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Chronocentrism and Criminology in Britain

Paul Rock *

Criminologists display a largely unexamined propensity to ignore writings that are more than fifteen or so years old, with evident consequences for the public presentation and validation of expert knowledge. A citation study was combined with detailed observations from British criminologists to ascertain quite how that disavowal of the past was accomplished.

Keywords: citation research; sociology of knowledge; chronocentrism

Introduction

This article is both something of a *jeu d'esprit* and a serious attempt to bring to prominence an important but neglected feature of intellectual practice in criminology. It was prompted by reflections that arose over the years as I listened to papers at academic conferences and read books and articles. I was struck not only by how temporal *lacunae* seem to permeate what passes for warranted scholarly knowledge, but also by how successive generations of thinkers have for no apparent reason been anathematized. Redolent of a process described by Sorokin as the workings of 'amnesia and discoverer's complex', a process that contributed to 'an extreme scarcity of references to the basic works of . . . predecessors' in sociology at large, including, he noted, himself (Sorokin 1956: 7,18), many authors who published their work in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s seem simply to have disappeared from contemporary intellectual consciousness, sometimes to be displaced by others, more recent and not always of equal merit, who have been credited with originating their ideas. Criminology has proceeded in a series of fits, being marked by radical discontinuities; a recurrence of new beginnings; and a quest for the seemingly distinctive, influenced, perhaps, by what the himself now-neglected Jack Douglas once called 'simplificationism': 'the modern scientists' self-imposed professional myopia, the insistence of each specialist

on seeing everything as caused by the few particular variables he happens to ‘own’ professionally ‘ (Douglas, Rasmussen and Flan 1977: 51). Sorokin’s and Douglas’ claim that disciplines tend to forget their past was later to be given a title by Saul Morson – *chronocentrism* – the unsubstantiated, often uninspected, almost certainly untenable but powerful doctrine that what is current must somehow be superior to what went before, that ideas, scholars and scholarship inevitably become stale and discredited over time, and that, by implication, those who invoke older work must themselves become contaminated by the taint of staleness (Morson 1996: 278-82). ‘Chronocentrism’, he wrote, comes ‘most readily to groups that imagine they possess wisdom . . . superior to that of their own predecessors’ (Morson 1995: 9).

Morson did not expand his concept at all fully, and this paper should be read as an attempt to develop it empirically. I shall employ it to describe the state of criminology in Britain - and sociological criminology in particular, the branch of the discipline with which I am most familiar - although what follows may well be true of other disciplines elsewhere. The paper proceeds by citation research and by interview and email correspondence with practising criminologists in England and Wales, all of whom agreed to be quoted either by name or anonymously, and I shall make use of those interviews and emails as the argument unfolds.¹

Chronocentric criminology

In an email, Adam Crawford observed of chronocentrism that there is ‘a (rather sloppy) theoretical assumption that underpins some criminological and social science research that we live in “new times” (be it post-modernity, post-Fordism or whatever) that demand new concepts, ideas, understandings. This tends to suggest a rupture with the past and hence ef-

faces historic continuities.’ Durkheim, Merton and the Matza of ‘Techniques of Neutralization’ and *Delinquency and Drift* (but not the Matza of *Becoming Deviant*) may have survived as ancestral figures, but few now seem to talk of Harold Garfinkel² or Joseph Gusfield.³ Alfred Lindesmith, Hermann Mannheim, Walter Reckless, Thomas Scheff, Robert Scott, James Short, Paul Tappan and others have been obscured. Work on the social production of official crime statistics now returns to Michel Foucault and blots out what might well have been defined as the earlier and more pivotal work of Aaron Cicourel, John Kitsuse, David Sudnow and Jack Douglas.⁴ The ethnomethodology and phenomenology of crime, deviance and control have apparently been expunged. Symbolic interactionism has been over-shadowed, but an odd entity called ‘social constructionism’ has appeared in its stead.⁵ Many of those identified by Hermann Mannheim (1960b), Piers Beirne (1993, 1994) and David Garland (2002) as the ‘founding fathers’ of the discipline have been disowned (no doubt, it must be said, perfectly justly in many cases) and they include André-Michel Guerry, Adolphe Quetelet and Gabriel Tarde.

To be sure, there is not much of a case to be made for sociological criminology becoming akin to the Royal College of Heraldry, ceaselessly poring over its pedigrees. Neither is it feasible or necessary always to give full acknowledgement to every precedent and ancestor. Like Funes (Borges 1998: 96), any discipline that retained too perfect a memory of its past would become mired in a chronicling of the particular, working in an eternal present, never able to rise to a plane of useful reflection, abstraction and synthesis. David Downes observed of that tension in referencing between the incomplete and the too-complete that ‘it’s a very difficult balance to achieve between neglecting what’s important in previous work . . . and going in for a kind of monumental attempt to recall, total recall, citing everything

that's ever been written about a particular subject and . . . having some kind of encyclopaedic set of references.'

The literature of criminology has now grown so elephantine that there may have been an increasing and necessary resort to the lexical short cut or bibliographic shorthand, to what Declan Roche, also in interview, called 'finding a good, recent article in a good journal'. Some pieces of writing may indeed be so original or novel in their ideas or empirical content that they really do have few precursors. Ideas shift. Data lose relevance.⁶ Technical methods are superseded. Writers may wish to engage with policy issues of the moment. Lines of argument fork or become sterile (Nigel Fielding remarked, for instance, that it is no bad thing that the search for a monocausal explanation of crime has been abandoned, unlikely ever to be resuscitated⁷). Bibliographic data bases have their temporal limitations (the electronic catalogues of the library of the Cambridge Institute of Criminology and the British Library of Political and Economic Science do not extend back beyond 1973,⁸ for instance, although the patterns I describe were apparent before they came into use). And works may be credited with their date of re-publication or translation rather than their original date of issue (Durkheim, for example, appeared five times in the citation survey prepared for this paper, and only once was the original publication dates of his books in France given).

But that is not elucidation enough. Amnesia does seem to be such a real force, leading as it does to the methodical extinction of many ideas and authors beyond a certain age, that I was moved to explore the matter empirically, and what I offer now is an attempt as much to expose questions as to resolve them.

A Citation Survey

The obvious area to begin the exploration of such matters was citation practices, ‘criminology in general lives on journal articles’ (Katz and Jackson-Jacobs 2004: 114), and the obvious journal to explore for a criminologist working in the UK is *The British Journal of Criminology*,⁹ an international journal with what has been called a ‘strong UK component.’¹⁰ Citation research has in the past been geared conventionally to ranking scholars and journals in hierarchies of esteem and influence for purposes of comparison and assessment.¹¹ One early piece of research (that did not touch on criminology) noted without comment the tendency for the age-distribution of citations to be arrayed in a pattern that conforms to a J-shaped curve (Nicholas, Ritchie and Ritchie 1978: 46-7). However I know of no extended link that has yet been made between that pattern and the shaping of what is accepted as memorable scholarship in criminology or any other discipline.

The dates of all citations were plotted for the first volume of *The British Journal of Criminology*, issued in 1960, and for subsequent volumes at ten-yearly intervals thereafter until 2000.¹² Citations were also charted for the inaugural 1951 volume of the journal’s forerunner, *The British Journal of Delinquency*. And the ensuing patterns are revealing. They suggest that, although there may have been an ever-growing universe of works published in criminology, and although the number of citations may have increased and the content of papers may have changed over time, the *formal* character of the age distribution of publications cited was remarkably stable. It too followed a pronounced J-shaped curve. There is a relatively invariant pattern: the J-shaped insignia was quite as strong in the 1951 volume with its mere 195 references as in the 2000 volume with its 1873 references. Criminological citation practices are not new and they cannot be explained, say, merely by the expan-

sion of the discipline. They seem instead to reflect a fixed form, habit or cast of the academic mind.

Figure I: Citations in *The British Journal of Delinquency* 1951 (n-195)

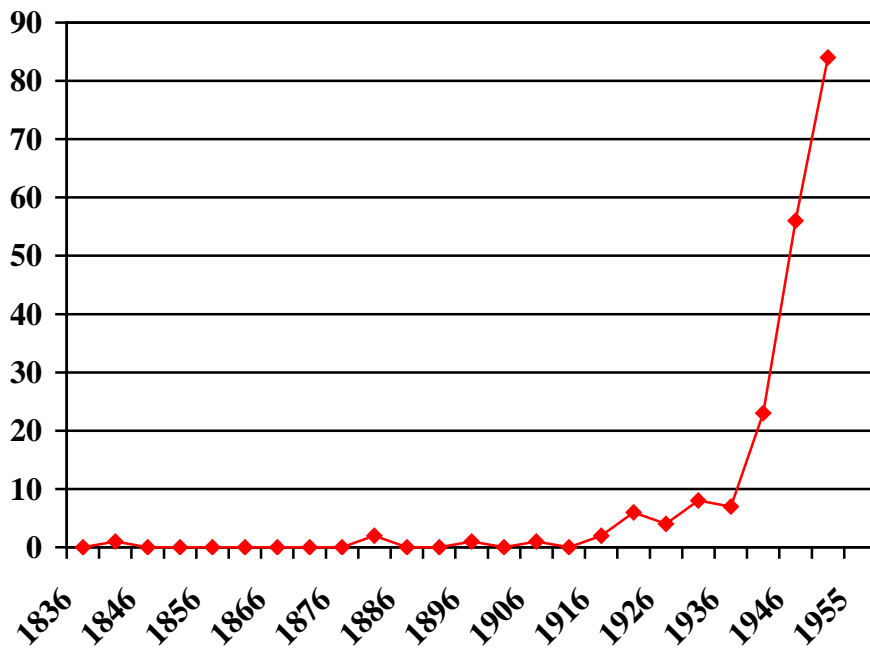


Figure II: Citations in *The British Journal of Criminology* 1960 (n-131)

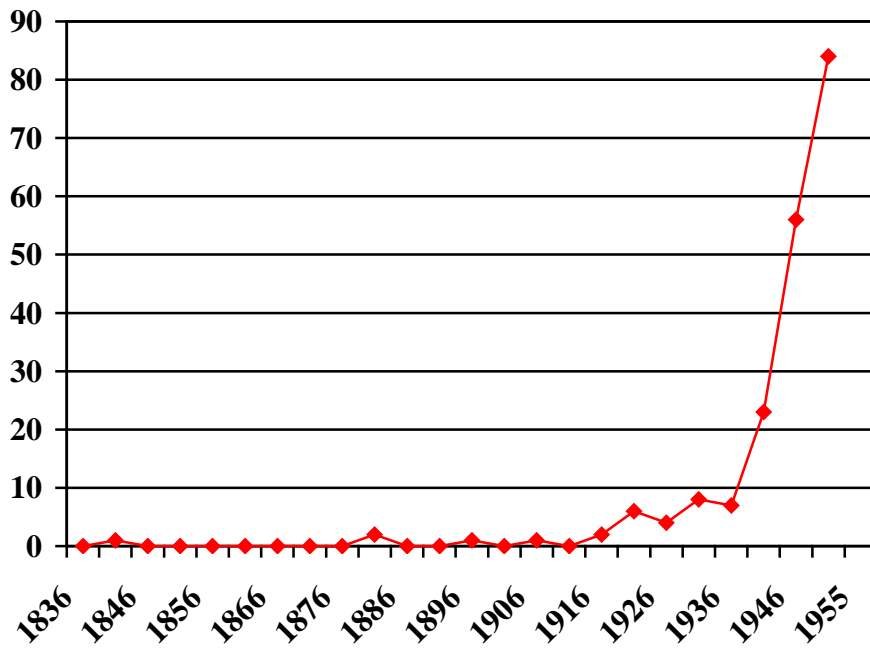


Figure III: Citations in *The British Journal of Criminology* 1970 (n-320)

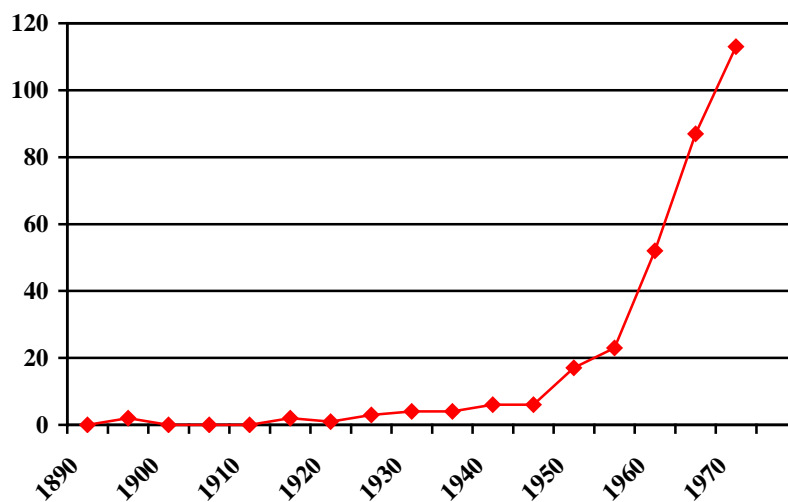


Figure IV: Citations in *The British Journal of Criminology* 1980 (n-619)

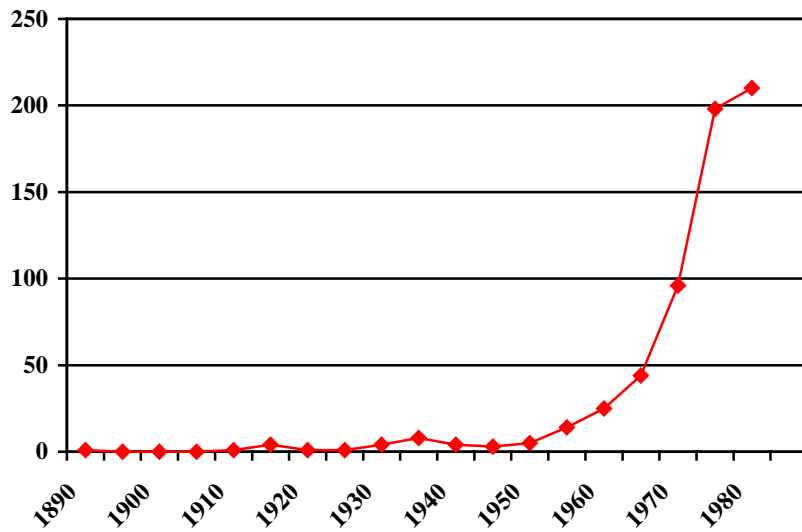


Figure V: Citations in *The British Journal of Criminology* 1990 (n-892)

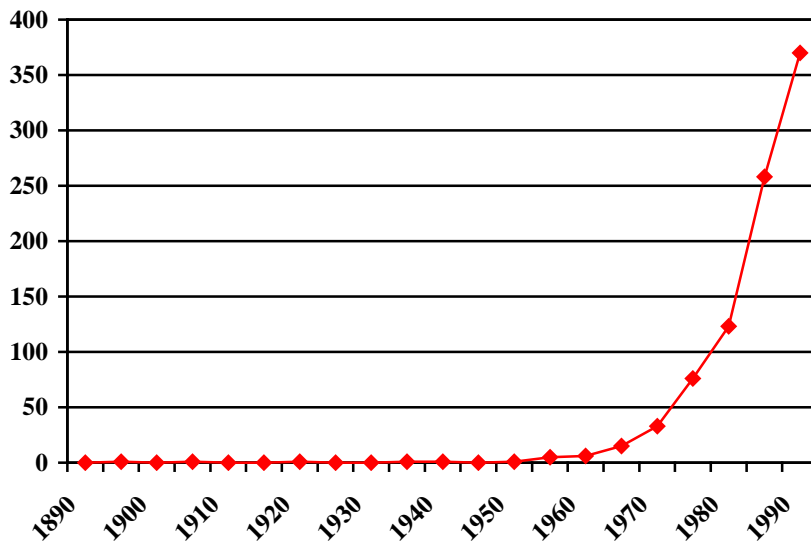
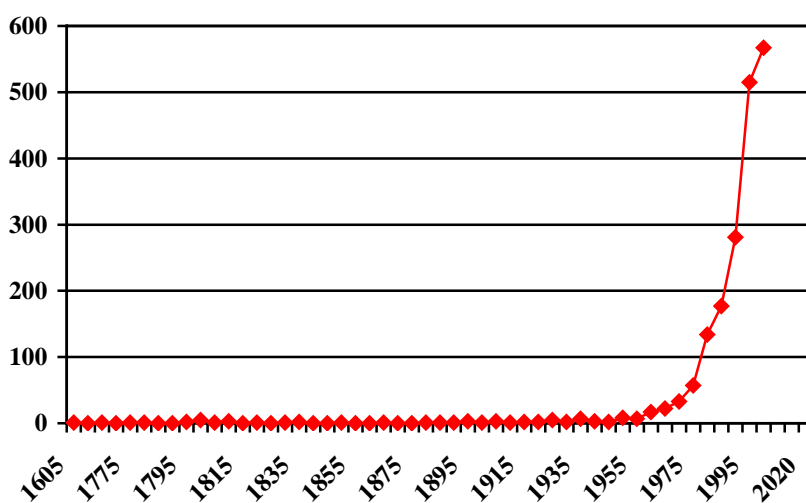


Figure VI: Citations in *The British Journal of Criminology* 2000 (n-1873)

*1605-1760 is not grouped by 5 years-only one frequency



An examination of who and what were most commonly cited over the decades prompts an obvious explanation of part of that configuration: the paradigmatic revolutions to which criminology is so prone induce rapid jumps and discontinuities in referencing patterns.

Hans Eysenck was one of the two equally most frequently cited authors of all across the entire period, attracting 28 references, but the citations referring to his work were clumped together in the 1960 (6) and 1970 (22) volumes and none appeared in the volumes sampled thereafter. The other most frequently cited author, David Garland, accumulated 6 references in 1990 and 22 in 2000, but none before (and his first published book, a co-edited volume, appeared in 1983 (Garland and Young 1983)). The next most often cited author,

John Braithwaite, received 1 reference in 1980, 9 in 1990 and 17 in 2000, and the work that won him the widest criminological acclaim was published in 1989 (Braithwaite 1989). Authors and their books will have their day, and the former stars of citation reviews can wane: John Bowlby (esp. 1946 and 1951), cited seven times, but not later than 1970; Cyril Burt (esp. 1944) cited six times, twice in 1951, thrice in 1970, and once in 1980, but not thereafter; W.N. East (for example, 1939), cited three times but not later than 1960; and Trevor Gibbens (e.g. 1963), cited four times but not after 1980, are clear instances. They once helped to define the field in England and Wales and are now no more. Although a few defied that trend,¹³ the age distribution of citations inevitably reflects the timing of when ideas entered the stream of thought, influenced writing and were then abandoned in tandem with the discipline's changing preoccupations.

No doubt, too, older books and journals may have become less accessible over time,¹⁴ and there will be a tendency for authors to turn to what is at hand. Yet fluctuations in research *foci*, theoretical trend, empirical relevance and the accessibility of materials do not wholly explain the pronounced emphasis on the new. Neither does the sheer expansion of criminology, because the curves are invariant over time, irrespective of the mass of writings in the field at any one moment. If the raw shape of those curves does not speak for itself, I concluded that it would be profitable first to turn to indicative interviews with a sample of criminological colleagues (three women and four men, four of whom were relatively junior, three relatively senior) in the LSE to establish what personal gloss they would themselves place upon their own and others' citation practices, and then to consult more broadly by email with ten criminologists at different universities across the UK.¹⁵ Their replies revealed that citation practices could be complex, personal and idiosyncratic, partly because the practices do not seem always to be reflexive; partly because there is an unre-

solved ambivalence about how evidence should best be deployed; partly because, as a result, citation appears to be an *ad hoc* procedure; and partly because there appears to be no formal schooling in the art and etiquette of referencing procedure other than, say, in the use of the Harvard system or its competitors. One of those former colleagues, Declan Roche, said ‘it’s made me think about something that I’ve done probably quite subconsciously, unconsciously, in that you just gravitate towards the recent stuff’. Stephanie Hayman, experienced in the field but only recently awarded a doctorate, observed that amongst her fellow research students citation procedure ‘was never discussed. . . . I think there’s a very good case [that] could be made for making students much more aware of how they use citations, good practice, etc. etc.’ And Coretta Phillips said ‘I’ve never talked to anybody about it . . . explicitly.’

Colleagues tended to maintain that they themselves were not prey to neophilia and that the practice lay elsewhere. One younger criminologist said ‘I tend to . . . read too much perhaps and try and select too much when I’m referring to something, to show that . . . I’ve covered all of the bases. . . . I still feel like I’m learning in a sense and I think probably what I’ve tended to do is . . . assume that I need to try almost every source, basic, historical and contemporary, and really to . . . over-reference probably.’ And another claimed that she wished to show in her citations that ‘I’m not guilty of plagiarism’, that others concurred with her arguments, and that, ‘aware of the historic literature’, she had returned to the oldest original sources and the more important writings that peppered the development of an idea . She was in a ‘small [research] pond’ and was ‘in a much stronger position to make judgments about utility than if you’re swimming in a much larger volume of water and you may choose more superficial criteria.’ ‘Recency,’ she said, did not imply ‘anything to me. Recency implies that I’m trying to keep abreast of what is being said but it doesn’t mean

that it's any more important than what has gone before.' Robert Reiner too talked of his having been steeped in the Talmudic tradition in which one should never 'fail to attribute ideas to where you first came across them and, since in fact there is virtually nothing, probably nothing new under the sun, the truth is that all of us are constantly repackaging . . . and thinking again . . . ideas that we actually came across in a different context. I'm driven more by the fear that I won't attribute, that I'll appear to be plagiarising, stealing ideas and so on . . .'¹⁶

If their professed practice had been widespread, one might have expected the spread of citations over time to be relatively flat; gradually declining with age; or bi-polar, with a disproportion of references to foundational works, on the one hand, and to recent works, on the other (leading to what might crudely be represented as '—', '/', 'V', 'W' or 'U'-shaped curves over time), but it was not, and their scholarly procedures, whilst admirable, do not seem to have been commonly emulated in the discipline (a criminologist at another university *did* conjecture that 'I can't help thinking that some of what some of your interviewees articulate is what we 'should do', not what we 'actually do!') Rather, there was a pervasive ambivalence that was a contradictory meld of a respect for scholarly tradition (and, with it, a sense of the defining articles that give an agreed structure, sometimes almost irrespective of content, to the history of ideas¹⁷) and an apprehension that the new has its own self-conferring legitimacy. A colleague said for instance:

'Would I be worried if I didn't [cite] anything over the last decade? I'd only be worried about it if I felt that there was literature that I'd ignored that was important. . . . I mean I don't . . . look at material on the basis of when it was published. It has to be on . . . the merit . . . of the material. However, I think it's also true to say that if I

can find up-to-date and contemporary things, . . . I would always . . . go to what's recently been written . . . '

Although the criminologists interviewed claimed always to search the past of an academic problem quite extensively - and wished to be seen to have searched the past - there was also a concern about not appearing to have neglected what was current and relevant. The new was deemed generally to supersede the old, and especially where work was embedded in the empirical, as so much criminology tends to be. The repeated phrase was 'not missing out'. One said 'I wouldn't necessarily say that the more recent is the superior. . . . but . . . you always feel that you've missed something or that you're not as well read as you should be' if you do not allude to it. Another said 'I don't preference things on the basis of the timing when they're published but I would seek to make sure that I was up to speed with what was out there at this moment in time.' And yet another remarked:

'I think as a young, or younger [scholar], you worry that you'll leave something out or get something wrong. Reading the latest stuff helps reassure yourself that you're getting the up-to-date view of the world that you're writing about. And also the second . . . reason why you might use references that if you're trying to show that you are writing something that's credible and authoritative, . . . including new references suggests to the reader you're keeping on top of your field. So I suppose it's partly about reassuring yourself and partly about reassuring your reader.'

Tim Newburn reflected that the new:

'supersedes some of the things that will have gone before. There may be some sort of foundational pieces which one would refer back to but in relation to empirical research, one would hope, it isn't always borne out, but that the newer pieces will supersede the earlier ones in a number of ways, bigger samples, better research or simply more recent research that's the qualitative equivalent of its predecessor that hap-

pens to be of or in a generation that is current, and is indeed what one is talking about generally.’

And David Downes said:

‘I suppose recency is the attempt to show that you’re being up to date, you know, you haven’t missed anything. . . . I suppose it means that you are aware of the latest thinking, as far as you can be, about this particular question.’

It was quite conceivable that there may actually be no recent work in a particular area but, without current citation, there was the possible risk that ‘you had missed something significant . . . you always want to be seen as at the cutting edge.’ He acknowledged the assumption held by some that the new envelops the old, that the ‘new has the edge on the old because it’s got all the advantages of the old incorporated in it.’ And, he continued, extraordinary reasons may have to be tendered to defend a use of old sources: ‘the other day, I said to a student, you ought to go back to [a book published in 1938] . . . and I felt I had to give a great justification for that, you know, why should he want to go back that far? Well, it seems to me, what [the author] has to say there still has enormous relevance to where we are today.’

Students, officers regulating what is called ‘teaching quality assurance’ (or TQA),¹⁸ external examiners¹⁹ and others were sensed as policing research and teaching and placing some pressure on criminologists to ‘keep up to date’. Nigel Fielding said:

‘Most students still just pester me to tell them which single book to buy so they could pass the course. . . . I would suggest that students have an important and generally negative influence in making lecturers feel guilty about citing ‘old’ contributions. Behind them stand external examiners and TQA hacks, for whom the most facile piece of ‘advice’ they can impose is to ‘bring your reading lists

up to date'. This will be exacerbated by the new pressure to put most of one's course materials 'on the web'. One has to be quite senior, or seriously stubborn, to resist the steady drip of such external impositions.'

It is also perhaps conceivable that such a preoccupation with the recent marks the relative absence of a single, collective scholarly tradition in criminology which all novices are obliged to master. There is no formal accrediting body which controls who can call himself or herself a criminologist. Criminologists tend to stem from an abundance of scholarly disciplines, occupy what Alison Liebling called ever more 'differentiated/dispersed networks', are less and less frequently members of distinct, and well-defined intellectual lineages 'taught/supervised by chiefs in the field', and use different methods to pursue diverse problems.²⁰ And the outcome, Simon Holdaway said, is that 'They do not identify their research as standing within a disciplinary, theoretical tradition that seeks to refine its ideas, has a historical legacy of direct relevance to present work, and understand ideas as part of a body of scholarly knowledge. The phenomenon of the 'jobbing criminologist', moving from project to project, with no understanding that their research is rooted in fertile theoretical ground, is not new.' The more empiricist strands of an empiricist discipline are not necessarily held to need justification in social theory but in 'positivist research methods'.²¹

In an occupational setting increasingly governed by performance indicators, the exigencies of funding deadlines, and what Alison Liebling called the growing 'influence of modernization, and the infiltration of business thinking/management styles into academic life', many criminologists claim to find it hard to be as leisurely, contemplative or conventionally scholarly as they imagined their precursors to have been in some golden age before the imperatives of research contracts and the Research Assessment Exercise.²² There is a

world of tight timetables, pressing demands and continual haste. Alison Liebling continued:

‘ . . . the mid-career turn to my elders is also happening now because I am ‘getting round to it’ after decades of full-on empirical work with less time for reading than some of my older colleagues may have had in the utopian academic past I never experienced. I feel it is a luxury to be reading e.g. Bowlby or Ericson in the original because their ideas are relevant to a report I might be writing (but that is already overdue). I manage a little more of this these days, but it has taken a long time to reach this point. We seem to have made academic life so strenuous (in the name of efficiency and ‘bringing in money’) that everything is done against the clock. This may be an important structural reason for the general tendency to concentrate on ‘the apparently essential’.’

More graphic still was Dick Hobbs. In common with some others of his generation, he held to a Platonic history of ideas in which a prelapsarian age of British criminology appears to have been rudely abandoned by scholars who are less than scholarly:

‘The sudden growth in British criminology seems to have caught sociology unawares... it seems to have given up [the] sociology of deviance, sociology of crime and control etc. Consequently what has replaced it is a bastardized concept of indeterminate lineage based upon populism, pragmatism, and a commodified notion of knowledge production increasingly driven by an unholy alliance of policy makers, publishers and entrepreneurial university administrators. British criminological forebears stressed the sociological underpinnings of the study of crime and control e.g. positivism, interactionism, phenomenology, ethnomethodology etc. Crime/deviance/control/ was part of a wider intellectual project. Increasingly criminology is taught as a discrete discipline bereft of epistemological considerations. If it is the second week in February it must be left realism. A hangover and the funer-

al of a cherished grandparent and both Lombroso and the Chicago School disappear up the Swanee. 1973 becomes year zero. Given that criminology degrees are increasingly influenced by policy considerations e.g. "what works", forensics, criminal psychology etc., it is little wonder that what were once thought of as the foundations are increasingly ignored in citations. This is reinforced by the availability of expertly produced handbooks and textbooks. It is no longer necessary or indeed practical to go trawling through a library to dissect a 1938 text, a one liner in the reference book will suffice before confronting the more immediate concerns of crime surveys, or administrative evaluations. This can lead to an easily learnt citation shorthand. So stigma (Goffman), moral panic (Cohen). Criminology is no longer a branch of sociology, it's karaoke.'

The phenomenology of citation practices

Strongly supporting these workings of chronocentrism, it might be supposed, is a more or less tacit phenomenology of time, fashion and the half-life of ideas. Those who write now or in the very recent past may well be seen by the criminologist to have an affinity, accessibility, immediacy, vivacity and openness of thought which cannot be so readily attached to the relatively closed life-world of his or her predecessors (Schutz and Luckmann 1974: 88). At a distance or immediately, they may be biographically, intellectually and socially engaged with the author, and what he or she writes and reads may be read by them and *vice versa*. They are in that sense part of an assumed and living community of the mind, a current intellectual generation or a working counterpart of a generation, a school or a politics, sharing a *Weltanschauung* or collective experience (Mannheim 1960a: 242), and having 'in common a sector of time which makes it possible for me to act upon them as they may act upon me within a communicative environment . . . ' (Schutz 1967: 318). Reference to

them can signal that one is an informed and knowing associate of that which is fresh, timely and pressing, not at all lagging behind the movement of ideas, a privileged participant in a social process in which, as Tarde put it, ‘the march of imitation from top to bottom . . . goes on’ (Tarde 1969: 190).

Robert Reiner reflected that ‘academic life is riddled [by] . . . a love of the new and a wish to show that you’re new. . . . there is this constant wish to show that you’re [at] the frontiers of knowledge, you’re absolutely up to date with current thinking and so on’. To be in or near a top or a centre where intellectual innovation is still taking place confers a sense of a closeness to events, of being an insider, of experiencing the still fermenting and the personal before it becomes fusty, formalized, alien, unremarkable, commonplace (see Simmel 1971: 363), scholastic or even, perhaps, antiquarian. David Downes remarked that ‘I have a great fear of antiquarianism and I think maybe that our generation [of the] 1960s, we were frightened of being just antiquarians’ And Tim Newburn agreed:

‘References have a symbolic function as well, which is to say that they indicate that one is, in theory, up to date, reading broadly, aware of the latest theoretical ideas and so on and so forth. So I think there’s a, without wanting to make it sound overly cynical, there is obviously a game being played as well with readers and I certainly have an eye to what I think is going to be considered to be, others will see as relevant, important, necessary in some way. . . . I would always include more recent citations [to show that I’m] up to speed, aware of current debates in the same way as we, using . . . the Goffmanesque dramaturgical analogy of acting on the stage and so forth, that, as in other areas of our life, we’re aware of expectations and the need to try and meet those. And one of the ways we meet the expectations of scholarship apparently, is, I

think is to show . . . that we're not just dinosaurs who happen [have] to read things in the [19]80s or the [19]70s or whatever and haven't kept abreast of developments.' By extension, and as the editor of a journal himself and a reader of submissions for other journals, he would scrutinise the impressions constructed by others in their deployment of references:²³

'[I] always look at the citations to get a quick sense of who I think's written this or in what style it is and where it sits in relation to other things. So that citations would affect my . . . first reaction to a piece quite strongly. So that if they were all . . . reasonably ancient, then I would wonder where this person had been and what they were doing and why it was that there was apparently nothing relevant in the last 10 or 20 years, whatever the period may be.'

Citations may not in that sense simply be technical or utilitarian devices but signifiers that bear a substantial iconic, existential and social load, signalling something about one's competence; who one is; whom one admires; what intellectual groups one claims as one's own, and how one defines their membership and boundaries.²⁴ They are attempts, in other words, symbolically to affirm the importance of people,²⁵ ideas and social worlds. They convey how one aspires publicly to be defined and placed as an alert and wide-awake person at the core of the academy. They create a self and its future trajectory, flagging what, as one colleague said, 'your life project is . . . it's a way of signifying that'. Adam Crawford remarked: 'References are signifiers of identity and belonging, they suggest who we reflect who we are and the reference group to which we consider ourselves to belong in our intellectual endeavours. These are more likely to be (but not always) the living and our contemporaries.'

It is perhaps but a step for citations to become features of a social engineering process in which criminologists individually or in combination more or less deliberately exercise patronage²⁶ or promote one another in what Nikolas Rose informally called 'citation rings or citation cabals.'²⁷ Very much to the point, Frances Heidensohn remembered a conversation at one of the meetings of the National Deviancy Symposium at the University of York in the early 1970s - the meetings which were to shape so many criminological life-chances. In that conversation, one sociologist of deviancy was overheard promising another 'I'll quote you if you quote me'.²⁸ Scholars may even refer heavily to themselves as they clamber up the ranks of citation indices.²⁹ Nikolas Rose remembered:

'I recall some years ago - when I was at a conference on the history of the human sciences - being amused by a Spanish psychologist and historian of psychology who used citation indices to study the relative importance of different Spanish psychologists. He cited his own work copiously in his published pieces, and was surrounded by a strangely large group of acolytes all of whom also cited him and one another profusely and exclusively - which of course meant that pretty soon he was far up the citation list of the most influential Spanish psychologists.'

Conclusion

Chronocentrism and its allied beliefs must account in part for the pronounced custom in criminology and other disciplines to cite what is recent and neglect what is old. The matter is important because what is named and what overlooked mould what passes for authoritative learning; the phrasing of problems and the identification of answers; the selection and marshalling of evidence and argument; literary etiquette; the approved history of ideas; and, most central to the scholarly project of criminology, the accumulation of knowledge

over time.³⁰ If Max Steuer was right when he said that ‘science is a structure that is worked on for many, many generations’;³¹ if Nigel Fielding was right when he said that ‘the most damaging thing is that this works against cumulative knowledge, which latter is the mark of a mature science’;³² there may be grounds for concern about the enterprise of criminology.

Notes

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¹ All quotations lacking reference to textual sources should be assumed to stem from those interviews or that correspondence.

² Garfinkel baptized ethnomethodology and used it to effect in developing a methodology to explore or create marginal situations in which commonplace meanings became anthropologically strange.

³ Gusfield analysed deviance, and particularly drinking, as a cultural construction fabricated in the status politics of America. It would be possible to catalogue the equally valuable contributions made by the other anathematised authors to criminology and the sociology of deviance, but I wished only to provide illustrations of what has been lost.

⁴ In a survey conducted of all citations in the 1951, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990 and 2000 volumes of *The British Journal of Delinquency* and *The British Journal of Criminology*, a survey which we describe at greater length below and which yielded a total sample of 4030 references, there was one reference to Matza's *Becoming Deviant*; 1 to Aaron Cicourel in 1970; none to Jack Douglas or Harold Garfinkel; 2 (one in 1980 and one in 1990) to the works of Joseph Gusfield; 1 to John Kitsuse in 1970; none to Alfred Lindesmith; 9 to the works of Hermann Mannheim, but none more recent than 1980; three to Walter Reckless, but none more recent than 1960; none to Robert Scott; none to Thomas Scheff; 2 to James Short, both in the 1970 volume; and four to Paul Tappan, none later than 1970.

⁵ Nigel Fielding remarked that 'The new label is about careers and the need to look like one's found something new. The new term lacks the virtue of precision, too. "Constructionism" is latched onto by students because they have heard the word "deconstruct", and find the approach appealing because it seems to involve playing with words in the kind of non-validate-able "analysis" that marks cultural and media studies. Students do not like to be told to look instead at SI, because there they find systematic procedures, formal validation criteria, and in some branches, quantification.'

⁶ Adam Crawford observed that 'There is a presumed "shelf-life" to empirical research, which suggests that "things change", people's attitudes and behaviour as well as professional practice. In some circumstances this may be true. But I also think there is an element of self-selection. If in doubt the more recent (so long as it is methodologically robust) may be the more empirically relevant, and therefore defensible.'

⁷ Although he may have been a little too sanguine. Some do still search for the single variable that will explain crime. See Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990.

⁸ But the electronic data base of the new Social Science Library of the University of Oxford does reach back to the 1920s.

⁹ It is, of course, possible that citation practices in journal articles are *sui generis*, and that books would disclose different patterns, but I can think of no good reason why this should be so.

¹⁰ Anonymous referee of an earlier draft of this article.

¹¹ See, for example, the journals that are devoted in metaphysical fashion to citation research itself, including criminological citation: *Journal Citation Reports* and *Journal Performance Indicators*. Criminologists have themselves explored how often and where they and their colleagues have been cited (for instance, Cohn and Farrington 1998). And *The British Journal of Criminology*'s own web-site contains information about how it is ranked in citation studies.

¹² The tabulations were done by Michael Prachar to whom I am grateful.

¹³ Edwin Sutherland was cited in the 1951 volume and in all other volumes except that of 1960, and Howard Becker began to make his mark in the 1960 volume and has been steadily cited thereafter.

¹⁴ Nicky Rafter, for example, found it difficult to come across a copy of the first edition of the English translation of Lombroso's *Donna Delinquante*, published by T. Fisher Unwin in London in 1895 as *The Female Offender*. See her introduction to the new version of the work which she herself edited (Lombroso 2004).

¹⁵ I was struck not only by the feeling that permeated many of their answers – it is clear that colleagues sense that all is not right with the discipline's management of its past – but also by their candour. People expressed themselves with admirable frankness. All quotations unaccompanied by documentary citation should be assumed to stem from interview or email correspondence.

¹⁶ But he added, and in illustration of the ambivalence we all tend to share in selecting authorities, that ‘I also feel that you have to deal with arguments in terms of their strongest possible presentation and therefore if I know there’s a kind of new book or article to be written on a particular line, then I’d probably want to tackle that rather than an earlier version of the same argument.’

¹⁷ Lucia Zedner observed ‘for all the reasons your respondents set out, it is not so surprising that there is a strong tendency to quote the latest author. What intrigues me is why and how the ‘classic’ works, still cited decades hence, achieve this status. Presumably it is largely a result of their outstanding calibre, but I suspect it is not only that. Take the example example of Herbert Packer’s *The Limits of the Criminal Sanction* [1969], a work still widely cited thirty years on but judging from the references probably scarcely ever read, it might be that some works gain a citation history that is almost independent of the original work.’

¹⁸ ‘Teaching quality assurance’ is part of the new battery of regulatory mechanisms imposed internally and externally on British universities under the new managerialism introduced in the 1980s and 1990s.

¹⁹ External examiners in the UK are recruited as a matter of course from other universities to inspect assessed work, advise on procedures and otherwise ensure that the standards applied in examinations in one university are comparable in quality with those maintained elsewhere.

²⁰ Adam Crawford said ‘Criminology as many people have noted is a ‘rendez-vous’ discipline, and not everyone comes to the discipline with the same background rooted in traditional social/criminological texts. . . . [Some] have their backgrounds in philosophy, law, policy studies, politics etc. We should not expect all those that engage with criminology to be aficionados in the discipline.’

²¹ Yet I am still not sure that the fragmentation of an eclectic and pragmatic discipline wholly explains why the past should be so decisively obliterated within each of its strands.

²² The Research Assessment Exercise is a periodic review of the quantity, quality and environment of research in all university departments that is conducted for the purpose of apportioning State funds.

²³ Another colleague remarked that, when reviewing articles for journals, she might in appropriate cases ‘ask . . . why doesn’t it have references beyond 1985? . . . I would certainly in referee’s comments say ‘why hasn’t this person referred to a broader and more up-to-date literature?’’

²⁴ Tim Newburn said: ‘I think in any of the fields we might work within, I suspect lots of people will have in their minds some sort of picture of who are the people who . . . for whatever reason, are closest to the centre of things, intellectually, scholarly, empirically or otherwise. And there becomes a kind of informal league table I suspect, one which we might not necessarily agree upon, but we probably all guess we might share to some extent. And I suspect . . . network analysis would find . . . first division folk citing first division folk more than . . . citing people they consider to be third division folk.’ Robert Reiner said more simply, ‘citing people you know is not just a question of being friendly, it’s just that they are the first names that come to mind as it were.’ Curiously enough, only one of the criminologists interviewed said that he circulated or received off-prints as a matter of course (‘I realize now that even if [an article is] in a good journal, there’s absolutely no guarantee [that people would see it]. And if you want someone to rate it, you probably need to send it to them. And so I’ve now started . . .’) It might have been supposed not only that off-prints

would also act as boundary-markers but would contribute to the propensity to cite the current work of those regarded as fellow insiders.

²⁵ Declan Roche said ‘I think you probably do look to find opportunities to cite your friends if you can. I mean if it’s a choice between two books and one was by a friend, you’d certainly put the one in by a friend or at least put it in as well.’

²⁶ David Downes observed ‘I don’t think there’s anything too wrong with that because there’s a great danger that, in the huge wealth of work that’s done, that people get overlooked and neglected even though their work is invaluable.’ Coretta Phillips remarked ‘I suppose what I’ve done sometimes is . . . cite Masters’ dissertations or . . . things where somebody’s done what I think is some really interesting work, and I . . . see that as a way of promoting them . . . [where] perhaps they’re not exposed or well known about.’ And Robert Reiner said very much the same.

²⁷ In a rather different sense, Nigel Fielding commented that ‘Catching these citation circles is a major objection of citation analysis. It involves some complex programming and is an established sub-field of science policy studies. A contemporary application is coming under the aegis of e-Science (Grid and High Performance computing for scientific applications), where citation analysis is used in fields like biology to deal with the overload in numbers of scientific papers; cross-citation is used to establish promising lines of research and the technique is of particular importance in human medicine. The key point about citation analysis is not to focus on individuals but on aggregates such as research groups connected with other research groups.’

²⁸ That practice seems to have been rife in criminological folk-lore. Robert Reiner could also remember how ‘I was once at a National Deviancy Group symposium in the early ‘[19]70s and I was on the disco floor when one famous new criminologist kind of danced by, and there’s another one, and they tapped each other on the shoul-

der and said, “right, it’s agreed then, I’ll cite you on page 7 if you cite me on page 14.” It is not clear whether Frances Heidensohn was on that disco floor at the same time or whether it was another conversation she heard.

²⁹ Nigel Fielding again remarked that ‘The current equivalent of this includes practices that manipulate online search engines. There are several practices. One anonymously ‘reviews’ one’s own book for Amazon, asks everyone with whom one is friendly to cite your review in an online message, and the compiler devices that look for ‘hits’ to identify publications about which ‘everyone is talking’ will elevate your item. . . . I am aware that there are several Masters programmes that have engaged in these practices so that if one types in a search for ‘criminology and criminal justice’ given courses come up receiving more mentions. It strikes me as pretty shoddy.’

³⁰ I am grateful to Nigel Dodd for this point.

³¹ M. Steuer, seminar on *The Scientific Study of Society*, London School of Economics, 4 February 2004.

³² He went on to say that this affects ‘patterns of adoption in new techniques and technologies for social research, such as secondary analysis of qualitative datasets.’ Advancement in academic disciplines is associated with the ‘new’ and kudos comes from conducting ‘original’ empirical studies, preferably of some wholly new phenomenon, rather than from re-working data collected previously.

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