with SCP and related RATs. The simple truth here is that, unless the 'normalness' of crime argument is able to comprehend (indeed, even acknowledge) our contemporary world of risks and extremes, of excess and insecurity, how will administrative criminologists ever be in a position to fully appreciate how certain targets and criminal propensities circulate within society? At least subjectively, how can the myriad crimes of the late modern offender ever be absorbed into normalcy?

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Notes

1. SCP relies heavily on the concept of 'defensible space' (Newman 1972). Originally an architectural development, defensible space drew upon anthropological research concerning 'territorial' theories of human behaviour to suggest that it was possible to design buildings and spaces that could actually prevent vandalism, robbery and even assaults and rapes.
2. See Clarke (1997) for a review of various successful SCP initiatives, including everything from the employment of steering column locks to reduce car thefts, to preventing convenience store robberies through environmental design.
3. Administrative criminology is a British term typically used to describe a mass of crime prevention initiatives undertaken by the Home Office Research and Planning Unit on behalf of Conservative governments during the 1980s and 1990s (e.g. Clarke and Mayhew 1980; Clarke and Cornish 1983; Heal and Laycock 1986).
4. It was at this point that several proponents of SCP began experimenting with a less impoverished version of rationality, such as Clarke's work on 'limited rationality', and the recognition that 'proximal' influences upon decision-making are influenced by 'distal' socio-economic factors (Ekblom 2000; see Ekblom (2007) for a recent attempt to finally embed 'non-materialistic motives such as play, ideology, revenge and challenge' into the equation).
5. Consider the following quote regarding burglary: '[I]t may not be sufficient to divide burglary simply into its residential and commercial forms. It may also be necessary to distinguish between burglaries committed in middle-class suburbs, in public housing, and in wealthy residential enclaves. Empirical studies suggest that the kinds of individual involved in these different forms of residential burglary, their motivations, and their methods all vary considerably' (Cornish and Clarke 1986a: 2).
6. See the related concept of 'opportunity theory' (e.g. Wikström 1991) and other variants of environmental criminology (e.g. Brantingham and Brantingham 1991). While the convergence of 'environmental' and 'administrative' criminology has often been remarked upon (Felson 1998; Vold *et al.* 2002: 196), it should be remembered that both are distinct branches of the discipline.
7. 'Shallow-end crime' is a term usually employed by criminologists to refer to the everyday property and street crimes that blight the lives of urbanites.
8. For some, the term 'expressive crime' is a problematic one. The first thing to state is that, while expressive crimes are often very much about the suspension

- of reality and the creation of a 'limit experience on the metaphorical edge', it does not mean they are not rational in the sense of being 'goal-oriented'. On the contrary, I agree with the likes of Felson (1998: 65) that all crimes are, to a certain extent, means/goal-oriented. However, where I strongly disagree with Felson concerns the notion that criminal acts can be deconstructed and located within a series of bland (blind) typologies. Such a position ignores the complex socio-cultural dynamics and existential dilemmas that are at the root of all crimes, especially expressive violence and other forms of emotionally based criminality.
9. When it comes to crimes of a sexual nature, rational choice theory looks strained indeed. Consider, for example, the way the leading proponent of SCP, Marcus Felson, only discusses rape in relation to population density (Felson 1998: 31) – hardly adequate given that, earlier in *Crime and Everyday Life*, he states that, according to national victim survey statistics, as many as 72 per cent of rape cases go unreported in the USA each year. In using rape as an example, I wish to acknowledge the feminist objection that rape is not simply a 'crime of passion' or an 'expressive crime', but that it can take many forms.
 10. By the same token, one should acknowledge the point that consumer culture itself produces its own banal, repetitive routines, albeit couched within a language of 'choice'.
 11. For a graphic illustration of the role of alcohol in violent urban crime, see Hobbs *et al.* (2000: 706–7).
 12. Jolls *et al.* (1998: 1488): 'If rationality is used to mean simply that people "choose" what they "prefer" in light of the prevailing incentives, then the notion of rationality offers few restrictions on behaviour. The person who drinks castor oil as often as possible is rational because she happens to love castor oil.'
 13. See Campbell's (1989) notion of 'neophilia'.
 14. In an excellent article, Haan and Vos illustrate how motivations such as moral ambiguity, shame and, importantly, impulsivity feature prominently in the thought processes of street robbers. In doing so they build up a sophisticated critique of the heuristic potential of the RCT of offending ('impulsivity not only provides the perpetrator with an excuse but also clarifies what s/he was experiencing before, during and after s/he committed the offence'; 2003: 42).
 15. Consider Miller: 'At present "*homo economicus*" is a powerful tool of ideological legitimization for academic, politician and consumer. But it remains so far from the actual practice of consumption that it is unlikely that many consumers or many economists actually believe this representation, even though they may find it expedient to defend it' (1995: 19).
 16. The word *akratia* originates in Aristotelian ethics – the weak-willed person (Hoch and Lowenstein 1991: 493). Akratic impulse buying is defined as 'unplanned purchases, undertaken with little or no deliberation, accompanied by affectual or mood states, which furthermore are not compelled, and which, finally, are contrary to the buyer's better judgment' (Wood 1998: 299; Mele 1987). In one recent survey of over 4,200 consumers, over 60 per cent of supermarket purchases and an amazing 53 per cent of mass merchandise purchases were 'unplanned' (POP Advertising Institute, cited in Wood 1998: 314).
 17. According to UK Fire Statistics, England and Wales experienced a 135 per cent increase in 'deliberately set fires' between 1989 and 1999.

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