CULTURAL CRIMINOLOGY
GOING DUTCH

On culture, methodology and research agendas

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Abstract

This chapter charts the development of cultural criminology in the Netherlands. It starts by contextualizing the emergence of Dutch cultural criminology against the backdrop of the ‘neo-positivist turn’ and the rise of ‘control talk’ that took place in the Netherlands during the mid-1980s. It then continues by pointing out some of the key differences between British and Dutch cultural criminology. In particular, it charts how the cultural perspective in twenty-first century Dutch criminology emerged out of a very particular set of disciplinary influences, including a rich tradition in ethnic and migration studies that holds a more anthropologically informed notion of culture. Finally, attention turns to methodology. Stressing the importance of empirical, comparative, and interestingly certain quantitative approaches, the authors propose a new research agenda that seeks to shift the future focus of (Dutch) cultural criminology away from studies of transgressive behavior towards more critical and political themes.

Introduction and context

Over the last decade, cultural criminology has become an important strand in Dutch criminology. In some ways, the Dutch take on cultural criminology differs from what we are used to in the English-speaking world. In order to understand the ‘how’s and ‘why’s of such differences, some specific developments in Dutch politics and academia, which took place around the turn of this century, must be taken into account.

It can hardly be denied that the traditional image (and self-image) of the Netherlands as a tolerant country has undergone a major transformation since the
early 1990s. This is not only evidenced by the shift from a relatively lenient penal system towards more punitive policies (Downes and van Swaaningen 2007), but also by a change in popular attitudes towards the multicultural society. The emerging *communis opinio* was that ethnic minorities from non-Western countries were insufficiently integrated into Dutch society, that the multicultural society was a failure, that ‘Islamic culture’ in particular was incompatible with a liberal constitutional state such as the Netherlands and that the number of immigrants from ‘those countries’ should be significantly reduced (Buruma 2007). The populist politician Pim Fortuyn may not have been the first to articulate such ideas, but he was certainly the one who made them more widely accepted in political circles. After his murder in 2002 and, two years later, the murder of film director Theo van Gogh, the ‘indigenous, ordinary and hardworking Dutchman’ was co-opted by many traditionally centrist parties as the new political motif. Meanwhile, discussions about Dutch culture and identity versus the ‘primitive’ pre-Enlightenment thinking of non-Western cultures began to dominate the political arena (van Swaaningen 2005a). The fact that this culture debate was being conducted in rather simplistic and essentialist terms, and the increasing tendency to associate criminality with non-Western migrant groups, prompted academics working on issues of security and migration to make their voices heard in the public debate on culture and criminality.

Another important development took place within criminology itself. The history of Dutch criminology as an independent academic discipline goes back to the end of the nineteenth century. Starting with Willem Bonger, who held the first actual chair in criminology in 1922, Dutch criminologists have always had a predominantly progressive reputation and this generally remained the case until the 1980s. After academic criminologists were disproportionally hard-hit by university cutbacks affecting the legal departments in which they were typically housed, and previously common symbolic interactionist and critical perspectives in criminology were, in alignment with the turning of the political tide and the normalization of neoliberal takeovers, dismissed as ‘old hat ideology’, Dutch criminology found itself decimated. When it scrambled back to its feet in the 1990s, its first task was to shake off its past reputation and rebrand itself as a ‘serious’ – read: positivist or applied – discipline (van Swaaningen 2005b). We can only conclude that, with the vital support of the Ministry of Justice, this objective has been achieved all too well. Around 2000, Dutch universities saw an opportunity to expand their criminology departments again. New, large-scale criminology curricula were set up, new staff were hired and the number of young PhD students steadily increased. This expansion also allowed Dutch criminology to once again broaden its perspective.

Since 2003, qualitatively trained criminologists, who had not yet got their fair share of the cake under the positivistic dominance, have met regularly to discuss cultural criminological issues and organize conferences.1 With the introduction of a Dutch-language journal on culture and crime in 2011 (*Tijdschrift over Cultuur & Criminaliteit*) and the establishment of a cultural criminology division within the Netherlands’ Society of Criminology (NVC) in 2013, the cultural perspective has today become a fixture in the Dutch criminological landscape.2
In this chapter we provide an overview of cultural criminology in the Netherlands in a bid to show how ‘the Dutch interpretation’ (Hayward 2016) differs in subtle but important ways from the mode of cultural criminology practiced in the UK. The chapter then goes on to offer a series of theoretical and methodological reflections on cultural criminology that we hope will help shape the future research agendas of cultural criminologists both in the Netherlands and elsewhere.

A comparison with British cultural criminology

Although the number of qualitatively trained social scientists and cultural anthropologists working in criminology in the Netherlands has risen sharply since 2000, it remains the case that the majority of research funding is still dominated by research programmes associated with developmental and life course criminology and the rational choice tradition. This emphasis on so-called ‘policy-relevant research’ has inevitably narrowed the focus of Dutch criminology, and ensured that other more general criminological subjects have often been overlooked (Engbersen 2008). Criminologists with a background in qualitative research and critical theory felt that a change was needed. In the 1960s, dissatisfaction among many young criminologists with the scientific and ‘administrative’ nature of Dutch criminology that all too often acted as a handmaiden of the state, led to the rise of a vibrant critical criminology. A similar dissatisfaction resulted in the emergence of cultural criminology in the early 2000s.

The control perspective has dominated Dutch criminology for so long that today it can seem difficult to think along different lines. One of the consequences of this situation is that, all-too-often, when it comes to control or security issues, background context (political, cultural, or otherwise) is often overlooked in favour of more immediate, practical considerations. One might even go so far as to state that much contemporary Dutch ‘administrative criminology’ resembles a form of ‘embedded criminology’. In other words, just as many journalists can now only report from war zones in a narrow, one-sided fashion because they are supervised and protected by the military, certain criminologists today seem happy to labour under the ‘State flag’ with the approval of the police and the criminal justice system. Although similar trends can be observed in the English-speaking world, it seems to us that the focus of British criminology in particular is not as narrow as that of its Dutch counterpart, partly as a result of the critical tradition being more strongly institutionalized in the United Kingdom.

Just like in the United Kingdom, theorists of the Birmingham Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies such as Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson are often mentioned in the Netherlands as predecessors of cultural criminology, but it should be noted that the Marxist tradition in criminology has never been very prominent in the Netherlands (van Swaaningen 1997). Marxist analyses are probably more applicable to a traditionally class-divided society such as the UK than to the relatively egalitarian welfare state that is the Netherlands. As mentioned above, the political necessity of a cultural perspective in Dutch criminology was situated elsewhere. In
the early 2000s, academics were mostly interested in finding out why the public and political debate in the Netherlands – for centuries a beacon of tolerance and pragmatism – was moving steadily towards more coercion and selective moralism. This seemed to us to be the most important question for Dutch cultural criminologists to answer: why was it that a country once famous for its (rightful) criticism of other countries and cultures with respect to human rights was now itself being targeted by international organizations and foreign academics for human rights violations and xenophobia? This kind of international criticism did not sit well with the inflated Dutch national self-image and during much of the 2000s the Netherlands was busy being right while maintaining that the rest of the world was misinformed. This was also the time when a significant part of the Dutch citizenry began to worry about the preservation of its culture and identity. The rich tradition of Dutch ethnic and migration studies found its way into cultural criminology when a large number of researchers in these fields moved into criminology departments, which, then as now, remain one of the few areas that still provide job opportunities for social scientists.

**Between ‘this is not criminology’ and ‘nothing new under the sun’**

One of the ambitions and challenges facing cultural criminologists was to emancipate (or re-emancipate) the discipline from the control perspective and to seriously engage in the central questions currently occupying the social sciences in general. Apparently, they have already been so successful that Pat Carlen (2009), in her review of Jeff Ferrell, Keith Hayward and Jock Young’s *Cultural Criminology: An Invitation* (2008), questioned whether cultural criminology still qualifies as ‘criminology’. After concluding that the authors have provided an adequate rebuttal to Martin O’Brien (2005), who wondered about the ‘cultural’ aspect of this perspective, Carlen writes:

I myself fail to see what is *criminological* about cultural criminology. The authors provide incisive insights into the cultural mix of subjective meanings of much behaviour …, but they do not address the question as to why certain people routinely fall foul of the law in very mundane ways…. It could also be argued that they are perfectly logical in refusing to pose some of criminology’s more traditional questions about law and lawbreaking. Against that, however, I would contend that until cultural criminology begins to take seriously the official meanings of crime and criminal justice, it is difficult to see how it can construct ‘dangerous knowledge’ about crime phenomena or ‘imagine’ a cultural criminology of the state.

(2009: 575)

We concur for the most part with Carlen’s criticism that cultural criminologists are wrong to ignore the often banal or quotidian aspects of criminality and that they have not been able to come up with a sufficiently persuasive and radically
different discourse on crime and punishment to counteract dominant policy narratives. We also endorse the argument that cultural criminologists should engage more often and more incisively with cultural interpretations of developments in crime control. Yet, is Carlen right to state that cultural criminology has positioned itself outside the realm of criminology? Not in our opinion – not least because such an idea is logically at odds with another criticism of cultural criminology, namely that it brings nothing new to the table aside from breathing new life into various long-established criminological perspectives.

A harsh assessment of cultural criminology would be to say that it has nothing new to offer, given that most of the strands now converging in cultural criminology were spun decades ago, but why should that be a problem? For a start, cultural criminology has refocused attention on symbolic interactionism. As mentioned earlier, this perspective was very influential in Dutch criminology, but was relegated to the background in the wake of the shift towards a more control-oriented criminology. Second, many parallels can be drawn to critical criminology with respect to the reasons for its emergence as well as to its social scientific assumptions. Classical critical criminological concepts such as moral panic, the amplification of security issues by the media and politicians or the politico-economic interests underlying the criminalization of rule-breaking as a sign of resistance to the prevailing social order are still relevant today, even though the issues concerned have changed over time (e.g. Hayward and Schuilenburg 2014; Jefferson 2014).

Starting with Émile Durkheim and Thorsten Sellin, there has always been a ‘cultural’ strand in criminology and ever since the establishment of the Chicago School of sociology of Robert Park and Ernest Burgess in the early twentieth century, research on migration and urban life as well as ethnographical and interpretative methods have continued to figure prominently on the criminological agenda – although it should also be noted here that the Chicago School was responsible for introducing the perhaps less desirable tendency to associate criminality with newcomers. And what about the subcultural approach as developed in the 1950s by, among others, Albert K. Cohen, David Matza and Walter Miller? Is there really such a difference between their work and more contemporary cultural criminological studies such as Jack Katz’ Seductions of Crime (1988), Philippe Bourgois’ In Search of Respect (1996), Elija Anderson’s Code of the Street (1999) and recent Dutch studies on Moroccan street culture in Amsterdam’s New West by Jan-Dirk de Jong (2007) or Robby Roks’ (2016) research on the embeddedness of the Main Triad Crips in a residential area in The Hague? The once dominant concept of ‘class’ may have been replaced by lifestyle and identity (ethnic or otherwise) and the focus may have shifted from structure to culture, but delinquent group formation as a response to social exclusion and a perceived lack of opportunities to make a decent living in mainstream society, continues to be a common denominator.

It would in fact be true to say that cultural criminology was around in the Netherlands long before the term was even invented. In his 1956 book Position and Subject-matter of Criminology, Herman Bianchi already observed that
psychological and sociological positivism resulted in one-dimensional visions of crime and that more insight could be gained by using a phenomenological-anthropological approach to criminality and the fight against it. In 1980, he presented an overview of theoretical criminology in terms of 12 basic models, each of which were linked to a particular culture or period in time. Bianchi (1980) also argued in favour of criminological Verstehen – a term that has since been adopted by cultural criminologists (Ferrell 1997). Likewise, an early extension of the ethnographic research method was initiated by Frank Bovenkerk and Lodewijk Brunt (1976). In their book Binnenstebuiten en ondersteboven (Inside Out and Upside Down) they advocated an anthropology of the industrial society. Because sociology has specialised in the study of representative samples of the population as a whole ..., there are very few studies available on marginal groups, let alone on the ways in which those involved define their social situation. What do we know about the fringes of society, about drunks, prostitutes, travellers or hotel thieves? How much do we know about hard-to-access groups such as the police or Masonic lodges? And how rarely have the upper echelons of our society been the subject of social scientific research themselves!

(1976: back flap)

In any event, does it really matter whether or not cultural criminology qualifies as ‘real’ criminology or whether or not it is selling old wine in new bottles? With regard to the first point, we obviously subscribe to the view that criminology is the social science dedicated to the study of crime and punishment or, in more sociological terms, deviancy and social control. With regard to the second point, it is long overdue that critical, symbolic interactionist and ethnographic perspectives are being welcomed back into criminology after having been marginalized for a long time. Furthermore, all this is not even about old wine in new bottles, given that the – admittedly similar – perspectives and instruments described above are currently being used to analyse a completely different society (on this particular point, see Jock Young in Ferrell and Hayward 2014: 187). A society which, just to name a few developments, is being shaped to a considerable extent by the digital environment; is saturated in the global culture of consumerism; where cultural and inter-ethnic relations are becoming increasingly strained; where populism has become fashionable in both the traditional and social media spheres as well as in the political arena; where many no longer believe in the grand narratives of emancipation and progress and where the gradual privatization of almost the entire public domain is well under way. Precisely because we are no longer dealing with just one cultural system of meaning – regardless of whether or not this has actually ever been the state of affairs – but with different systems of meaning coexisting, competing and influencing each other, we believe that cultural criminology is in a unique position to offer an analytical perspective that is pertinent to our times.
The concept of ‘culture’ in criminology

It goes without saying that the long tradition of culture as a scientifically meaningful concept is inextricably linked to the rise of and theoretical developments within the social sciences, in particular cultural anthropology and, in more recent times, cultural studies. ‘Everyone is into culture now’, Adam Kuper (1999: 2) observed in a critical reflection on the history of the concept. Originally, the concept of culture was strongly essentialist in nature, in the sense of a stable and well-defined set of norms and values. In the nineteenth century, this view of culture fitted well within the process of nation-forming and the romantic notion of the German idea of *Blut und Boden*, which refers to the link between descent, *Blut* (blood) and *Boden* (soil) which supposedly nourishes a people (Oude Breuil 2011; Schuilenburg 2011). Politicians and columnists in particular appealed to this essentialist view of the historical ties between a territory and a shared culture in order to promote popular support for the nation-state (Wolf 1982; Anderson 1983). Starting from a romantic perspective, the nation-state was presented as a natural given, which would make internal differences disappear because the idea of community would be alive in everyone’s mind.

This romantic notion strongly influenced thinking about culture for a century and a half – and experienced a resurgence in politics and society after 2000 – but the academic view of culture has, meanwhile, developed into a constructivist concept, meaning that people draw from cultural values and traditions in order to determine their position. Culture is now seen as a dynamic process of giving meaning, rather than a geographically delineated entity fixed in time and space. The interplay between structure and agency is of particular relevance to this process. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1996) used the distinction between ‘field’ and ‘habitus’ to demonstrate that supra-individual structures and individual actions presuppose and influence each other. Along the same lines, the British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1984) argued that the contrast between deterministic approaches (as represented by functionalism and structuralism) and actor-centric approaches (as represented by phenomenology and hermeneutics) is no longer useful in dealing with the concept of culture. As he writes at the beginning of *The Constitution of Society*, what the social sciences ought to prioritize, is ‘neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of societal totality’ (Giddens 1984: 2). In other words, structures determine the behaviour of individuals, but at the same time the actions of individuals can contribute, at least to some extent, to shifts in structure. The transition from culture taken as an objectively observable essence to a dynamic process of giving meaning has at least three implications for cultural criminology.

First of all, it means that, once more, cultural criminology starts from a symbolic interactionist perspective of giving meaning. What this boils down to is that people react to the social world based on the meaning they attach to it. This meaning derives from interactions with other people and is adjusted in an interpretative process that takes place when a person engages with other people,
objects or institutions (Blumer 1969; see also Goffman 1959). Interactions between individuals are therefore in themselves ‘social facts’, to borrow a term from Émile Durkheim, and as such they should be the subject of scholarly research. The above-mentioned structures, including societal order, are always the result of interactions between people. In other words, before we start questioning whether or not there is a specific concept of culture, we need to examine how, despite the differences between people, certain patterns can emerge (Schuilenburg 2012). In his book Kapot moeilijk (‘Whackedly Difficult’), Jan-Dirk de Jong (2007) has shown that essentialist explanations referring to particular traits as ‘typically Moroccan’ are insufficient to account for the high crime rate among young Dutch-Moroccans in Amsterdam’s New West. Referring to group dynamic processes, de Jong points to the production of a fairly autonomous street culture that can lead to disorder and criminal behaviour. Abdessamad Bouabid’s ongoing PhD research (2016) shows that both the identity as well as the actions of Dutch-Moroccan young men is in part shaped by the negative stereotypes about them that are constantly being reproduced by politicians, talk show hosts and journalists.

Second, the cultural perspective in criminology also implies a bottom-up or emic perspective on culture (Fetterman 2010). When this type of Verstehende approach is used, the researcher is directly involved with his subject, which allows him to better understand why people act the way they do. An etic perspective, on the other hand, implies that the researcher keeps his distance from the research subject, observes a phenomenon from the position of an outsider and approaches it with a vocabulary that is alien to the research group. In emic research, participant observation is an essential tool. A consequence of the emic perspective – when a phenomenon is studied through the eyes of the respondents – is that the researcher develops a commitment to his subject. Instead of taking the position of a neutral, detached observer, the researcher becomes a participant in the research. The underlying idea is that this will result in a more comprehensive description and understanding of the subject under study. An example of this is Jing Hiah and Richard Staring’s study of the Chinese catering industry (2016). Dutch authorities have accused Chinese restaurant owners of engaging in human trafficking and modern slavery because they provide their employees not only with work, but also with food and lodging. However, in the eyes of the employees – many of whom are illegally present in the Netherlands – restaurant owners who offer only work and nothing else are regarded as stingy employers.

Finally, a cultural perspective also takes into account the interaction between culture as a dynamic process of giving meaning on the one hand, and the effects of political, economic and social developments on the other. Interactions between people do not take place in a vacuum, but also derive meaning from wider – and sometimes contradictory – historical developments. In this context, we can point to what Frank Furedi (1997) has termed the ‘culture of fear’. Despite the fact that crime rates in Western countries have been steadily declining for a number of years, with the crime drop in New York as the best-known example (Zimring 2012), feelings of unsafety have not abated. Citizens remain
afraid, even though they live in relatively safe societies. In order to channel and rationalize these fears, politicians tend to redefine them in terms of manageable risks (Crawford 2010). This development can be related to Zygmunt Bauman’s idea of *liquid modernity* (2000, 2006), a concept that serves as a metaphor for the current stage of modernity, in which once stable institutions are called into question and traditional norms and values lose their meaning. The resulting late modern anomie has led to a situation in which pre-emptive risk reduction and regulation have become the norm.

By positioning processes of assigning meaning within the wider constellation of political, economic and social developments, the culture concept has acquired a different but still central role in understanding and explaining human actions. At the same time, this view of the meaning of culture raises fundamental questions with respect to the influence of culture on societal developments (and vice versa) as well as questions regarding the differences and similarities between cultures against the background of these developments.

**Criminality as a socio-cultural construction**

For as long as criminology has been around, there has been debate on the concept of ‘criminality’. Is crime a subcategory of sin, as the pre-criminologists thought? Is it a statistical deviation from the average human being, as claimed by the nineteenth-century statistician Adolphe Quetelet? Is it a pathological phenomenon, as Cesare Lombroso and Enrico Ferri believed at the end of the nineteenth century? Is it a consequence of a conductive social environment, as Alexandre Lacassagne and Gabriel Tarde maintained around the same time in France? Is the question whether or not it is followed by criminal prosecution even relevant at all, as Edwin Sutherland wondered around 1940, or is crime simply behaviour labelled as criminal, as Howard Becker stated in the early 1960s? As the answers to these questions determine the domain of criminology, the boundaries of the discipline have shifted frequently over time.

Considering the scholarly traditions from which cultural criminology emerged, it is obvious that an essentialist view of criminality cannot be used as a starting point. The concept of criminality in cultural criminology is mainly centred on the appealing aspects of crime (e.g. Katz 1988). While crime is rejected as immoral and harmful in the official control discourse, it is often glorified in films, television series and music. There is a tension here that most mainstream criminologists are unable to address. There is no denying that the seductive power of crime, the pleasure and the adrenaline rush that comes from doing something that is bad or forbidden, strikes a chord with all of us. This is why Mike Presdee (2000) introduced the term ‘carnival of crime’. Excesses, wilful rule breaking, ridiculing the authorities and apparently irrational behaviour are celebrated, as it were. Committing crimes offers the possibility of a momentary escape from the routine and boredom of everyday life. Jeff Ferrell (2011) points out that the concept of ‘transgression’, which occupies a central place in
cultural criminology, is much broader and also has more dimensions than the concept of ‘criminality’. It implies a more or less deliberate disobedience, in which violating norms is accompanied by a sort of heretical glee. Yet, not all criminality has this seductive transgressive component. As Pat Carlen (2009) noted, much criminality is also incredibly dreary and mundane, and is often held together by a combination of clumsiness and stupidity (see e.g. Robby Roks’ aforementioned study of the Main Triad Crips in The Hague). The fact remains, however, that cultural criminology focuses attention on a dimension of criminality that is often overlooked by mainstream criminologists.

Whether or not something is forbidden by law is not a particularly relevant criterion for cultural criminologists. In that sense, they are following in the tradition of Edwin Sutherland, who argued in *White Collar Crime* ([1949] 1983) that criminal behaviour in the higher socio-economic classes is not usually dealt with through the criminal justice system, but through administrative by-ways in order to avoid stigmatization and negative publicity. Nowadays, this is also an issue in organizational criminology and green criminology, which are often studied by means of ethnographic fieldwork. For example, in *It’s Legal, But It Ain’t Right* (2005), Nikos Passas and Neva Goodwin ask the pressing question as to why the public perception of criminality focuses so strongly on street crime, while organizational criminality produces many more victims and is responsible for far more financial damage. Likewise, green criminology shows that questions concerning criminalization, actual prosecution and sanction depend upon geographical circumstances, political cultures and economic interests (South and Beirne 2006).

One very simple answer to the question raised by Passas and Goodwin can be found in the way the media forms our notions of criminality. As critical criminologists have long pointed out (see e.g. Cohen & Young 1973), the media socially constructs criminality by framing it within a simplistic context of good and evil. This, of course, accounts for why violent crime features far more prominently in the mainstream media than does environmental or white-collar crime. A similarly reductionist logic is at work when it comes to organized crime. Today, however, the social construction of crime in the media is even more intense and manifold. Consider, for example, current research on various Internet forums that copy requests for information concerning the whereabouts of suspects from the police and put forward alternative interpretations of criminality. Judith van Erp (2011) examined how popular Dutch websites such as *GeenStijl* and *Boevenvangen*, where ‘hunting for criminals’ forms a prominent pastime, define and represent criminality. She concluded that the new media pander to the preferences of their readers. In doing so, they sometimes turn the original meaning on its head and contribute to eroding the influence of the authoritative framework of the police. Such is the significance of this new type of mediated socio-cultural construction, we now turn to the subject in more detail.
Media images: the merging of reality and virtuality

As the previous section suggested, ours is a world increasingly saturated with images of crime. Yet, with few exceptions, the criminological analysis of this situation has lacked sophistication. In particular, much of the existing research on crime’s representation within popular culture seems to stall over the issue of whether or not violence in films or video games is as innocent as is alleged. In broad terms, the debate crystallizes around whether or not there exists a causal link between the behaviour of young people and violence in popular culture. The problematic relationship between media and behaviour in young people (see e.g. van Gestel 2010) is, however, not something that occupies cultural criminologists. Instead, the media is interesting for a different reason.

One of cultural criminology’s longstanding interests is to understand how, using a phrase by Hayward and Young (2004: 259), ‘the street scripts the screen, and the screen scripts the street’. It thus attempts to make sense of the continual movement between various dimensions, such as from the virtual to the real and from the real to the virtual. The logic behind this blurring process rests on the fact that each virtuality eventually becomes reality and that each reality sinks into a virtual world (de Jong and Schuilenburg, 2006). Examples in popular culture include movies such as Mathieu Kassovitz’s La Haine (1995) about the production of parochial space in French banlieues; Steven Spielberg’s Minority Report (2002) on predictive policing and the spectre of so-called ‘pre-crime’; Red Road by Andrea Arnold (2006) about the dangers of CCTV; and Martin Scorsese’s The Wolf of Wall Street (2013), about the toxic ethics of bankers and stock traders. Such films inevitably provide images and information about contemporary developments in society, but even more importantly, they also affect our political realities by furnishing forms of imagination, interpretation and action.

Maybe Exit Through the Gift Shop by the English graffiti artist Banksy (2010) – a documentary about Thierry Guetta, a middle-aged family man fascinated by the world of graffiti who earns his living in a second-hand clothes shop – can elucidate matters that cannot be explained by a dry summary of films and their themes. Banksy’s documentary is a portrait of Mr Guetta, who as ‘Mr Brainwash’ makes a series of third-rate Andy Warholesque parodies of art. He became world-famous when Banksy introduced him as ‘the next big thing’ in Los Angeles. During his first major exhibition, his work sold for millions of dollars to celebrities like Brad Pitt. From the perspective of the concept of culture and the social-cultural construction of criminality outlined above, Exit Through the Gift Shop raises several topics that are relevant for cultural criminology. First of all, the documentary is about the global phenomenon of graffiti, a form of signification that can express political events and messages (murals), but which can also be used to decorate the shutters of trendy shops (branding). ‘I guess my ambition was to make a film that would do for graffiti art what “Karate Kid” did for martial arts, a film that would get every school kid in the world picking up a
spray can and having a go’, said Banksy at the Berlin film festival. The film also refers to the way in which local authorities try to prevent neighbourhood decline because of graffiti by applying measures such as zero tolerance policing. Banksy also took on the established art world by creating the clownish Guetta and thereby attacking the social construction of ‘good taste’, in line with the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Taste, wrote Bourdieu (1996: 18), is the ‘most categorising’ of class-related characteristics. Finally, the documentary raises the issue of the relationship between fiction and reality.

To raise the study of popular culture to a higher level, one could reasonably assert, on the premise of the relationship between reality and virtuality explored in this documentary, that young people in Rotterdam have more in common with young people in Miami than with their parents or neighbours. Fieldwork makes it possible to ascertain whether disorderly conduct, as the broken windows theory postulates, does indeed result in higher levels of criminality. It is also possible to contemplate the end of the traditional opposition between high and low culture and, going even further, the distinction between what is real and what is fake. Manuel Castells calls the type of reality thus created ‘real virtuality’ (1996: 403; 1998: 253). On the basis of this concept he repudiates the idea that virtual reality is separate from our physical reality. In their book Mediapolis (2006), Alex de Jong and Marc Schuilenburg show how the virtual and sonic environments of videogames, films and music on the one hand and ‘objective’ reality on the other hand have grown to resemble each other ever more closely. War games make their players believe that they are connected to an ‘objective’ reality, while ‘real’ war situations give soldiers the impression that they have landed in a video game. The logic of these shifts rests upon the fact that each virtuality eventually becomes reality and all reality lapses into a virtual world.

Frank Bovenkerk and Marian Husken (2005) have shown that the globalization of American mass culture has been accompanied by the dissemination of cultural icons such as Coca Cola and The Godfather. The globalization of organized criminality is partially attributable to images from popular culture. Gangsters have adopted lifestyles, rituals and opinions about good and derived directly from gangster novels, mafia films and crime series on television. Gangster funerals in Melbourne, Amsterdam and London bear a striking resemblance to the funerals depicted in American crime films and TV series. The Crips in The Hague, for example – who have partially modelled themselves on the Crips in Los Angeles – are portrayed in the Dutch media in the same way as the American Crips (Roks and Staring 2008). Just like in Exit Through the Gift Shop, fiction and reality are continuously merging and blending. The anthropologist Arjun Appadurai provides a vivid description of this in his book Modernity at Large (1996). He talks about ‘mediascapes’ and shows how stories and images from film, television and the Internet even contribute to people leaving their country and going in search of other, more attractive destinations.
In reply to the earlier criticism expressed by Pat Carlen (2009), one could say that this mediated ‘Hall of Mirrors’ (Ferrell et al. 2008: Chapter 5) is indeed an extraordinary source of ‘dangerous knowledge’ that often remains invisible to academics who are obsessed by so-called ‘hard facts’. And so an important question emerges: how are these new worlds best studied from the perspective of cultural criminology?

Against method?

In an interview with René van Swaaningen (2014), Jock Young stated:

Methodology is rather overrated in present-day criminology. An academic attitude is far more important than methodology. Most cultural criminological studies are based in participant observation and ethnography. But also these qualitative scholars construct a certain vision of ‘reality’, suggesting a ‘meaning’ and a ‘coherence’ the data don’t necessarily prescribe. I would say we, as cultural criminologists, should not imitate positivists in this respect, but give ample room to contradictions and doubts. In this sense I am extremely in favour of naturalism and empiricism. The problem does not lie in methodology, but rather in all those so-called ‘hard facts’ that have pushed academic debate and reflection aside.

In the same interview, Young referred to the distinction between the more empirical and culture-oriented American cultural criminologists and their somewhat more theoretical and materialistically minded British colleagues. How do these observations relate to the situation in the Netherlands?

Dutch cultural criminology is, at any rate, less emphatically theoretical and more empirical than its British counterpart. At the same time, we can establish that cultural criminology does not fall under one specific perspective with regard to methodology. Underlying the Dutch approach is a great diversity of methods. These include but are not limited to, (multi-site) participant observation in geographic space, the visual analysis of digital images and media constructions in virtual space, netnography, and even the creative theoretical reinterpretation of large-scale (quantitative) data sets collected by third parties. Despite all this variety, it is clear that cultural criminologists mainly use qualitative research methods and stay well away from laboratory-like environments in which variables are selected, checked and kept constant.

It is evident that, with regard to methodology, cultural criminology in the Netherlands has been inspired to a significant degree by cultural anthropology and that great value is attached to empirical research undertaken within diverse communities. This means that ethnographic research methods, participant observation in particular, are of prime importance to many cultural criminologists. Not only does this mean that topics such as migration, ethnicity and multiculturality occupy
a more prominent place in Dutch cultural criminology than in Britain, but also that
greater importance is attached to qualitative research methods.

Many questions that interest cultural criminologists in the Netherlands can be
classified under the heading ‘explorative research’, whereby the emic perspective referred to earlier can be used. Explorative research in criminology
often entails research into hidden worlds, such as the subculture of street gangs;
the dishonest elements of the real estate industry (shady solicitors, disreputable
mortgage brokers etc.); or the under researched interior lifeworlds associated
with the sex industry. These scenes, networks and subcultures, which are
embedded in society while being for the main part concealed from the outside
world, are often difficult and sometimes even impossible to study using statisti-
cal methods or to understand using uncontested realities reconstructed from
judicial investigations.

Using qualitative research methods, the reality within which criminality is
defined can be best charted on the basis of direct observation and interaction with
the actors involved, whether they are perpetrators, victims, authorities or other
related parties. The point is to come as close as possible to the object of study in
order to be able to interpret the deviant behaviour within the wider context and
constellation of operational actors, norms, expectations and prescribed rules.
Applying such a method, which positions the researcher in the middle of the
reality being studied, inevitably prioritises emotions such as fear, elation, grief,
anger and joy. In doing so, it provides a richer account of criminality than the-
ories of crime based on rational calculation or economic instrumentality.

But Dutch cultural criminologists do not rely solely on ethnographic research;
rather they prefer to employ a creative mixed methods approach when it comes
to defining, understanding and explaining deviant behaviour and society’s reac-
tions to it. Indeed, in the right circumstances, it can be very useful to utilize
quantitative research methods or reuse available datasets in order to pursue
research questions. The historical anthropologist Anton Blok (2011), for
example, speaks about the importance of systematically comparing detailed case
histories on the basis of theoretical concepts. According to Blok, ‘Confusion
does not disappear by collecting more empirical material, but by ordering avail-
able information differently’ (2011: 100–101).

Historians show how it is possible to use existing source material that was pro-
duced and preserved in the past for very different reasons – in this case, for inves-
tigation and prosecution – in a responsible manner. Thus, Anton Blok (1991), using
court records of the interrogations of members of eighteenth century robber gangs –
the so-called Bokkenrijders – was able to describe the circumstances under which
specific occupational groups had gathered together in these gangs. The step from
using such historical source material to contemporary criminal investigations is a
small one. Use of this method is also perfectly feasible within the context of modern
Dutch society, but so far, not much use has been made of it in cultural criminology.
An exception is the work of the historical criminologist Pieter Spierenburg (2008,
2013), who tries to understand and explain extensive and lengthy transformation
processes surrounding violence, murder and punishment on the basis of historical archive material in combination with comparative literature studies.

Whether this concerns ethnographic fieldwork, with its inherent risk of a selective or limited viewpoint that does not allow any space for changes wrought by external forces, or the use of written material that has not been collected for academic purposes is indeed open to question. However, it is always important to critically examine and reflect upon the origin and application of data. This entails the important implication that the circumstances under which the material was collected must also be taken into consideration. Problematizing data and providing insight into its socially constructed nature means that such material will not be taken at face value, but is instead interpreted while taking such limitations into account. Although cultural criminologists often have a preference for qualitative, small-scale data collection methods within the context of their research questions, view of humanity and other related perspectives, the above example emphasizes the point that the methods used are only a means and not an intrinsic goal.

A number of cases of fraud in Dutch academic circles added a new element to the discussion on transparency and openness concerning research sources. In 2013 it was revealed that Mart Bax, who up until that point had been a respected professor emeritus of anthropology, had presented all kinds of empirical inaccuracies about the number of victims of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The committee investigating this fraud had serious doubts about the nature and accountability of the years of fieldwork that Bax had supposedly undertaken in the region (Baud et al. 2013). One of the consequences of this and several other cases of fraud that have come to light in recent years, is a call for more transparency and clarification of the research methods used by academics to generate their data. This puts the opening quote in this section, in which Jock Young makes a plea for more naturalism and empiricism in criminological research, in a slightly different light. The pressure on qualitative researchers to account for the process of data collection and the factual data in all kinds of ways is not only at odds with the relationships of trust upon which this data is sometimes based, but is also difficult to reconcile with methodical naturalism and empiricism.

Other research methods deserve attention within the context of cultural criminology including ones that are relatively seldom used. Despite the interest in international issues concerning criminality, whereby mobility, global flows of people and goods and transnationality are central concepts, most criminologists still conduct their research from the safety of their own country. Cultural criminologists are no exception, although some movement has been seen in recent years. For example, various Dutch PhD (criminology) students of are currently conducting international comparative research, in which specific subjects, such as the influence of stereotypical images of ‘Moroccan’ youths (Abdessamad Bouabid) or employment relationships in the Chinese catering industry (Jing Hiah) are charted out in a qualitative manner in two different countries and then compared with each other in order to clarify the influence of social and political contexts. Other PhD
students decide whether or not to travel according to questions or movements of their respondents. In his study of informal Afghan entrepreneurship, Shir Shah Nabi, for example, follows the money of Afghan migrants and entrepreneurs who conduct transactions making use of the services of underground bankers, known as hawala bankers. To do this, he travels between Amsterdam, Kabul and Dubai. These examples of multi-site ethnography are particularly important for understanding the ‘glocal’ nature of transnational crimes such as the trafficking of people or the smuggling of weapons and drugs.

Concluding remarks and future research agendas

Critical opinions have been voiced concerning the future of cultural criminological research, especially with regard to the relevance of studies of transgressive behaviour, alternative research methods and the need for theoretical innovation. Cultural criminology runs the risk of lapsing into what Alvin Gouldner (1968) called ‘zookeeping criminology’: observing subjects as if they are animals in a zoo without any clear social needs being served or political conclusions being drawn. If we look at some personally-tinged study topics, such as ‘S & M’ culture, graffiti or skateboarding, we often wonder why they are presented as criminological studies and not leisure activity studies. Moreover, dragging such mere transgressions into the realm of criminology may well feed the idea that there is actually something wrong with them. If we are to be taken seriously as criminologists, we must be very aware of this, otherwise there is a real risk that cultural criminology will suffer the same marginalization as was experienced by the sociology of deviance in the 1980s (Sumner 1994). We do not want to label any theme as being irrelevant here, but to have criminological significance, our Verstehen of any theme must be criminological. That means that researchers should reflect on the socially harmful nature of the conduct that they are studying, the social control or criminal prosecution of such behaviour by the authorities and the private sector and the association with criminality in the media or the political arena. In this chapter we have pointed at some research themes for cultural criminology that, in our opinion, are the most pressing at this moment in time.

Many other extremely relevant themes remain largely untouched by cultural criminologists. Much of the current cultural criminological research focuses on street crime perpetrated by young people – thereby reiterating mainstream criminology’s research foci. In this light, reaffirming a focus on crimes of the powerful, which originates in critical criminology, could be very helpful. Where are the white-collar criminals in cultural criminology? Is their behaviour also not expressive and focused on experiencing kicks? With their expensive clothing and cars, are they not expressing a specific style and identity? Are they not occupied with commanding respect through symbolic acts? The gender perspective is also still missing in cultural criminology. Three years after the critical criminological bible, The New Criminology was published in 1973, a feminist counterpart appeared, entitled Women, Crime and Criminology: A Feminist Critique (Smart 1976). This is not the
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place to explore the development of feminist criminology (or the lack thereof), but it seems to us that many cultural criminological themes concerning gender are currently being ignored as well.

A methodological development that deserves greater attention involves focussing on objects instead of on people. An example of such an approach is provided by Dina Siegel (2008) in her study of criminality in the diamond industry. The people she interviewed were selected on the basis of the routes taken by diamonds from the mines in Angola to the dealers in Antwerp. When placing goods at the heart of the study, cultural criminology can draw inspiration from cultural anthropology, which has a rich tradition of research focusing on material aspects of human society. Interesting in this respect is the book *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspectives*, in which Arjun Appadurai (1986) looks at goods as objects with their own social life, whereby people attach value to objects, which in turn confer value to social relationships through being exchanged. This exchange of material culture is not purely an economic, rational matter, but shares many similarities with other forms of exchange whereby people use objects to express who they are or who they want to be, with whom they feel connected and how they relate to others (Appadurai 1986: 56–58).

In all this, inspiration can be found at the theoretical level in perspectives in which the interrelatedness of human and non-human entities is thematized. Classic oppositions, such as subject–object, culture–nature and micro–macro are not enough to enable a proper understanding of the hybrid nature of criminological problems. One option is to consider the concept of ‘assemblage’ associated with the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (Schuilenburg 2015) or the Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) of sociologist Bruno Latour (2005, 2013) derived from this concept. In both cases, the principle aim is to explore the relations and interactions between people, objects and living environments. So far, cultural criminology has been extraordinarily anthropocentric and thus non-human actors have received little, if any attention. If they do come into focus, it is mainly as passive instruments, which people use in order to shape relationships or attempt to reach certain goals. Such reduction however, does not do justice to the fact that the objects also form ties and create new relationships between people. As everything and everyone exists simultaneously, both people and things exert a certain influence on what is happening. They therefore have meaning and must be examined in relationship to each other.

To conclude, in this chapter, we have shown how Dutch cultural criminology has a long academic tradition in which ethnographic research methods – participant observation and fieldwork in particular – occupy centre stage. This tradition, we argued, has helped shape a form of cultural criminology over time that differs in subtle but important ways to cultural criminological approaches developed in the UK, the US and elsewhere. However, rather than simply pointing out how differing societal, political and academic traditions have functioned to shape national variations of cultural criminology, we also looked to the future in an effort to ensure that cultural criminology remains a vital and productive field of study. We
believe that cultural criminology’s future is a bright one, but that importantly it must also be ready to adapt and develop to meet the challenges posed by a late modern world in flux. In sum, if we are to have confidence in the continuing relevance of cultural criminological research, the challenge lies in conducting more critical research into the interactions between deviant or transgressive behaviour, social control and culture within the context of specific economic, social and political relationships. Such a situation makes theoretical and methodological innovation not just necessary, but essential. Looking back over cultural criminology’s brief but dynamic history, we would like to conclude by saying that, in our estimation, cultural criminology is well-suited to take on such an iterative task.

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Notes

1 It is not a coincidence that this mainly concerned criminologists from Erasmus University, Rotterdam and Utrecht University (and to a lesser extent the VU University Amsterdam) who were already active in a strongly critical and culturally oriented international criminology network known as the Common Study Programme on Criminal Justice and Critical Criminology – http://commonstudyprogramme.wordpress.com.

2 It should be noted here that the journal Tijdschrift over Cultuur & Criminaliteit is actually a collaborative Dutch-Flemish undertaking. The rise of cultural criminology in Flanders is less pronounced than in the Netherlands and the above-mentioned developments took a different course in (Dutch-speaking) Belgium, but there has also been a marked increase in qualitative criminological research in Flanders since 2000.

3 Such a claim would indeed be a harsh one given the extent to which cultural criminology has enlivened the study of crime by opening it up to a host of new academic disciplines and intellectual influences, from cultural geography to documentary filmmaking, from social movement studies to architectural theory.

4 In Groningen, Wytske van der Wagen is currently working on a PhD thesis on ‘cyborg-criminality’ from a cultural criminological perspective using Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network-Theory, whereby the computer is placed centre stage as a ‘non-human actor’.

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