



Crime, edgework and corporeal transaction

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Abstract

This article responds to the call by cultural criminologists for a 'criminology of the skin' that attends to the embodied pleasures and emotions generated by certain forms of criminal behavior. Drawing on the 'edgework' model of voluntary risk taking and a modified version of Jurgen Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action, I theorize risk taking in criminal endeavors as an activity linked to the embodied social practices of the life-world. Conceptualized in this way, illicit risk taking can be seen to play an important role in crystallizing the 'criminal erotics' involved in some types of crime. Standing in opposition to the *disembodied* system imperatives of late capitalism, criminal edgework represents a form of escape and resistance to the prevailing structures of political and economic power.

Key Words

corporeal transaction • cultural criminology • edgework
• embodied practices • subcultures • system/life-world

When Jeff Ferrell and his collaborators introduced the new field of cultural criminology as a 'criminology of the skin' and called for the study of 'criminal pleasures and erotics' (Ferrell and Sanders, 1995), they seemed to suggest that criminological analysis would have to transcend recent prohibitions against studying the body's role in criminal enterprises. After all, skin clearly belongs to the body and most of us feel tingles in our bodies

when contemplating pleasurable and erotic things. However, for many social scientists involved in criminological study, any suggestion that the body should be a prominent concern in analyzing criminal behavior would appear to be a step backwards. Having moved beyond the discredited criminological theories of thinkers like Lombroso-Ferreo (1972) and William Sheldon (Wilson and Herrnstein, 1985, notwithstanding), many would feel that the field can only be hurt by any attempt to 'bring bodies back in' (Frank, 1990) to the study of criminal behavior.

In spite of such concerns, I argue in this article that the dimensions of criminality emphasized by cultural criminology are best understood as fully embodied social practices and assert that these practices emerge as oppositional responses to the disembodied imperatives of late capitalism. A central claim in this analysis is that most aspects of criminal life highlighted by cultural criminology—the pursuit of risk, pleasure, style and empowerment—are ways to 'body forth' in a social context where actors are subjected to regimes of work, consumption and communication that deny the creative possibilities of their bodies.

What has drawn me to this embodied approach to cultural criminology is my effort to better understand the role of risk taking, or the phenomenon I have termed as 'edgework', in the criminal enterprises emphasized by this tradition. Expanding on the focused study of structural and experiential dimensions of voluntary risk-taking activities such as 'extreme sports', high-risk occupations, drug experimentation and the like, I (Lyng, 1993) and others (O'Malley and Mugford, 1994; Ferrell et al., 2001) have suggested that the seductive character of many criminal activities may derive from the particular sensations and emotions generated by the high-risk character of these activities. Moreover, the empirical or theoretical contours of the edgework model of voluntary risk taking (see Lyng, 1990) strongly suggest that these emotions and sensations are produced through a process in which the 'knowings' and skills of the body organize action in the absence of the social mind. Thus, if edgework is a prominent feature of some forms of criminal behavior, then the experience of embodiment, and the corporeal pleasures that come with this experience, can be taken as critical features of these criminal endeavors.

In light of these considerations, I pursue several interrelated goals in this article. First, I review research supporting the claim that many of the pleasures, erotics and aesthetics residing in certain criminal activities are associated with the hyperreality of edgework. Second, I will argue that the transcendent practices involved in negotiating the edge are wholly embodied in nature and acquire their transcendent power in the context of a social and cultural reality that privileges the mind, discursive practices and rationality over the body, the nondiscursive and the nonrational. Third, I seek a more systematic expression of these ideas by weaving together conceptual material relating to edgework and the notion of 'corporeal contingency', situated within a broader theoretical framework recently introduced as the Theory of Corporeal Transaction (Lyng and Franks,

2002). Finally, I draw on the latter framework to identify other embodied practices, in addition to edgework, that figure into the criminal patterns emphasized by cultural criminology.

Edgework and the phenomenology of crime

With the publication of *The Seductions of Crime* in 1988, Jack Katz made an important contribution to the new field of cultural criminology by directing attention to the aesthetic and emotional attractions of the criminal experience. Challenging the existing structural and rational choice approaches to crime, Katz asserts that motivations for criminal behavior lie in the ‘foreground’ of immediate experience, having more to do with the rewards of the crime experience itself than the ‘background factors’ emphasized by traditional criminological theories. Some criminal actions are experienced as almost magical events that involve distinctive ‘sensual dynamics’. These criminal pursuits often take on a transcendent appeal, offering the criminal an opportunity for a passionate, intensely authentic experience.

Although Katz’s perspective seemed to represent a radical break with existing social scientific thinking about the motivational forces involved in crime, his work actually builds on an earlier tradition of criminological theory and field research. Few of the researchers belonging to this tradition established formal connections to phenomenology, but their work does focus attention on the motivational significance of the criminal experience—the ‘foreground factors’ emphasized by Katz. David Matza’s classic study *Becoming Deviant* (1969), for example, highlights the boundary condition that actors confront in illicit situations—the ‘invitation edge’ that separates the ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ of a deviant activity (1969: 147). Similarly, John Lofland argued in his 1969 classic *Deviance and Identity*, that playing with the invitational edge of deviance often carries a ‘positive sense of adventure, of excitement and of enchantment’ (1969: 104). Anticipating later insights about the alluring quality of ‘edgework sensations’ (Lyng, 1990), Lofland asserted that deviant acts characterized by ‘[u]ncertainty, unpredictability, threat, fear, frustration, anxiety and the like—felt to contain little possibility of overwhelming the organism—appear to be labeled by human beings as excitement, challenge, fun or adventure’ (1969: 105). These themes are also emphasized in the classic field research of Albert Cohen (1955) and Paul Willis (1977) on delinquency among working class males, which provides empirical support for the connections between deviance and edgework established by theorists like Matza and Lofland.

Katz offers perhaps the most encompassing analysis of the sensual, moral and emotional dimensions of crime, although I would agree with O’Malley and Mugford (1994: 194) and Milovanovic (forthcoming) that his phenomenology of crime and the edgework model represent ‘two closely

related accounts of transcendental experiences' that can be located along a common continuum. As O'Malley and Mugford further note,

The parallels between Katz and Lyng may be stronger than their differences, raising a pertinent question about Katz's work: namely, to what extent is his a theory of crime *as* crime? We suggest . . . that his work is read best as a general account of the attractions of exciting and transcending activity, focused down to explain particular types of crime. That is, the transcendent characteristics of the acts are more crucial than their criminality . . .

(1994: 195, emphasis in original)

Having connected the sensual pleasures and aesthetic arousal of crime with the edgework experience, I now turn to the problem of embodiment in social action. The task here is to explore how edgework activities in general, and criminal edgework in particular, acquire their transcendent qualities as distinctively embodied practices, which is an important step in exploring the possibilities for a criminology of the skin.

Edgework as embodied practice

To acquire a greater sensitivity to the embodied nature of edgework practices, we can return to the original edgework model formulated over a decade ago (Lyng, 1990). Although the problem of embodiment was not a central theme in the original analysis, it was certainly an implicit dimension of this initial effort to conceptualize edgework in sociological terms. A key part of this conceptualization is the application of G.H. Mead's 'I/me' dialectic (which is a component of the broader Marx/Mead synthetic framework guiding the analysis) to the experience of negotiating the edge. The defining sensations of the edgework experience can be traced to the way in which the immediate demands of the life-and-death circumstances faced by risk takers disrupt the process of 'imaginative rehearsal' and the social self (the 'me') sustained by this process. In situations of extreme danger, actors are forced to deal with the immediacy of the moment by responding 'instinctively' to the evolving circumstances. It is simply not possible to formulate, via the social mind, an effective response to a challenge that threatens to instantly overwhelm the actor. Consequently, under the completely novel conditions of true edgework, imaginative rehearsal ceases, the 'voice of society' is silenced and the 'me' is annihilated. What is left in place of these elements is a residual, 'acting' self that responds without reflective consciousness.¹ Thus, risk takers describe their experience at the edge as self-actualizing or self-determining, authentically real and creatively satisfying.

The primary focus of the original analysis was on the experiential consequences of 'closing down the social' in the action of individuals who occupy an institutional environment characterized by social overdetermination. Little attention was devoted to describing the nature of the residual self that is left in the wake of this transformation. However, this

approach implies that conditions leading to the diminution of the social mind also contribute to the emergence of a more fully embodied form of action. When the process of imaginative rehearsal shuts down, the ensuing action is influenced more directly by the inherent wisdom and capacities of the body. Although all action is embodied, it *is* possible to distinguish between action predominantly directed by the intentions of the ‘me’ and action that is unintended, spontaneous and unpredictable. Mead was inclined to think of the latter as the overt phase of the act designated by his concept of the ‘I’ (in contrast to the covert ‘me’). But we should recognize that the defining characteristics of Mead’s ‘I’ also describe the actions of contingent bodies that often resist the intentions of the social self in quite unexpected ways.

Thus, factors such as the ineffability of the experience, alterations in the perception of time and space and feelings of mental control over environmental objects (Lyng, 1990: 881–2) can be explained in terms of edgework’s capacity to annihilate the culturally based ‘consentient set’ with which we construct time and space distinctions.² While this is an important aspect of edgework sensations, it is also important to understand how these sensations relate to a central feature of the culturally unmediated body—its status as a domain of *indeterminacy*. As a part of nature, the body reveals the objective uncertainty that distinguishes the natural world in general.³ Moreover, the order and predictability of the emergent universe is also partly a product of the very social and cultural processes disrupted in the edgework experience. In the presence of the social self, we ‘terminate indeterminacy’ in accordance with the consentient set of our culture; but in its absence, the unmediated, free body is capable of rendering entirely new terminations. Consequently, edgeworkers are able to ‘body forth’ to an alternative reality in which objects and events assume new forms and qualities or, just as likely, the very categories of ‘objects’ and ‘events’ (space and time) are completely dissolved as dualistic opposites.

While it is possible to make a strong case for edgework as a fully embodied practice, the full significance of this insight cannot be appreciated without the aid of a general sociological perspective that places human bodies at the center of discourse about contemporary social life. Consequently, we must also explore how this fully embodied practice and its corporeally based capacities, sensations and emotions are related to the structural forces that shape bodies and their actions in late capitalist societies. This is the task to which I now turn.

The social context of embodied edgework practices

Although the initial edgework study employed a conceptualization of ‘institutional constraints’ deriving from the Marx–Mead synthesis, subsequent work has moved beyond the structural conditions of alienation, reification, individualism and oversocialization to consider other structural

imperatives implicated in edgework practices.⁴ Considering the complexity and dynamic nature of contemporary western societies, many interpretations are possible. At the risk of further complicating matters, I will propose yet another model of social organization in the late modern period, one that accords with the earlier analysis of edgework as an embodied practice. However, I hope to demonstrate that this model may actually simplify the debate about how to contextualize edgework, by providing a general framework for integrating the insights from a number of competing perspectives.

Transaction and the body

My exploration of the relationship between the body, mind and society begins with the pragmatist concept of 'transaction' (Dewey and Bentley, 1949; see also Emirbayer, 1997; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Understood as the actualization of intentions to alter a world that responds indifferently to these acts, transaction is a crucial concept for exploring the ontological status of embodied consciousness. As Mead argued, 'the body becomes most conscious of itself when it encounters *resistance* . . . which is to say, when it is in use, acting' (Frank, 1995: 51, emphasis added). The body's capacity for the manipulation of objects to achieve specific ends is the foundation of the doubled-edged process by which environmental objects are constituted and sensitivities and capacities of the organism are developed.

The importance of the concept of transaction to a sociological conception of the body is reflected in Arthur Frank's (1995) recent effort to construct a typology of body styles. The typology is constructed from the 'four questions which the body must ask itself as it undertakes action in relationship to some object' (1995: 51). These questions define the four continua that serve as the parameters of the typology. The questions are: (1) Will the body's performance be predictable or unpredictable? (the problem of *control*); (2) Is the body lacking or producing? (the problem of *desire*); (3) Is the body monadic/closed or dyadic/open to others? (the problem of its *relations to others*); (4) Is the body's consciousness associated or disassociated with its own corporeality? (the problem of its *self-relatedness*). The polar extremes of these continua can be combined to form a matrix of four cells designating styles of body usage (1995: 51–4). The body styles included are the disciplined body, the mirroring body, the dominating body and the communicative body.

Although Frank's typology is a useful starting point for a transactional conception of the body, I have proposed to root it more firmly in the pragmatist ontology (see Lyng and Franks, 2002). The over-riding experience of the body is captured by the dialectic between the subjective and objective aspects of the body—the sense that we have of both *being* a body and *having* a body simultaneously. Indeed, these two dimensions cannot be separated in actual experience because it is in the action of the body as

subjective agent that we discover its ego-alien unpredictability. The latter experience—the sense of the body’s objective contingency or indeterminate reality—forms the key problem for the embodied actor.

The concept of transaction assumes key significance in relation to this problem. Transaction is the principal means by which human actors ‘terminate indeterminacy’ by bringing out some of the potentialities of the body and ‘render[ing] obscure its other possible determinations’ (Shalin, 1992: 258). Because we cannot act without our bodies, we are forced to confront in every action the reality of the body’s objective uncertainty. As an aspect of indeterminate reality, our bodies do not perform just as we want them to. Hence, the body’s corporeal contingency is the focus of ongoing efforts to terminate it through transactions with other elements of the environment.

Starting with the body’s inherent indeterminacy, it is possible to consider Frank’s styles of body usage in a different light. Each of the body styles—the disciplined, mirroring, dominating and communicating forms—can now be conceptualized as specific strategies for terminating corporeal indeterminacy. And while all four body styles are linked by this common problem, they are distinguished by the kind of transactions that are used to deal with corporeal contingency. Thus, for the disciplined body, *production* is the medium of transaction; for the mirroring body, *consumption* is its medium; and for both the dominating and communicating bodies, *social interaction* is the common medium.

Transposing Frank’s body typology in this way yields basic parameters for analyzing the body at both the social system and action levels. It is now possible to conceive of connections between these two levels in terms of embodied transactions focused on production, consumption and social interaction. These three activities can be addressed at both levels—through individuals coming to terms with the indeterminacy of their own bodies (an action problem) and through organized collectivities seeking to ensure the survival of their members (a system problem). However, in order to fully explore corporeal transactions at both of these levels, it is necessary to broaden the conceptual apparatus by taking advantage of existing models for linking the ‘action’ and ‘system’ perspectives. The model I will employ for this purpose is a modified version of Jurgen Habermas’s (1984, 1987) theoretical system, an approach I have designated as the Theory of Corporeal Transaction (Lyng and Franks, 2002).

Life-world and system: embodied and disembodied transactions

Space limitations preclude a detailed description of the Theory of Corporeal Transaction (TCT) here, so I will discuss only those elements of the framework directly relevant to the present focus on edgework and cultural

criminology. The crucial concepts for dealing with these problems are captured by Habermas's distinction between the 'life-world' and 'system'. Although Habermas employs these concepts as key conceptual devices for synthesizing a broad range of social theories, including phenomenology, pragmatism, semiotics and various versions of systems theory, the impressive synthesis accomplished by his Theory of Communicative Action (TCA) is deeply rooted in a rationalist ontology that some pragmatists and postmodernists find troubling. For example, Shalin (1992), Halton (1995) and a number of other pragmatist critics of Habermas (Antonio and Kellner, 1992; Joas, 1992; Sciulli, 1992) question the rationalist foundations of TCA by pointing to the importance of 'noncognitive forms of intelligence irreducible to verbal intellect' left out of the theory (Shalin, 1992: 254). By privileging consciousness and discursive practices, Habermas operates with a conception of reason that 'has no obvious relation to the human body and noncognitive processes (emotions, feelings, sentiments)' (Shalin, 1992: 254).

Of particular concern to pragmatists is Habermas's approach to the life-world concept. As Eugene Halton notes, 'Habermas has conceived the life-world as a passive reservoir of knowledge with no capacities for reasonable activity . . . biology plays no part in his conception, he conceives life solely from the rationalist's viewpoint as "tacit knowledge"' (1995: 204). By shifting the focus from knowledge to *experience* as the foundation of the life-world, a more encompassing concept can be constructed, one that now incorporates not only tacit knowledge but also 'habits of belief providing common sense prejudices, wisdom, traditions, and crafts' (Halton, 1995: 205). While Habermas sees the life-world as storing the *interpretive* work of preceding generations, Halton views it as 'the incorporation of prior experience in human traditions and practices' (1995: 205).

A crucial implication of the pragmatist response to Habermas is that we must make room in the life-world concept for the transacting bodies and the emergent products of these transactions. By substituting the notion of 'corporeal transaction' for Habermas's 'communicative action' in the action-theoretical framework, life-world analysis can be expanded beyond the exclusive focus on symbolic interaction to consider other bodily transactions involved in production, consumption and social interaction. The transactional approach puts *embodied* actors at the center of the life-world by allowing us to see the body as both acting subject and resisting object—serving, in this way, as the wellspring of the conflicting forms that constitute the life-world.

Thus, in the transactional perspective, the life-world refers to human actors striving to come to terms with the inherent contingencies of their bodies through creative acts of embodied production, consumption and interaction. The life-world analytical focus serves to highlight the part that these corporeal transactions play in allowing people to deal with the contingent nature of their bodies. This is *not* to deny the importance of that

other key human problem—the need to ensure collective survival. However, the latter is properly thought of as a problem of the system, which stands in some historically specific relationship with the life-world of transacting bodies.

The increasing rationalization of social life eventually leads to the uncoupling of the system and life-world (Habermas, 1987: 153–5). Within the system context, production, consumption and interaction processes are shaped by purposive-rational calculation and become largely *disembodied* in character, which means that these processes are no longer organized for the specific purpose of terminating corporeal contingency. The disciplined, mirroring and dominating bodies emerge in this context through system colonization of the life-world. Under the rationalization imperative of the system, manifested concretely as the promotion of rational efficiency, conspicuous consumption and ideological domination, corporeal contingency is terminated in the form of work regimens, consumer products and belief systems that deeply inscribe bodies and minds. Thus, one's location in the system's division of labor is revealed in the corporeal consequences of specialized occupational practices—the calloused hands and hard muscles of factory workers versus the delicate fingers and large posteriors of office employees. Under the system's consumption imperative, the body is mirrored in consumer objects with corporeal contingency being extinguished in terms of the superficial manufactured identities defined by the sellers of these goods—one becomes a 'cowboy', 'biker', 'yuppie', 'punk' or 'soccer mom', by merely wearing the appropriate clothing or acquiring the necessary accessories. In the realm of interaction, the system's totalizing discourses inscribe dominating bodies who seek to impose their own subjectivity on the other—making the other submit to their truth systems—as a way of extinguishing the contingency of the other.

Although the life-world is deeply penetrated by the system's disembodied imperatives, the body does not lose its capacity for resisting the corporeal inscriptions of the colonizing forms of body usage. As Habermas notes, the penetration of the life-world by the system 'cannot be carried through without remainder' and thus, the life-world is 'never completely husked away' (1987: 311). Thus, even in the context of consumer capitalism, the life-world continues to afford social actors opportunities for terminating corporeal contingency through alternative forms of embodied production, consumption and interaction found in leisure-time pursuits and certain marginal enterprises.⁵ One manages the indeterminacy of the body in these activities by becoming holistically engaged with significant objects of production and consumption or in embodied communication with others. Embodied transactions with material objects and other human actors are crucial for elaborating creative meaning structures and unexpressed human capacities and sentiments—'*extrarational* sources of intelligence built into and grown out of the human body' (Halton, 1995: 195)—that yield new terminations of corporeal contingency.

The problem of embodiment in criminal action

Having described the nature of embodied and disembodied production, consumption and interaction and the corporeal processes involved in the system colonization of the life-world, I will now orient the patterns of criminality discussed earlier to this theoretical scheme. The task at this point is to demonstrate how many of the themes emphasized by cultural criminology—the role in criminal enterprises of culture and style, pleasure and sensuality, chaos and control—are connected to the social relations of embodiment. I will argue that criminality emerges within the context of system and life-world transactions and involves the intertwining of the various body styles that arise within this context. All of the body styles produced by the system inscription of life-world bodies—the disciplined, mirroring and dominating bodies—are implicated in these patterns of criminal conduct. The common dynamic in these criminal edgework projects is the co-optation of each of these body styles for the purpose of generating alternative or transcendent realities.

Thus, the capacities of disciplined body are critically important to conducting both criminal and noncriminal edgework, as reflected in the significant attention devoted to preparation and planning by edgeworkers of all stripes, from skydivers to street thugs. This is clearly evident in the field data on various edgework groups. As noted elsewhere (Lyng, 1990), edgeworkers tend to attribute their success in negotiating the edge to an innate 'survival skill'. This skill relates, in part, to some empirically demonstrable capacities associated with 'mental toughness', such as being able to focus one's attention, control fear, avoid 'brainlock' (Lyng, 1990: 859), but, at its core, it involves the capacity for corporeal control that characterizes the disciplined body. However, all of these disciplinary actions are undertaken in order to reach the hyperreality found at the edge.

In looking at criminal edgework, we find a clear analogue to the survival skill in Katz's notion of the robber's 'hardheadedness'. The criminal 'hardman' responds to the anarchic situations he creates 'by imposing a disciplined control through the force of their personality' (Katz, 1988: 225). Looked at from the present perspective, it would be more accurate to say that hardmen impose a disciplined control through the force of their *bodies*. They do so by co-opting the disciplined body and putting it to work in transcending the system's disembodied imperatives through criminal ventures: the disciplined body is recruited for a criminal project to explore fully embodied acts of interpersonal anarchy—and the new terminations of indeterminacy that arise in this project. Ironically, once the hardman succeeds in taking the situation close to the edge, the disciplined body dissolves into a 'becoming-body' that is unpredictable and beyond the control of the ego. In accepting the inevitable inversion of the disciplined body into a becoming body that cannot *control* chaos but rather is *transfigured* by chaos, these edgeworkers achieve transcendence.

If the disciplined body figures into almost all edgework activities, both criminal and noncriminal, the body style most likely to be intertwined with the disciplined body in violent street crime is the dominating body. As noted earlier, the dominating body is inscribed by system communication imperatives that lead to the subjective denial of objective uncertainty. This accounts for the dominating body's overwhelming resistance to all forms of intersubjective understanding. Unidirectional transactions are the hallmark of this body style: others are *used* by the dominating body/selves for their purposes but the contingencies they confront in other bodies cannot induce them to change. The dominating body succeeds by communicating that there are no limits on how far he will go to achieve his ends—he 'celebrates a commitment to violence beyond any reason comprehensible to others' (Katz, 1988: 100). He forces *others* to reason when he makes it clear that *he* will not perform those calculations. He is always prepared to go crazy if the situation calls for it. Paradoxically, the very thing that dominating bodies fear the most—their own contingency—is what they seek in others and what they tap within themselves to control and dominate contingent others. The ultimate consequence of the transactions between dominating bodies and the bodies they victimize is a cascade of chaos.

Thus, the dominating body is actually *attracted* to the contingency of the other because terminating other-contingency is the means by which it extinguishes its own indeterminacy. Katz's hardmen look for victims and situations that are unpredictable because coming to terms with these chaotic circumstances enhances the opportunity to transform their own inner contingency into a transcendent reality. And what is the nature of this transcendent reality? In discussing transcendence, Katz makes an explicit connection between the alternative reality and the problem of contingency:

In his everyday doings, the hardman transcends the difference between how he and others experience everyday situations by insisting that his subjectivity remains firm as he moves into and out of others' worlds. . . . Seen in the form of snapshots taken from the outside, the hardman seems to be a collection of impulsive outpourings of hostile feelings—anger, aggressive instincts, and sadistic inclinations. But after a series of frustrated robberies, lost fights, betrayals by intimates, arrests, and prison sentences, one always has a multitude of reasons for *not* responding from the guts. Just because they are done against the background of reasonable grounds for deterrence, the hardman's aggressive moves carry, in their sensual vibrance—in the heavy awe and felt charge they bring to scenes—the ringing significance of their transcendent project.

(1988: 233–5)

The transcendent reality created by the dominating body consists of an extreme subjectivity that is maintained by drawing on the body's contingent power to create havoc. And now we see an additional paradox in

this process: the transcendent reality to which violent criminals are drawn arises out of the same corporeal uncertainty that the dominating body wants to terminate within itself—which it achieves by annihilating the contingent threat of the other.

Thus, in criminal actions where control is achieved less from the exercise of discipline than the dominating body's capacity for chaos, the essential dynamic involved in moving to the invitational edge is the same. Like the disciplined body in edgework projects, the dominating body is dissolved—consumed by its own capacity for chaos and transformed into a becoming body. The great tragedy of this type of criminal edgework is that the perpetrator's transcendence is often achieved at the expense of his or her victim. The transformation of the criminal's body is accompanied by what is often a permanent transfiguration of the victim's body as well.

Finally, in moving beyond the edgework dimensions of street crime, we find the third colonized body, the mirroring body, also involved in certain criminal enterprises and potentially entangled with the disciplined and dominating bodies. And just as the disciplined and dominating bodies are co-opted and dissolved in criminal edgework, the mirroring body is also used for a subversive agenda that ultimately contributes to its own dissolution. In this process, commercial fashion is appropriated by marginal groups and transformed into subcultural style.

While the mirroring body is only superficially connected to the objects it consumes, even as identity is constructed in terms of acquired consumer goods, objects available for conspicuous consumption can always become the focus of the intensive and creative exploitation by groups seeking a more embodied form of consumption. As Ferrell notes,

[g]ang members, graffiti writers, and others invent their own styles less than they literally and figuratively buy into various sectors of mass, commodified fashion markets, and then homologously rework and reinvent the stylistic fragments that they pry loose for their own purposes.

(1995: 177–8)

The process of appropriating consumer objects for uses other than their intended purposes transforms them from throwaway goods into objects of style. Consistent with the nature of embodied consumption described earlier, these stylistic objects do not merely reflect commercially significant identity categories. They serve aesthetic purposes and therefore indicate new possibilities for the termination of corporeal indeterminacy.

Thus, the aesthetics of style create new possibilities for resistance to the disembodied imperatives of the system. In making the transition from fashion and conspicuous consumption to style and aesthetics, the mirroring body is superseded by a becoming body that discovers new terminations of corporeal contingency in its complex appropriations of consumer objects. Undertaken as a collective project, these appropriated elements of style literally carve out a culture within a culture—a subcultural reality that

stands apart from and is opposed to the system. Moreover, subcultural style serves as a dissenting force in a way that parallels the critical function of high art in the Marcusean perspective: 'The transcendence of immediate reality shatters the reified objectivity of established social relations and opens a new dimension of experience: rebirth of the rebellious subjectivity' (Marcuse, 1978: 7).

The ontology of style undertaken here only lends further support to insights by cultural criminologists who have argued that 'style matters' (Ferrell, 1995). If style emerges out of the process of mirroring bodies dissolving into becoming bodies and gaining new capacities for transcendence and resistance, then it is easy to understand why style would assume such great importance to youth and criminal subcultures. Although subcultural style may serve as a focal point for individual and collective identity, its significance extends well beyond issues of identity. As Ferrell points out in his study of hip-hop graffiti writers, it is often the case that the stylistic expression *is* the crime (a 'crime of style'): 'Graffiti "writers" organize their painting around personal and collective style, gain status and visibility from both stylistic conventions and innovations, and in so doing develop a stylish resistance to corporate culture and political power' (1995: 172). Moreover, legal and political authorities engage in elaborate campaigns to criminalize those involved in stylistic expression (not only in graffiti writing but even in personal adornment and comportment) because they also understand (sometimes only implicitly) the resistance strategy embodied in such styles. These acts of stylistic resistance can be starting points for a complex series of interactions between insubordinate groups and social control and media agents, ultimately leading to imputations of criminality and the construction of actual criminal careers that often follow in the wake of such imputations.

Conclusion

In discussing the co-optation and transformation of the disciplined, dominating and mirroring bodies in various projects undertaken by criminal actors and groups, I have attempted to move decisively and systematically in the direction of an embodied criminology of the skin. The goal of this analysis has been to demonstrate the embodied character of criminal action and to reveal how many of the patterns emphasized by cultural criminologists reflect the dynamics of criminal corporeality. An important implication of this analysis is that these patterns of criminality can be understood as rebellious responses to system colonization of the life-world, where system and life-world refer to particular configurations of corporeal transaction rather than communicative action. Life-world bodies are imprinted

by system imperatives of disembodiment but actors do not always remain passive in the face of such colonization. They are capable of ingeniously co-opting colonized bodies for projects that lead to the eventual dissolution of these body styles in a transcendent reality rooted in the unrealized potentials of the becoming body. Some of these corporeal transformations have relatively benign consequences, as in the case of the transcendent experiences achieved through leisure edgework and subcultural style. And some of them have highly destructive effects, as when dominating bodies are co-opted for acts of violent criminal edgework. In either case, it is important to understand the ontological connections between these patterns and the broader structures of disembodiment that characterize the bureaucratic-capitalist system.

Although I examined each colonized body separately in discussing the role that each can play in criminal enterprises, I want to emphasize that the disciplined, dominating and mirroring bodies are often intertwined in any particular criminal actor or group. The body typology employed here is merely a heuristic guide, which means that 'empirical bodies' are often a mixture of several types (Frank, 1995: 53). Thus, while stickup men may operate predominantly as dominating bodies, co-opting this body style to pursue criminal edgework, they may organize their criminal enterprises around other body styles as well. Street robbers who engage in meticulous planning and preparation for the potentially chaotic circumstances of a stickup or who invest their criminal projects with a high degree of stylishness and 'class' may also co-opt the disciplined and mirroring bodies in their campaigns of transcendence. Once again, the over-riding concern of all who resist system colonization is to appropriate and exploit whatever institutional forms are available in order to reach the 'place of definitions' at the edge (Thompson, 1966: 345).

Is cultural criminology also a criminology of embodied practices? I hope I have demonstrated that it is. Certainly, this analysis lends support to Ferrell and Sanders's claim that 'if we take the body and its pleasures to be a locus of political meaning, a site of both political repression and liberation, we can see that criminal pleasures also incorporate forms of political resistance and escape' (1995: 314).

Notes

1. Although this residual self is not equivalent to Mead's notion of the 'I', since the 'I' cannot exist apart from a fully developed 'me' in Mead's dialectical formulation, it does signify many of the experiential patterns typically associated with the spontaneous 'I'.
2. See Mead (1964, 'Time': 341).

3. The early pragmatists were particularly sensitive to this aspect of nature in general and the elements of nature in human life. Dewey states,

[a]ny view which holds that man is a part of nature, not outside it, will certainly hold that indeterminacy in human experience . . . is evidence of some corresponding indeterminateness in the process of nature within which man exists (acts) and out of which he arose.

(1946: 351)

4. For a review of the various perspectives on the structural dimensions of edgework, see Lyng (forthcoming).
5. See Lyng and Franks (2002) for a detailed description of various expressions of embodied production, consumption and interaction within life-world institutions.

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