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Security and Visions of the Criminal: Technology, Professional Criminality and Social Change in Victorian and Edwardian Britain

David Churchill

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The later nineteenth century saw the formation of two distinct visions of serious criminality. Previous studies of the weak-willed, 'degenerate' offender, have neglected the simultaneous appearance of the modern professional criminal. This essay reveals that the rise of the security industry in the Victorian era served to reshape notions of criminal professionalism, imbuing them with a new emphasis on the technical proficiency of thieves. This image of the criminal provided an outlet for ambivalent reflections on social and technological change, much as similar, high-security visions of the criminal have ever since. Hence, this essay both traces the origins of a neglected aspect of modern criminological thought and reconstructs the historical role of security provision in shaping visions of the criminal.

Keywords

Security industry; security technology; situational crime prevention; techno-crime; criminological theory; safe-breaking.

**Security and Visions of the Criminal: Technology, Professional Criminality and
Social Change in Victorian and Edwardian Britain**

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Late in 1906, the *Daily Mail* carried an article entitled: 'SCIENTIFIC BURGLARS. SAFES BROKEN OPEN WITH CHEMICALS.' It reported that a 'severe burglary epidemic' was underway in London, with metropolitan householders and shopkeepers under siege. The latest victim was Mr C. Armand Hoghton: the burglars had waited in the garden of his Hyde Park Terrace residence before effecting 'an easy entrance' through a ground-floor window, and making off with antiques and valuables valued at over £400. Notwithstanding the apparent ease of entry in this case, the *Mail* linked it to a more sophisticated break-in reported the previous day, in order to proffer commentary on 'the new scientific type of burglar': 'The old-fashioned thief, who more or less clumsily breaks into a house, is still in existence, but police records show that the number of burglars who are sufficiently educated and skilful to press into their service such scientific discoveries as may aid them is rapidly increasing.' The piece went on to survey various 'tools of the finest and most ingenious make', with which such advanced thieves were invariably equipped. The police supposedly now recognised the marks of a drill, hammer or chisel as evidence that 'an unskilful, clumsy hand has been at work'; by contrast, the 'up-to-date scientific burglar' made use of more sophisticated equipment – the 'CHEMICALS' of the title – namely thermite and nitro-glycerine.¹

The article highlighted a familiar figure of late-Victorian and Edwardian newspaper crime reporting: the, expert, technically proficient, so-called 'scientific' burglar.² This figure – who epitomised the idea of professional criminality before the First World War – is profoundly at odds with visions of the criminal most often

¹ London Metropolitan Archives, Chubb & Son: CLC/B/002/10/01/060/230M (*Daily Mail*, 11 October 1906).

² This essay uses the terms 'burglar' and 'burglary' loosely, as did most Victorian and Edwardian commentators; the discourse of professional 'burglary' was oriented primarily around break-ins at commercial premises, yet under common law the offence of burglary was limited to dwellings.

associated with the late nineteenth century. This period is best remembered as the formative age of the 'science' of criminology – of positivistic theories of criminality which are said to have eclipsed mid-Victorian moral individualism (though cf. Bailey 1997). Central to official criminological discourse at this time was the 'degenerate' recidivist – a mentally deficient, weak-willed, pitiable offender. This atavistic image of the criminal, stunted by either defective inheritance or the environment of the modern city, gained wide circulation amongst policy-makers and penal medical experts, and was key to the early development of criminology in Britain as much as abroad (Garland 1985, 1988; Pick 1989; Wiener 1990; Leps 1992: ch.1-3; Pratt 1997: ch.3; Davie 2005; Becker 2006). According to Neil Davie, 'the general principle of the habitual offender as someone both low in intelligence and largely intractable was most definitely *de rigueur* among British criminologists and government officials' at this time (Davie 2005: 192). Yet alternative visions of the recidivist fitted poorly with the 'degeneration' framework (Bailey 1993: 244-45; Taylor 2005: 12-15).³ Notably at odds with this framework was the 'scientific' burglar – an inventive, organised, educated and highly skilled offender, who thus bore the classic hallmarks of the professional criminal.⁴ Writing in 1907, Sir Robert Anderson – former head of the Criminal Investigation Department of the Metropolitan Police – asserted that 'professional' criminals (those 'who keep society in a state of siege'), 'are as strong as they are clever...*Lombroso theories [sic] have no application to such men*' (Anderson 1984 [1907]: 93, emphasis added). Though it has attracted less scholarly attention, the image of the technically proficient, professional offender has endured (in one form or another) just as powerfully as pathological visions of the criminal. Each represented a coherent view of serious criminality, and each remains a vital force in the ideologies of crime and control. Thus, the later nineteenth century saw the rise of two distinct visions of serious criminality; in order further to understand this fertile phase in the development of criminological thought, this essay analyses historical discourses of the professional criminal in the Victorian and Edwardian era.

Yet moreover, in analysing the emergence of modern ideas of criminal professionalism, this essay provides a significant study of how security provision has

³ Prison psychiatrists considered that the degeneration framework applied only to a minority of convicts (Garland 1988: 4-5).

⁴ Official discussion of 'professional' criminality at the time was often rather confused, and many commentators struggled to distinguish the resourceful, capable offender from the weak-willed degenerate (Pratt 1997: 10-11; Davie 2005: 201).

shaped visions of the criminal. The contrast between images of the professional and the degenerate criminal owed much to their separate social foundations. The degenerate was born of the medical expertise of the Victorian penal estate, and raised by the nascent discipline of criminology; the professional, on the other hand, grew out of the proliferation of high-tech security commodities. Hence, this study sheds new light on the role of the security industry in shaping modern attitudes towards crime and criminals. To date, there has been very little research in this area: historians have closely analysed the role of criminal justice agencies in shaping discourses of crime, yet they have made little mention of commercial security providers.⁵ Recent work by Eloise Moss – who argues that advertisers for the burglary insurance industry contributed to a ‘culture of fear’ surrounding burglary early in the twentieth century – has begun to address this deficit (Moss 2011; see also Smith 2012).⁶ The present essay traces the contribution of the security industry to representations of the criminal further back in time, to the period after 1850 in which the image of the professional offender took shape.

This historical enquiry provides a new perspective on the social consequences of commercial security provision. Existing work on contemporary security and attitudes to crime and criminals has focused mainly on two major developments. Firstly, the growth of security commodities is intimately associated with the re-emergence of situational perspectives on crime – particularly via rational choice and routine activities theory – which thus constitute new ‘criminologies of everyday life’ (O’Malley 1992: 262-5; Garland 1996: 450-2; Garland 2001).⁷ For David Garland (2000), the rise of situational crime prevention (SCP) marked a decisive break with pathological theories of criminality long nurtured within the penal system, shifting analysis from criminality to crime. Secondly, scholars have linked contemporary private policing and security to mounting fear of crime and the breakdown of established trust relations, and argued that increasing security provision tends paradoxically to exacerbate concerns about insecurity (Crawford 2000; Zedner 2003: 163-66; Loader and Walker 2007: ch.8). In particular, Ian Loader

⁵ For an overview, see Emsley (2010: ch.7); on the state-centred perspective of modern criminal justice history, see Churchill (2014).

⁶ Moss has also worked on the lock and safe industry (2013: ch.6), yet this aspect of her work focuses more on domestic surveillance than constructions of criminality. (I am grateful to Moss for allowing me access to this portion of her thesis.)

⁷ Though note the roots of such ideas in enlightenment social thought (Newman and Morangiu 1997; Garland 2000: 3-4).

has highlighted to the role of the security industry in fuelling public concerns about crime and 'insatiable' demands for protection (Loader 1997: 151-55; Loader 1999: 381-82). Both sets of scholarship – on the rise of SCP, and on mounting fear and anxiety – illuminate important aspects of contemporary mentalities of security. Yet such studied attention to these aspects – both of which are considered characteristically late-modern – has allowed other, deep-seated phenomena to elude analysis.⁸ Minimal attention having been paid to security before the late twentieth century, scholars have yet to recognise that certain ways of imagining the criminal have long been shaped by security provision. By analysing the role of security in forging images of the professional offender, this essay reveals alternative symbolic properties of security technologies – inherited from the Victorian and Edwardian era – which continue to inform discourses of high-tech criminality today.

Hence, this essay examines historically the relation between security provision and visions of the criminal, and assesses the implications of this historical study for contemporary criminology. The first part analyses representations of the professional, technically adroit criminal deployed in security product advertising. However, the second part argues the security industry's most tangible contribution to broader discourses of criminality came not through its advertising, but through the actual security devices which it produced. The continual flow of improved products onto the market provided the symbolic resources with which to reformulate longstanding notions of criminal professionalism in increasingly technological terms. The third part illuminates the social functions of this image of the criminal, which served as a vehicle for reflection on the ambiguities of modern social change. Finally, based on this historical study, the fourth part proposes an alternative framework for understanding the impact of security technology on contemporary perceptions of criminality. In sum, this essay offers a critical yet nuanced assessment of the social role of the security industry, which highlights neglected links between security enterprise and perceptions of criminality.

⁸ Furthermore, it has marginalised the role of 'situational' perspectives on crime in the era of the modern criminal justice state.

SOURCES AND METHOD

This essay is based upon qualitative, archival research on documents compiled by the Chubb & Son lock and safe company. In particular, extensive use is made of the firm's scrapbook collection, which preserves a substantial set of marketing materials, correspondence and press cuttings relating to security commerce. Of the 64 volumes covering the years up to 1914, a core sample of 19 volumes (spaced roughly evenly over the period) was consulted in full, supplemented by a more cursory analysis of intervening volumes. On this basis, a close reading of marketing materials, newspaper cuttings and other records was conducted, to decipher how criminals were represented in these documents.⁹ This archive provides a unique, extensive and rich resource for historical research on crime and security. However, as the documents were purposely selected by the firm for preservation, one should assume they are not a representative sample of those in circulation at the time. In the case of newspaper cuttings, it is clear that only reports of certain kinds of offences (predominantly those featuring particular security devices) were retained. Hence, this essay does not attempt to quantify the incidence or characteristics of crime reports over time, recognising that the sources consulted embody only a sub-section of a much wider and more variegated discourse on crime and criminals.¹⁰ To situate this material in context, further sections of the Chubb archive (including financial records) and published works on crime and criminals were also explored. Thus based upon extensive archival research, this essay reassembles an historical discourse of professional criminality, assesses the contribution of the security industry to that discourse, and identifies its broader social bases and social functions.

SECURITY ADVERTISING AND THE PROFESSIONAL CRIMINAL

A modern security industry first developed in Britain following technological advances in lock design in the 1770s. In due course, there emerged a collection of brand-name firms, producing technically sophisticated locks and safes, and marketing their products nationwide. A series of public lock-picking competitions in the 1850s and 1860s subjected the emerging industry to unprecedented public

⁹ The provenance of many items in this collection is not recorded, yet it is usually possible to approximate a document's date from the context of the collection.

¹⁰ Hence too this essay does not explore connections between the discourse of professional burglary and other kinds of offending.

exposure, and did much to cement its reputation as a dynamic body of firms capable of providing a significant measure of security in an era of rapid social change (Churchill 2015). The emergence of the security industry in Britain was paralleled internationally, notably in America, a vibrant lock and safe industry also developed at its core. Furthermore, America led the development of private security services: the second half of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of a broad range of investigative agencies and nascent transit security operations, with the latter moving into payroll delivery and bank transfers by the turn of the century (McCrie 1997; Miller 2013). Back in Britain, the later nineteenth century saw the pluralisation of the security industry beyond its historic roots in lock- and safe-making, into burglar alarms, purpose-built safe deposits, and burglary insurance (Churchill forthcoming). However, while adequate data is lacking, it seems that the market for new products and services (including burglary insurance) remained fairly small, at least before the 1920s (O'Malley and Hutchinson 2007: 384-85; cf. Moss 2011: 1048). Lock and safe companies thus remained at the core of the security industry in this period, and so this essay specifically seeks their contribution to the construction of the professional criminal.

From the very origin of the security industry, manufacturers consistently focused on the exploits and capabilities of highly sophisticated criminals. Joseph Bramah (a pioneering lock-maker) issued perhaps the earliest commentary of this kind in 1785, cautioning that:

no invention for the security of property hath yet been offered to the world, which the ingenuity of wickedness hath not found means to defeat; nor is it probable that the genius of any one man will ever strike out a method, by which all the arts and manoeuvres, which are practised in the science of robbery, may effectually be counteracted. Modern depredation is reduced to a system, in which art and force are exerted with such skill and power, as to elude precaution, and to defy resistance (Bramah 1785: 2).

The problem of crime was thus located principally in the rise of the 'science of robbery' – a systematic, mechanically adroit and professional mode of theft. In this respect, Bramah was closely followed by his commercial rivals: advertisements for Chubb's 'detector' lock in the 1820s similarly played on the figure of the 'ingenious depredator', and two decades later on the 'force and ingenuity of the most skilful and

determined btrglar [sic]'.¹¹ Such emphasis on the technical capability of thieves was a clear theme from the 1850s onwards, as interest in criminal tactics shifted from lock-picking to the more diverse art of safe-breaking (see also Moss 2013: ch.6). Advertisements for George Price's 'drill-proof' safes in the 1850s and 1860s repeatedly cautioned readers about 'the present race of clever and scientific thieves' and the technical capability of 'the modern "cracksman"',¹² while a leaflet issued by Chatwood in the 1870s waxed lyrical about the 'consummate skill and ingenuity' of thieves, and 'the insidious attacks of the professional burglar'.¹³

The security industry's focus upon professional, high-tech criminality served particular commercial purposes. The firms cited above were relative newcomers to the market in security devices, and they sought to establish a competitive advantage over long-standing producers on grounds of quality. Cheaper locks and secure boxes were available, yet brand names like Bramah, Chubb or Chatwood promised state-of-the-art products assuring unparalleled – sometimes even 'perfect' or 'absolute' – security (Churchill 2015). Hence, these companies had an interest in portraying property crime as a high-tech problem, which demanded high-tech solutions. While some advertisements stressed the 'increased robberies' caused by 'bad locks',¹⁴ this strategy tended to promote high-tech locks in general rather than a given firm's products in particular. Hence, companies generally preferred to stress the *quality* rather than the quantity of crime, using criminal ingenuity to establish the necessity of purchasing a given branded security device. Accordingly, the burglar was portrayed as an offender of consummate ability, yet still incapable of penetrating the latest protective products.¹⁵ For example, in a mid-century handbill, George Price promised prospective customers that, with his patent two-guinea bank lock, 'you may bid defiance to all the thieves and burglars in Christendom. Your Cash will be safe.'¹⁶ At the top of the market, a device competed on the basis of its mechanical merit,

¹¹ CLC/B/002/10/01/002/025B (Chubb leaflet, undated [1820s?]); CLC/B/002/10/01/009/004 (Chubb leaflet, undated [1820s?]); CLC/B/002/10/01/009/008 (Chubb leaflet, undated [1820s?]); CLC/B/002/10/01/002/059D (*Illustrated News*, June 1843).

¹² CLC/B/002/10/01/007/043A (G. Price leaflet, June 1855); CLC/B/002/10/01/006/005 (G. Price leaflet, June 1855); CLC/B/002/10/01/007/096B (*Wolverhampton Chronicle*, 12 May 1858); CLC/B/002/10/01/010/049A (G. Price leaflet, July 1863), pp.8, 11; CLC/B/002/10/01/013/070F (*Leeds Mercury*, 16 February 1875). See also Price (1866: 4, 30).

¹³ CLC/B/002/10/01/017/031 (Chatwood leaflet, 1876), p.5.

¹⁴ CLC/B/002/10/01/002/029 (Morden leaflet, undated [1830s?]). See also Price (1860: 3).

¹⁵ This contrasts with (later) burglary insurance advertisements (Moss 2011).

¹⁶ CLC/B/002/10/01/009/063E (G. Price poster, undated [1864]).

measured primarily against the burglar's purported mechanical talents. Via scientific security design, entrepreneurs promised to nullify the threat posed by this 'science' of burglary: as one mid-century combination lock advertisement put it, 'The burglar [confronting the lock], with all his skill, can here do no more than common men – ie., guess a million times'.¹⁷

The same vision of the professional burglar also surfaced in broader discourse at this time. From the mid-nineteenth century, the language of 'scientific' criminality recurred in both in published works on crime and security (Cruikshank 1851: 4-7; Binny 2009 [1862]: 334-55; Power-Berrey 1899: chs.5, 11; Anderson 1984 [1907]), and in newspaper crime reports, where it provided an instant indication of criminal sophistication (see also Smith 2012: 271).¹⁸ Furthermore, commentaries on serious crime directly replicated the motifs of security advertising: for example, a mid-Victorian article in the *Engineer* highlighted the 'mechanical adroitness' of burglars, which set them apart from opportunistic thieves.¹⁹ Indeed, by 1870, *The Times* fretted that London's criminal elite were no longer 'vulgar housebreakers', but 'modern artists' (in the sense of technical artistry).²⁰ However, one should not assume a causal relationship between security advertising and the representation of criminals in broader culture. In recent decades, scholars of consumption and marketing have argued persuasively against earlier studies which attributed a formidable measure of manipulative cultural control to advertising, both past and present (Schudson 1993; Bevir and Trentmann 2008; Schwarzkopf 2011; Miller 2012: 112-4; cf. Ewen 2001 [1976]). Moreover, the available evidence similarly cautions against overstating the historical significance of security product advertising. Firstly, depicting criminals as professionals was often subordinate to other messages in security product marketing; many advertisements instead prioritised claims to trust in brand names, or to intrinsic product quality, and hence

¹⁷ CLC/B/002/10/01/009/010 (Munger leaflet, undated [1860s?]).

¹⁸ See for example CLC/B/002/10/01/010/068A (unidentified newspaper, undated [1860s]); CLC/B/002/10/01/011/093K (*Weekly Times*, 2 Mar 1869); CLC/B/002/10/01/029/055B (unidentified newspaper, undated [1880s?]); CLC/B/002/10/01/056/267TM (*Daily Telegraph*, 7 March 1901); CLC/B/002/10/01/058/74L (*Glasgow Evening News*, 5 June 1903); CLC/B/002/10/01/064/61TL-TM (*Daily Mail*, 2 May 1913); CLC/B/002/10/01/063/35TM (*Daily Express*, 10 June 1913); CLC/B/002/10/01/063/37BL (*Pall Mall Gazette*, 29 July 1913); CLC/B/002/10/01/064/49TL-BL-BM (*Daily Sketch*, 21 Jan 1913).

¹⁹ Quoted in CLC/B/002/10/01/020/096 (unidentified newspaper, undated [1860s]).

²⁰ CLC/B/002/10/01/012/020F-H (*The Times*, 10 May 1870).

made only passing reference to criminality.²¹ Secondly, the scale of security product promotion was relatively modest. Surviving Chubb accounts indicate that annual advertising spending fluctuated significantly, but it stood at over £1,600 in 1880, and this figure seems to have grown little by the eve of the First World War.²² By comparison, firms with the highest advertising outlay at this time (the patent medicine producers) were each spending up to £100,000 per year on advertising (Nevett 1982: 71-4). When one further considers that much security advertising appeared in trade publications (for builders and architects), the security industry's contribution to an already saturated marketing landscape (McFall 2004) appears marginal (cf. Moss 2011).

Historically, the security industry has depicted the criminal as a highly capable professional. In their advertisements, brand-name security firms repeatedly positioned the burglar's technical skill centre-stage, especially from the 1850s. This focus on the criminal (rather than the crime itself) suggests a rather different relationship between security and visions of offending to that promoted via contemporary situational crime prevention. Yet given doubts regarding the influence of advertising, one must search more widely for the role of security in shaping modern visions of the criminal.

SECURITY TECHNOLOGIES AND THE CHANGING FACE OF THE PROFESSIONAL CRIMINAL

Even if security advertising had only a limited impact, there were other ways in which security provision drove change to visions of the criminal. Though less directly than advertising, the symbolic properties of security products themselves played a major role. By the early twentieth century, burglary insurance policies – which insisted that householders adopt particular, branded security measures – explicitly linked security technologies to criminal skill (Moss 2011: 1059-60). Yet decades before the coming

²¹ Furthermore, most advertisements stressed a particular brand or product's competitive edge ('buy Chubb') above the necessity of advanced security devices more generally ('buy safes'). In such a crowded marketplace, the latter tactic poses the hazard of other firms 'free-riding' on a competitor's marketing.

²² CLC/B/002/04/05/004 (Chubb trade accounts); CLC/B/002/04/01/001-002 (Chubb balance sheets). Annual advertising spending at Hobbs Hart – another brand-name lock- and safe-maker – was approximately £500 for the years around 1890: CLC/B/002/HH04/01/001 (Hobbs Hart statements of accounts).

of burglary insurance, high-tech locks and safes – which attracted considerable public interest by the 1850s (Churchill 2015) – themselves provided a lens through which to reinterpret serious criminality. Hence, this section outlines the historical development of security technologies, and analyses how these devices refigured visions of the criminal.

For the first time, the Victorian and Edwardian era witnessed continual, incremental development of security devices in response to perceived advances in criminal techniques. By the early nineteenth century, skilled lock-picking was seen as the burglar's principal accomplishment. This view was reflected and entrenched in a series of lock-picking competitions (between rival lock-makers) in the 1850s, which in turn resulted in a wave of lock designs meant to prevent new picking methods (Churchill 2015). However, from the 1850s, perceived criminal talents diversified beyond lock-picking, and the use of gunpowder and drills to derange lock mechanisms prompted further design innovation. Yet increasingly, attention focused on attacks to the body of the safe itself, particularly after the sensational Cornhill burglary (1865) revealed that doors could be forced out (and thence wrenched open) by hammering metal wedges into the frame (Price 1866; see also Meier 2011, 18-20).²³ This method immediately entered the annals of scientific burglary, and the security industry responded by making safes 'wedge-proof' – for example, by fitting the door tightly to the frame to prevent insertion of wedges, or using 'hook' bolts to bind the door strongly to the frame (Chubb 1875: 30-7). By the turn of the century, focus had shifted again from mechanical modes of safe-breaking to more exotic technologies, notably nitro-glycerine (including as dynamite), thermite, the oxy-acetylene blowpipe and electrical appliances (Power-Berrey 1899: 160-8), breeding a further round of innovation in security technologies. One can thus trace from the mid-nineteenth century the escalating dynamic of innovation in security technologies and criminal techniques which would persist thereafter (McIntosh 1971; Byrne 1992; Hobbs 2010).²⁴

At each stage in this sequence, the burglar's ability to circumvent a particular model of safe marked him out as a professional operator. Hence, the development of advanced security devices helped to refigure established ideas criminal

²³ I am currently pursuing further research on this case and public reactions to it.

²⁴ I am currently pursuing further research on this topic.

professionalism in more explicitly technological terms. In themselves, ideas of hardened offenders, criminal specialism and the ‘underworld’ long pre-dated the mid-nineteenth century (Dodsworth 2013; Shore 2015). Specifically, the idea of the ‘system of robbery’ – found frequently in early security product advertising – can be traced back at least to the mid-eighteenth century. Such systematic thieving was marked by discipline, preparation, planning and conspiracy; in the eighteenth century it was particularly associated with highwaymen, and by the early nineteenth century with juvenile pickpockets (Shoemaker 2006; Shore 1999). The Victorian emblem of professional criminality as ‘scientific’ arose as long-standing notions of systematic thieving were exposed to the symbolic assault of successive waves of high-tech security devices. Thus, scientific criminality was a synthesis of methodical planning and preparation (systematic thieving) and command of technological power (mobilised against modern security devices). Few actual burglars displayed these competencies – indeed, much work in crime history has exposed the myth that Victorian crime was largely the product of discrete ‘criminal class’ (see Emsley 2010: ch.7). Nonetheless, a small sub-set of offenders did conform – to a greater or lesser extent – to such stereotypes, and a measure of specialisation and capability was evident amongst the most serious of thieves (Godfrey et al 2011: 141-42; Brown 2011, 562-63; see also Taylor 1984; Hobbs 1995).

Moreover, security technologies were integral to media commentary on criminal professionalism. From the 1850s, newspaper features periodically traced the dialectical development of criminal techniques and security technologies – or, ‘The Progress of the Fight Between Safe-Makers and Safe-Breakers’.²⁵ Furthermore, in reports on individual crimes, security devices served as a ready yardstick by which journalists assessed the offender’s competence. For example, in a report on the raid at the Diamond Merchant’s Alliance Company in 1897, the burglar’s skill was brought into relief by the quality of security provision at the premises, apparently ‘one of the most carefully guarded and secure establishments in London’: ‘massive revolving steel shutters’ protected the windows and doors; the interior walls and ceiling were plated with steel; and the police were under special instructions to watch the interior

²⁵ CLC/B/002/10/01/061/243 (*Daily Mail*, 30 November 1906). Further examples include: CLC/B/002/10/01/010/042A-B (*Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 1 March 1866); CLC/B/002/10/01/010/042C-D (*Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 8 March 1866); CLC/B/002/10/01/022/021B-C (unidentified newspaper, undated [1870s?]); CLC/B/002/10/01/061/269TM-L (*Daily Mail*, 18 July 1907).

(through a grille). In this context, the burglars' success in gaining access marked them out as members of the 'High Mob...who scorn small affairs, and who are regarded in the highest reverences by the smaller practitioners in private plunder. They keep step with science, and they have every new invention at their command.'²⁶ Alternatively, sets of housebreaking tools (either discarded at the scene or discovered at the suspect's home) used to circumvent security technologies formed the basis upon which to estimate the offender's 'scientific' expertise. Thus, one report on a failed bank heist in 1867 observed: 'Judging by the appearance of some tools which they left behind them, the thieves do not appear to have been well equipped for a safe robbery on a large scale.'²⁷ Furthermore, the occasional seizure of high-quality safe-breaking equipment prompted sustained commentary on professional criminality. For example, in the late 1850s, the Manchester Police seized an elaborate drilling machine designed to bore large holes through iron plates, and the *Mechanics' Magazine* adjudged that 'great ingenuity and mechanical skill have been bestowed upon its contrivance.'²⁸ Such machines figured prominently in press features on the expert burglar.²⁹

This material also exposes the material and institutional supports which buttressed the discourse of professional criminality. In contrast to ideas of the degenerate offender – which were inscribed in practices of penal confinement (Garland 1985, 1988) – ideas of the technically-proficient professional were inscribed in the materiality of the crime scene. Marks and scratches on doors, drawers, locks and safes signalled the use of particular housebreaking tools, which in turn indicated the technical capability implicated in the offence. More frequent illustration and photography of crime scenes in the popular press further sustained this discourse by the late nineteenth century. Furthermore, professional and degenerate criminals were the subject of distinct bodies of 'expert' knowledge. While the degenerate criminal mind was easily accessed by prison medical officers, the professional was (ideally) an *absent* criminal, and thus beyond the clutches of physiognomists,

²⁶ CLC/B/002/10/01/052/51R (*Daily News*, 2 November 1897).

²⁷ CLC/B/002/10/01/011/066E (*Manchester Guardian*, 27 October 1867). Later examples include: CLC/B/002/10/01/045/36TR (*The People*, April 1890); CLC/B/002/10/01/051/43TM (*Daily Mail*, 8 June 1897); CLC/B/002/10/01/058/74L (*Glasgow Evening News*, 5 June 1903).

²⁸ CLC/B/002/10/01/007/072F (*Mechanics' Magazine*, 20 February 1858). For a further example, see CLC/B/002/10/01/063/35TM (*Daily Express*, 10 June 1913).

²⁹ See Binny (2009 [1862]: 344); CLC/B/002/10/01/009/041A (*Cornhill Magazine*, January 1863), p.82; CLC/B/002/10/01/046/92TL (*Answers*, 5 July 1891).

psychiatrists and other connoisseurs of human deficiency. Instead, expert spokesmen on professional criminality were those who could interpret the crime scene. Hence, newspaper interviews concerning the threat of 'scientific' burglary tended to feature either police detectives or security industry insiders,³⁰ and representatives of the lock- and safe-makers also appeared essentially as expert witnesses in criminal proceedings.³¹ Each group produced inflated estimates of criminal skill as part of their own, struggle for institutional recognition as defenders of respectable society against criminals. As we have seen, security product marketing depended upon accentuating criminal proficiency, a tactic which by implication reified security entrepreneurs themselves as ingenious innovators in protective design. Similarly, for detectives, portraying the criminal as a skilful professional elevated the implied talents of detective policing, and distinguished it from the lowly work of beat patrol. Indeed, this self-flattering commentary complemented a broader programme of confident self-presentation amongst detectives, notably via memoirs (Shpayer-Makov 2011: ch.7). Thus, as John Mack (1972) hinted, there is a fundamental divide in visions of serious criminality between the criminalistics of the detective department ('the full-time criminal') on the one hand and the criminology of the penal estate ('the full-time prisoner') on the other.³²

Hence, the vision of the technically proficient professional criminal was in large part a product of incremental advance in security technologies. State-of-the-art Security hardware afforded journalists and others a compelling means of emphasising the technical capabilities of criminals, especially via close study of the crime scene. This changing security context reoriented long-standing notions of criminal professionalism increasingly toward technical skill and sophistication. Thus, security technologies were things that mattered in Victorian and Edwardian visions of the criminal (see Miller 1998).

³⁰ In 1891, *Answers* carried an interview on the contemporary safe-breaker ('the king of thieves') with 'one of the best-known detectives in England': CLC/B/002/10/01/046/92TL (*Answers*, 5 July 1891). For interviews with security industry representatives, see CLC/B/002/10/01/052/54R (*Star*, undated [1890s]); CLC/B/002/10/01/060/207L (*Glasgow Weekly News*, 16 April 1906); CLC/B/002/10/01/061/277BR (*The Times*, 27 August 1907).

³¹ See for example CLC/B/002/10/01/007/100A-B (*Daily News*, 8 July 1858); CLC/B/002/10/01/037/031A (*Morning Post*, 16 October 1886).

³² Historical studies tend to imply that the detective vision of the criminal (as professional) lost out to the penal vision (as degenerate) in the later nineteenth century (see especially Becker 2006).

CRIME AND SECURITY IN AN AGE OF PROGRESS

Having linked security technologies to a particular discourse of professional criminality, it remains to assess the social functions of this discourse. Historically, representations of the criminal reflect major dynamics of social change (Melossi 2008); hence, this section assesses the place of the professional criminal in Victorian and Edwardian culture. Born in an age of rapid urbanisation and industrialisation – and in a culture vexed by the ambiguities of moral, political and intellectual progress – the technically adroit offender served as a foil for contemporaries to comprehend and to critique modern social development.

Modernity

The ‘scientific’ burglar was an emphatically modern kind of thief. The degenerate recidivist represented a relapse to a more primitive evolutionary epoch; the professional, by contrast, harnessed advances in science and technology for criminal purposes. For this reason, he provided a more appealing focus for *ambivalent* reflections on social progress (see Rieger 2003): if the degenerate represented an *inversion* of progress, the professional represented a *perversion* of progress. This era mobilised against the habitual criminal a suite of new technologies (e.g. photography, fingerprinting – Knepper and Norris 2008: 83-5) and a whole body of scientific knowledge (positivist criminology); yet the professional thief’s exploits cautioned against assuming that advances in science and technology would accrue exclusively to the forces of law and order. Instead, the discourse of criminal professionalism connoted a more cynical sense of ‘progress’ all round: as one journalist claimed in the 1850s, ‘universal progress is the order of the day, and the housebreaker is not behind the rest of the world’.³³ The ‘scientific’ burglar kept pace with technological change, as his various pseudonyms (the ‘modern cracksman’, the ‘up-to-date burglar’, the ‘skilful burglar of the present day’) indicate; conversely, the practitioner who retained false keys and jemmies was increasingly dismissed as an

³³ CLC/B/002/10/01/005/035A (unidentified newspaper, undated [1850s?]). Another made the same point following the Cornhill burglary: ‘Well, we are all on the road of “progress,” burglars as well as barons...It might be well for some of us if we were to inquire a little more curiously, Where to?’ (CLC/B/002/10/01/010/037B-C (unidentified newspaper, undated [February 1866])).

'old-fashioned' kind of thief.³⁴ Contemporaries explored this theme with reference to Jack Sheppard – the folkloric eighteenth-century housebreaker and escape artist – who served as an ancestor for the 'up-to-date' burglar. Sheppard's name appeared as a substitute for impressive break-in artists,³⁵ yet other references signalled the gulf of technological change which separated Victorian observers from the early eighteenth century. For example, following the arrest of two burglars equipped with safe-breaking tools in the 1880s, one newspaper observed: 'The equipment of the modern burglar would seem to be tolerably complete. Jack Sheppard probably carried a jemmy and a horse pistol, but lived in an age not distinguished for its scientific attainments'.³⁶ Security firms exploited the same comparison: most strikingly, an 1887 advertisement for the Chancery Lane Safe Deposit Company transported Sheppard to the transformed security infrastructure of its present. Pictured in the corridors of this very modern fortress, Sheppard was imagined to conclude, philosophically, that: 'SOME people live before their time, others too late in the World's history to make a mark – but, somehow or other, it seems to me that I lived in the right epoch – anyhow, I should be nowhere in this age of Safe Deposits, and my name would have been unknown to posterity.'³⁷

Knowledge

The vision of the high-tech, professional offender expressed concerns about the misuse of learning. The ameliorative impact of education was a key plank in Victorian and Edwardian discourses on crime, yet attitudes were complex; indeed, some feared that education might elevate criminal skill (Tobias 1967: 174; Crone 2010: 8-9). The discourse of professional criminality disclosed persistent concern about the criminal applications of scientific and technical training. A mid-century feature on 'CRIME AND ART' thus contrasted the simplicity of Georgian highway robbery with the mechanical skill of Victorian burglary: 'no apprentice or thick head could now hope to carry on – he who would do it to profit must have ingenuity and

³⁴ CLC/B/002/10/018/022D-E-023A (unknown newspaper, undated [1870s?]); CLC/B/002/10/01/035/081B-D (*Birmingham Daily Mail*, 4 March 1886). See also CLC/B/002/10/01/060/195-196 (unidentified newspaper, undated [1900s]).

³⁵ Notably the Cornhill burglary: see CLC/B/002/10/01/009/088A-C (*Daily Telegraph*, 16 Feb 1865); CLC/B/002/10/01/009/095A-C (*Times*, 1 March 1865); Anon. (1866).

³⁶ CLC/B/002/10/01/024/013F (unidentified newspaper, undated [1880s]).

³⁷ CLC/B/002/10/01/038/044 (*Siftings from the World's Wit*, 15 Jan 1887).

some mental qualities or phrenological developments which do not fall to the share of the majority... [Hence] *It is not to be wondered at that some men who have been trained in the manufacturing arts should pervert their knowledge to nefarious purposes*'.³⁸ By the late nineteenth century, technical and scientific education had emerged as a key issue in international economic competition, as industrial performance in America and Germany outstripped that of pioneering Britain (Pollard 1989: ch.3). The commentary on professional criminality reflected this economic context, notably in a *Daily Mail* feature in 1903 on 'THE GERMAN BURGLAR IN ENGLAND', who was sadly distinguished from his native colleagues by his mastery of chemistry.³⁹ Indeed, by the Edwardian period, the use and misuse of knowledge had become vital not just to economic fortunes, but also to national security, as the battle between safe-makers and safe-breakers refracted contemporary anxieties surrounding the Anglo-German naval arms race.⁴⁰

Civilisation

The scientific burglar also cut a rather refined figure, and thus channelled thoughts about the modern civilisation of manners. Notwithstanding fears of armed burglary which surfaced in the 1880s (Emsley 2005: 32), the professional was usually depicted almost as a pacifistic kind of criminal, especially when compared with the club-wielding 'Bill Sykes' created by Charles Dickens. Thus, the Cornhill burglary was not the work of 'your old-fashioned typical burglar – a low-browed, brawny, coarse-featured, repulsive, roughly-clad brute...but by a civilised sort, robbers known to detectives as "cracksmen," who carry their tools in their pockets, and are decent-looking and well dressed'.⁴¹ In contrast to the 'gentleman' burglar of fiction (see Moss 2014), the real-life professional was generally assumed to be a skilled working man; yet undistinguished by the characteristic physiognomy of the 'criminal class', concerns circulated that he could pass for a member of respectable society. Some even saw in the scientific criminal a peculiar delicacy: for example, the *Daily*

³⁸ CLC/B/002/10/01/007/097D (*Sheffield Independent*, 22 May 1858), emphasis added. Predictably, some safe-makers played on this fear of learned criminals: see for example CLC/B/002/10/01/033/004 (Hobbs-Hart leaflet, undated [c.1885]).

³⁹ CLC/B/002/10/01/058/62 (*Daily Mail*, 12 March 1903).

⁴⁰ According to one commentator, the 'sustained duel between the safe-maker and the safe-breaker...provides an exact parallel to the progress of modern naval development': CLC/B/002/10/01/061/276 TM (*Glasgow Evening News*, 17 May 1907).

⁴¹ CLC/B/002/10/01/010/037B-C (unidentified newspaper, undated [February 1866]).

Telegraph in 1896 asserted that the old criminal slang of ‘cracking’ a ‘crib’ [breaking and entering] carried ‘a suggestion of roughness and violence which would be repugnant to the tastes, and perhaps even distressing to the nerves, of the up-to-date burglar.’⁴² Hence, this discourse expressed a certain confidence in the peculiar civility of the British, especially when contrasted with the American ‘masked’ burglar, a professional operator who forced entry with the threat of lethal violence.⁴³

Apparent throughout is the *appreciative* nature of this discourse. Contemporaries did not approve of ‘scientific’ burglary, but many respect it. The burglar’s purported non-violence was significant here; furthermore, his preference for substantial commercial targets made it easy for personal harm to slip to the margins of this discourse. Yet, as Dario Melossi’s (2000) analysis suggests, appreciation was also rooted in the political economy of the period. Economic restructuring in the second half of the nineteenth century saw engineering, iron and steel assume a larger share of industrial output, hence increasing demand for mechanical and metalworking skills and assuring favourable wages in these sectors (Hobsbawm with Wrigley 1999: ch.6). As these were similar skills to those attributed to the scientific burglar, his lost contribution to national wealth was sorely appreciated, at a time when Britain’s international competitive advantage was slipping. Thomas Caseley, the apparent mastermind of the Cornhill burglary, elicited just this kind of appreciative reception. While presiding over a civil case arising out of the affair,⁴⁴ the Lord Chief Justice touched directly upon the opportunity cost of a man of Caseley’s ability turning to crime: ‘It is a pity you did not turn your talents to better account.’ (To which Caseley, ‘with great quickness’, replied: ‘It is a pity the police did not let me.’)⁴⁵ This economic context, together with the broader cultural valorisation technology and invention (MacLeod 2007), made the professional criminal’s mechanical accomplishments

⁴² CLC/B/002/10/01/051/6L (*Daily Telegraph*, 15 April 1896). Earlier – several years on from the metropolitan garotting panics – the *Echo* had commented: ‘The rogues of London seem to have abandoned attacks on the person, and now the more fashionable work is performed with skeleton latch-keys, and by entries at unlocked windows’ (CLC/B/002/10/01/012/016E (*Echo*, 29 March 1870)).

⁴³ American firms sometimes made use of the same trope in British advertisements: see for example CLC/B/002/10/01/017/027 (Yale leaflet, September 1876); CLC/B/002/10/01/027/006 (Holmes advertising circular, 5 March 1883). Greater concern would develop in the 1920s and 1930s regarding the ‘contagion’ of American criminal methods crossing the Atlantic (Davies 2007).

⁴⁴ The victim of the burglary, John Walker, unsuccessfully sued the safe-maker, Milner & Son, on the basis that the safe in question was ‘warranted’ as ‘thief-proof’: *Walker v. Milner and Another* [1866], 176 ER 773.

⁴⁵ *The Times*, 15 February 1866.

impressive, including to respected technical journals. Thus, following the Cornhill case, *The Engineer* remarked that:

THE art of burglary has all but risen to the dignity of a science. The gentlemen of the pick-lock and the crow-bar manage their affairs with a skill, a forethought, and a consummate adroitness *worthy not only of a better cause, but of a species of admiration...* Mechanical engineering loses nothing of its honours in such hands, and we question if the practical application, at least, of the forces of nature, is better understood in the great workshops of the country than it is in “Thieves’-alley,” or “Rogues’-walk.”⁴⁶

Hence, the discourse of high-tech, professional criminality reflected major contours of social change. In particular, it invited contemporaries to wrestle with their ambivalence towards modern social development – urbanisation, industrialisation, and scientific advancement. The degeneration framework, in its contempt for the criminal, expressed concerns about the precariousness of social progress at the turn of the twentieth century. By contrast, the professional criminal figured in an appreciative discourse which reflected the moral ambiguity of ‘progress’ itself, voicing fascination with the perversion of scientific knowledge and the closeness of the criminal to the norms of respectable society.

SECURITY, TECHNOLOGY AND CRIMINOLOGICAL THOUGHT

Contemporary security provision is usually associated on the one hand with the rise of situational perspectives on crime, and on the other with mounting fear and anxiety. Yet historically, as we have seen, security was integral to an appreciative discourse of the technically adroit criminal, which first arose in the Victorian and Edwardian era. Hence, relations between security and visions of the criminal are more diverse than criminological scholarship has recognised. Moving beyond the historical study presented above, this final section proposes a twofold typology for understanding the implications of security for contemporary criminological thought, which distinguishes between low-security and high-security visions of crime.

The *low-security* vision of crime conceives the criminal as an unimaginative opportunity-taker, a view which is derived from frequent, minimal security

⁴⁶ CLC/B/002/10/01/009/097A (*Engineer*, undated [c.1865]), emphases added.

interventions. At least as originally conceived, situational crime prevention (SCP) constitutes a low-security vision. It regards the criminal as everyman – a normal, rational agent without atypical tendencies, character traits or capabilities. Thus, Ronald Clarke advocated the rational choice model as a counterweight to ‘dispositional’ theories of criminality, which explained offending via the social, psychological or biological constitution of the offender (Clarke 1980: 136-37). This criminal is essentially an *opportunity-taker*, and these opportunities are effectively self-evident; hence, the criminal is reasoning yet largely *unimaginative* actor. SCP seeks explanations for crime chiefly within the situation itself (Newman 1997: 4-6; Tilley 1997: 102-103), and hence focuses primarily on *crime* rather than criminal. Within SCP, routine activities theory is most characteristically a low-security vision of crime. This approach was founded on the normality of high crime rates, and the implication that crime is imbricated in normal, everyday behaviour (Garland 1996: 451). Indeed, Felson explicitly posited routine activities theory in opposition (amongst other things) to ‘the ingenuity fallacy’ – ‘the tendency to exaggerate the offender’s cleverness’ (Felson 1994: 5). In tone, the low-security criminal of SCP (and routine activities theory especially) is a rather anodyne figure, emptied of malice or creditworthiness; to Felson in particular, the criminal is everyman and everyman is dull. Practically, as a low-security vision of crime, SCP prescribes a suite of *minimal* yet *ubiquitous* security interventions (steering column locks, computer passwords, street lighting), designed to deter offenders at relatively modest expense and while impacting as subtly as possible upon everyday social situations.

By contrast, the *high-security* vision of crime conceives the criminal as an imaginative opportunity-maker, a view which is derived from occasional, maximal security interventions. The image of the criminal as skilled, well-equipped and technically proficient is a characteristically high-security vision. Unlike in SCP, the criminal is here regarded as an *opportunity-maker* who, presented with formidable barriers to offending, must display considerable *imagination*. As high-security crime is considered the work of specialist operators, possessing bespoke skills and knowledge, and hence this vision focuses primarily on the *criminal*; the situational circumstances of the crime itself are important, yet principally as a means of validating the individual offender’s competence. In tone, the high-security offender is not the grey opportunist of SCP, but an appreciable kind of offender, whose exploits

may seem consonant with contemporary cultural values and political economy. Practically, the high-security vision of crime prescribes *maximal* security interventions, *occasionally* deployed (bank vaults, safe deposits), which is designed to deter specialist offenders even at great expense and at the cost of significant disruption to everyday social situations.

This high-security vision of crime remains vital to new times of social and technological change in the contemporary era. Of course, the form it took in the Victorian and Edwardian era – professional burglary – is of little immediate interest to contemporary criminology, following the fracturing of such ‘traditional’ criminal enterprises in the later twentieth century (Hobbs 1995: ch.1). The same motifs of criminal planning, specialist equipment, intelligence and technical proficiency recur in media coverage of high-security raids – not to mention in the heist movie (Rayner 2003) – yet such representations now take on an almost nostalgic quality, in contrast to the dynamism of Victorian discourse on the ‘scientific’ burglar. However, a new high-security offender – the cyber-hacker – has emerged for a digital age. The social construction of the hacker manifests several parallels with that of the scientific burglar. Firstly, he is an intelligent and technically-adroit offender, who serves as a foil for reflections upon the dark side of progress (Levi 2001: 46-7; Wall 2008). Secondly, by harnessing skills perceived as central to prospects of economic success, he attracts a mix of fear and admiration (Chandler 1996; Yar 2013: 24-6). Thirdly, he presents a new, sophisticated form of criminal activity which brings forth calls for control measures reaching beyond the conventional bounds of criminal justice (e.g. Brenner 2007). Moreover, the computer hacker’s characteristic skill and competence (like the safe-breaker’s) is defined by the high-security context of his offending. Hence, the most celebrated hackers are identified as such through attacks on major military and national security institutions – or at least substantial private corporations – whose security provisions are assumed to be state-of-the-art (e.g. Grabosky 2007: 15-17; see also Chandler 1996: 246). Of course, there are many important contrasts between these two figures, yet the parallels suggest a logic to the representation of high-security criminals which tends to reproduce itself over time. Hence, by tracing these ideas to their unfamiliar origins in the Victorian and

Edwardian era, this essay has offered a new perspective on the complex relationship between crime, culture and technological change in our own time.⁴⁷

The high-security/low-security typology has the advantage of capturing the diverse ways in which security provision influences perceptions of crime and criminals. In this respect, it enriches Garland's portrayal of criminologies of 'everyday life' or 'the self' (Garland 1996; 2001). Viewed through this framework, it becomes apparent that modes of criminological thought arising out of security provision beyond the state neither uniformly shift attention from criminal to crime, nor uniformly connote a vision of crime as normal and prosaic. Rather, by acknowledging the deep historical roots of commodified security provision, one can identify a distinct, high-security vision of the criminal (as technically proficient expert) which we have thereby inherited – a vision which preserves the focus on criminal over crime, and in which crime appears spectacular rather than banal. Furthermore, this high-security vision thrives on ambivalence towards modern social change, providing in our own time a means of reflecting on the apparent erosion of national borders and transition to an information society.

Finally, though the typology separates low-security from high-security visions of crime, it should not be taken to imply that SCP – which was originally conceived as a low-security vision of crime – is therefore conceptually inadequate to explain high-security crime. In fact, since the 1980s, rational choice theorists have sought progressively to re-discover the criminal in various ways: by analysing the 'choice-structuring properties' of (mainly pre-situational) offending decisions (Cornish and Clarke 1987); by acknowledging differentials in criminal motivation between individuals (Tilley 1997); and – most importantly for present purposes – by accommodating differentials in criminal capability between individuals (Ekblom and Tilley 2000). Indeed, these moves have successively rendered rational choice theory *less* of a low-security vision of crime, much as some have suggested it has become a less purely 'situational' theory (Newman and Morangiu 1997: 151-52). In light of these developments, routine activities theory now stands out all the more as *the* characteristically low-security theory of crime in contemporary criminological thought.

⁴⁷ More research is required on the role of computer security software and service providers in shaping the discourse of high-security cybercrime (see Yar 2009; Banks forthcoming).

CONCLUSION

The later nineteenth century bequeathed two powerful visions of the criminal. The conception of the criminal as an unfit degenerate, whose offending is pre-determined by biology or environment, is already well documented. Less often discussed is another vision of the criminal – the careful, intelligent, technically capable, well equipped, professional burglar. The security industry contributed substantially to the formation of this latter discourse, breeding a high-security vision of crime which has since remained vital to conceptions of criminality in new times of social and technological change. If this connection between security and visions of the criminal has not been evident hitherto, this is because criminologists have so seldom recognised that security provision and its social consequences are historically constituted. Notwithstanding the recency of certain late-modern developments, contemporary criminological research has proceeded without sufficient appreciation of the deep historical roots of commodified security provision, resulting in an impoverished conceptualisation of security and its social consequences. The tendency to focus on supposedly new developments – including the re-emergence of situational crime prevention and a mounting sense of insecurity – has obscured the deep-seated symbolism which connects high-security situations with high-security offenders. Together with recent contemporary research (e.g. Gould et al 2013), historical evidence demonstrates that the symbolic properties of security devices are more complex than most existing studies suggest. Future work on other aspects of security should similarly pay heed to their respective lines of inheritance.

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