

# CULTURAL CRIMINOLOGY

By Ferrell, J., Hayward, K. and Young, J.  
Sage, 2008

Reviewed by Dr. Matt Long, Nottingham Trent University.

Compared to a decade or so ago, 'cultural criminology' is now being taught and researched widely across higher education criminology departments in the UK. Ferrell, Hayward and Young's book is a huge success in meeting the need for a concise but comprehensive textbook in this exciting new area of criminology. In particular, those who enjoyed the edited volume which constituted Ferrell et al's (2004) *Cultural Criminology Unleashed* will almost certainly approve of this book.

*Chapter One* invites the reader into the discipline of cultural criminology by introducing some of the key concepts that are central to the tradition. According to Ferrell et al. (2008: 2), cultural criminology aims firstly: "...to understand crime as an expressive human activity" and secondly, "...to critique the perceived wisdom surrounding the contemporary politics of crime and criminal justice". This chapter highlights the unhealthy binary distinction between 'structure' and 'agency,' which has traditionally pervaded social scientific and criminological discourses, arguing that cultural criminology can provide a refreshing alternative.

*Chapter Two* provides an excellent historical account of the development of 'deviancy theory' along with subcultural, labelling and moral panic traditions that have informed the discipline of criminology post World War 2. Here, the evaluation of how so called 'critical' criminologies have developed especially in Britain and the USA is great reading for any developing undergraduate who may desire contextualisation of some of key concepts that their tutors might well be encouraging them to accept as part of the discourse of criminology. One is able to see how we have arrived at cultural criminology and where the roots of the contemporary tradition of work of people like Keith Hayward and Jock Young have originated.

*Chapter Three* provides a discussion of what it means to live in a so-called 'late modern' world and reflects back on Jock Young's (1999) classic *The Exclusive Society* in terms of the notions of 'inclusion', 'exclusion' and 'social bulimia'. It dismisses much of conventional criminology as being characterised by the unhelpful binary of positivism on the one hand and rational choice theory on the other and argues that 'emotionality' and 'expression' have a central place in criminality.

*Chapter Four* is somewhat unusual in that a short vignette is presented so that the reader can see how the routine and boredom of everyday life can be made sense of and understood through the lens of cultural criminology. There are a number of excellent photographs here, which really bring the themes expressed in the vignette to life.

*Chapter Five* focuses wonderfully on the relationship of the media to crime, exploring the postmodern potential for ‘crime’ to be turned into entertainment and commodified, rendering claims that criminality is fundamentally about ‘resistance’ laughable.

Playing my own undergraduate students a clip from the movie *Jackass*<sup>1</sup> I have sought to bring alive the themes of this chapter myself. To what extent, for example is the theft of a golf buggy ‘real’ – did it really happen in the film or was it scripted or staged for effect with the owners of the golf course? When watching clips of the numerous characters referred to as ‘stupid burglars’ or ‘stupid vandals’ on You Tube, one again asks to what extent is what is being viewed ‘real’ or ‘simulation’. And in the end who really cares as long as we are being titillated and entertained? Reality and the ‘hyper-real’ become one and the same and attempts to distinguish between the two are rendered pointless. (See Baudrillard, 1983).

*Chapter Six* amusingly takes a sideswipe at some of the methodological practices of conventional criminology, particularly those underpinned by positivist epistemologies. It is scathing in its attack on Institutional Review Boards or ethics committees as they are more commonly known in this country arguing that the way in which they bureaucratise the research process leaves criminology as an emasculated if not impotent intellectual discipline. As well as destructing the old, the chapter is constructive in the offering of new methodological practices such as ‘instant’, ‘liquid’ and ‘visual’ ethnographies.

The final chapter, *Chapter Seven*, – perhaps rather optimistically - offers to pave the way for a criminology of the twenty-first century by means of a 6 point manifesto that is intended to encourage the reader to reach beyond the comfortable confines of orthodox criminology.

This resource provides an excellent textbook for those teaching cultural criminology as a module. Its use of vignettes, photographs and the novel way of highlighting films of interest at the end of each chapter provide a resource useful for teachers and students alike. One is left with a sense of optimism and an enthusiastic taste in the mouth. This book is a pleasure to read in no small way due to the humour of Ferrell, Hayward and Young in (a) pointing out the absurdities of the discipline and (b) suggesting a refreshing alternative. Highly recommended reading.

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<sup>1</sup> Jackass the movie. 2002. Presented by paramount pictures and mtv films.

## References

Baudrillard, J. (1983) *Simulations*. New York. Semiotext(e).

Ferrell et al. (2004) *Cultural Criminology Unleashed*. London. GlassHouse.

Young, J. (1999) *The Exclusive Society*. London. Sage