

CHAPTER 1

Righteous Slaughter

What is the killer trying to do in a typical homicide? How does he understand himself, his victim, and the scene at the fatal moment? With what sense and in what sensuality is he compelled to act?

Defining the Problem

Aside from deaths from automobile accidents and murders committed in the course of robberies and other predatory crimes, the modal criminal homicide¹ is an impassioned attempt to perform a sacrifice to embody one or another version of the "Good." When people kill in a moralistic rage, their perspective often seems foolish or incomprehensible to us, and, indeed, it often seems that way to them soon after the killing. But if we stick to the details of the event, we can see offenders defending the Good, even in what initially appear to be crazy circumstances.²

To press the point with an extreme example, consider this killing through beating of a 5-week-old infant:

The victim . . . started crying early in the morning. The offender, the boy's father, ordered the victim to stop crying. The victim's crying, however, only heightened in intensity. The . . . persistent crying may have been oriented not toward challenging his father's authority, but toward acquiring food or a change of diapers. Whatever the motive for crying, the child's father defined it as purposive and offensive.³

This scene differed only in degree from everyday, routine events. It is not unusual for parents to demand respect from children and to respond to defiance with beatings. Nor is it unusual to misinterpret an infant's

motives. Parents differ widely in the abilities and comprehension that they attribute to children of various ages.⁴

The father just described may have been crazy in some sense but if he was, presumably he had been crazy for some time before he killed; his craziness would not seem to explain the event. Within the situation of the homicide, whatever insanity haunted him was morally shaped. It appears that he did not kill in the course of doing something conventionally considered bad, such as sexually abusing the child, robbing a third party, or sadistically celebrating violence. He did not suddenly explode and kill while irrationally flailing about. Nor was he simply trying to remove an irritation; a more expedient course would have been to put the child out the door, throw him out the window, or abandon him. When parents beat their children, much less kill them, they are using, at best, an indirect, cumbersome way of ridding themselves of the problems the children are causing.

The interpretation that the father defined the crying as defiant and enacted his violence to honor parental authority, is based on few facts. The interpretation becomes more convincing as a way of understanding such events if it is examined in the context of a wide variety of other cases. Thus, it helps to note that in 112 cases of homicides of children in New York, the assailants were primarily parents (especially mothers), and the means of killing were kickings and beatings—extensions of ordinary means of enforcing parental discipline.⁵

Now consider a classic case of homicide caused by sexual jealousy from Henry Lundsgaarde's study of cases in Houston in 1969. For reasons to be explained, I have not removed what may be sensational details, even though the police may have encouraged the surviving seductress, Mrs. Jones, to spice up the account.

Last night . . . I called Russell at his home. . . . to ask if I could borrow some money from him to pay the rent and the utilities. . . . I guess it was about five minutes to midnight when he got to my house. . . . We were just standing there talking about different things and the troubles me and Jones were having. . . . Russell made some remark about my husband being down at some joint watching the go-go girls. . . . Russell said that I was going to be the talk of the neighborhood because I was standing out front talking to a bachelor. . . . We got in the car. . . . Russell teased me about how my hair looked and he kissed me a few times and then I kissed him back a few times. I kidded him about wrinkling his white shirt and he said that he wasn't worried about his shirt and that it was his tight black pants that were bothering him. . . . I told him to let me see and I felt and he had an erection. This is when he pulled his pants down. . . . [and] told me "It's too late to send me home now!" He reached over and kissed me. About this time I looked over Russell's shoulder and

saw my husband. He had a gun. . . . and then Russell said "now listen Jones" or "Wait Jones" and this is when my husband shot him. . . . [I] looked into the car and saw Russell. He was bleeding real bad from the back of his head and he vomited. . . . I grabbed a wet towel from the bathroom and went back to the car and started to wipe stuff off of Russell's face and then I put the rag behind his head. About this time the police arrived and I went back into the house to quiet my children. I told my son to keep the other children in the bedroom.⁶

According to the police, all the participants had been good friends. Mrs. Jones and Russell had been having an affair for two years. Mrs. Jones had suggested divorce to her husband but had not pressed the matter. Mr. Jones had suspected the two and had tried to surprise them in the act. The grand jury refused to bring charges against him. Technically—that is, according to its official treatment—this homicide was not a crime.

Nor was Francine Hughes judged guilty for the highly publicized killing of her spouse, James. James had frequently beaten her, partly because of his violent opposition to her effort to become independent through education. The day of the killing, Francine's 12-year-old daughter called the police while James was beating Francine, but the police did not arrest him. Francine packed to move out, a decision that had the moral support of her children, and then poured gasoline around the bed in which James had fallen asleep, lit the gas, and drove straight to the sheriff's office to make a hysterical confession. The fact that James was asleep when the fire was set made a finding of self-defense difficult. Instead, the jury found Francine temporarily insane because of James's long-term abuse of her. (There was no indication of a belief in her continuing insanity. Francine was freed soon after the administration of psychological tests.)

Both spouse slayings illustrate that the killer's frequently "self-righteous" attitude (a term used by Lundsgaarde) is not necessarily idiosyncratic. Francine had been repeatedly beaten by James for almost fifteen years. On the day of the murder, she had more at stake than the recurrent issue of physical self-defense. A welfare mother, she had enrolled in business college some months before, and James was now prohibiting her effort to improve herself. The version of the Good she was defending was not simply the right to physical self-defense. It was also a version of the American dream that is widely accepted among people of all political persuasions: to better yourself through education and to escape the welfare rolls by applying yourself to serve business. And although the reaction was not universally favorable, her killing of James was considered righteous and as deserving profound respect by some of the national news commentaries on her case and in the tone of a nationally broadcast television drama.⁷

Likewise, Mr. Jones's killing of Russell was not considered wrong, nor was his Texas grand jury idiosyncratic in understanding that he was

upholding the traditional sanctity of the marital union. The defense of *flagrante delicto* has been acceptable for centuries in many societies. If Mr. Jones and Francine Hughes both experienced an exceptional moment of temporary insanity, they were rational in claiming that their irrationality would be understood by others as righteously inspired.

The presence of children at the scene of the homicide—close to Russell's erotic behavior with Mrs. Jones and as witnesses to James Hughes's beatings of Francine—is also morally significant. Accounts of homicides of spouses often show the killer postured as a defender of the children's moral sensibilities. The following account, from a Canadian study, is taken largely from the husband's construction of the event:

About two weeks prior to the homicidal act . . . the wife openly told John that he was not wanted anymore and she wanted him to leave home. John begged her to do something and save the marriage for the sake of the children but the wife refused to discuss the matter further. Then John was so upset that he bought a rifle, intending to commit suicide. Just three days prior to the homicide John's wife left home for a lover. . . . When this happened John was crushed emotionally and was looking for ways to hurt himself. . . . After three days (and on Mother's Day) the wife returned home to take the children and go away again. John begged her not to do such a thing to the children but she ignored him. During this argument the children became upset and started crying. Then John turned to his wife and told her what was she doing to the children [sic]. When the wife replied that she "didn't give a damn about the children," John grabbed a knife and stabbed her to death.⁸

The next case of homicide growing out of erotic passions illustrates a different notion of killing in defense of the Good. According to the killer's statement to the police, he and his wife were engaged in sex when she repeatedly called out the name of a fellow he knew to be a former boyfriend. He brought his sexual act to a climax and then shot her. The couple's twin 3-year-old daughters were present.⁹

What is striking in this case is not only the form of the humiliation—the wife's mention of the boyfriend's name is reminiscent of a classic genre of crude jokes—but the husband's claim that he first finished the sex act. On hearing the other fellow's name, he might have lost the will to go on. Attentive to the double entendre, insisting that he would "fuck" her sexually—literally and violently—figuratively, he was transcending the challenge to his virility. Although the legal system was not sympathetic—he was given a life sentence—the killer could consider his act as upholding part of an eternally recognized Good.

The first two killings that were described were among whites, the last was among blacks, and the next occurred in a Mexican-American community. The killer, aged 35, was at home when several people came over to

visit his neighbor. One visitor, the neighbor's uncle, aged 50, parked in front of the killer's driveway. After an initial request, the visitor moved his car, but later he again blocked the driveway. The killer, carrying a loaded shotgun, told the visitor that he would kill him if he did not remove his car. The visitor was unarmed and made no response, but he held his ground; then the killer shot him.¹⁰

In this instance, the killing was formally in defense of property rights, another value that a killer may regard, at the crucial time, as eternal and obviously righteous. In defending his right to control the use of his property, a killer can sense himself upholding the institution of property rights in general. As crazy or foolish as such an incident may appear, it is essential to note that such craziness or foolishness does not occur randomly; the violence erupts in situations that put at stake what the people involved momentarily regard as dimensions of the eternal Good.

That homicidal acts occur in defense of the Good is highlighted by the materially petty, "inconsequential" nature of the conflicts. In the following case, the killer and the victim were black male friends in their twenties. While in a cafe late one Saturday evening, the victim, who had a reputation as a "tough," began picking barbecued food from the killer's plate. The killer complained, but the victim persisted, defiantly splashing hot sauce on the killer. When the fight escalated, the killer pulled out his knife.¹¹

To call such fights "childish" may highlight their pathos. But this struggle to control personal property is naturally sensible to all witnesses. Here the killer could expect bystanders to support the defense of his rights, particularly because the victim's reputation as a troublemaker made the issue a community cause.

It is tempting to discount as superficial the claim that such incidents are motivated by morality. There is something artificial about the moral explanation. As Peter D. Chimbos noted, in his study of homicides of spouses:

A common technique in arguments is to refer to old grievances or conflicts no longer relevant except as weapons to argue with. . . . Another typical technique is to attack the spouse's deviations from the culturally approved sex role ideal. . . . For example, a wife may accuse her husband of being a poor breadwinner or an incompetent lover. Similarly, a husband may accuse his wife of being "bitchy," "frigid" or promiscuous. Insinuations that the spouse is not a good mother or father to the children are commonly made.¹²

We are accustomed to think that, surely, these people are not *really* killing because they regard a piece of food or a blocked driveway as so important. But it is essential not to overlook the moral form of common homicide. This form does not explain (much less justify) the killing, but it defines the killer's experience and thus sets up the problem so it can be explained.

Frequently, both the killer and the victim agree that "the Good" is at stake, as is illustrated in the following account of a wife's murder of her husband:

A woman, a 35-year-old Black female, had gone to a local cafe to get her husband to come home. . . . She apparently yelled that she was tired of seeing her husband fooling with "them whores" in the cafe and he was overheard to shout that she should remove her eyeglasses. They fought on the sidewalk and during the fight the woman took a .22 caliber pistol from her purse and fired. A witness said that the man tried to raise himself after the first shot had been fired and that the woman then shot him once more. . . . Homicide detectives were able to interview the husband before he died and he stated that he was willing to prosecute the person who had shot him but that he didn't know who had done it!¹³

It is not uncommon for victims to refuse to prosecute assailants who are lovers or family members. In this case, the wife was defending the traditional rights of her status. As he was dying, the husband seemed to concede that his wife had a right to shoot him.

Of course, these accounts only sketch the participants at the crucial moments. But it is striking that a "righteous" posture fits such a wide variety of the best sketches available in research on homicide. Consider one final example—a killing recounted by the 15-year-old daughter of the couple involved:

This morning my mother told my stepfather that she was going to cash a check. He told her that he was going to cash the check to pay the car note. Mother told him that he could not pay the car note this week because he had other bills to pay. Mother was sitting on the footstool in the living room reading the paper. My stepfather was sitting in another chair in the same room. He got up and went into the bedroom and got the gun off the bookcase at the head of the bed. He told mother he was tired of this goddamn shit and he said that when he had the gun in his hand. He put the gun in his pocket. Mother told him, "That is what I wanted you to do. Now that you have got the gun, use it!" She told me to go gather up the clothes for the laundry. I left the room and went to get the clothes. I heard three shots. I ran back into the room to see what had happened. My stepfather told me that he had killed my mother and for me to go and call the police.¹⁴

In many important senses, this killing was not about who would pay which bill; other, more fundamental, sources of tension must have been at work. But in an initially important sense, the fatal fight was literally over which bill would be paid first. In *form*, both the husband and the wife were

trying to position themselves to appear to be good people to the world, to creditors—to outsiders—who would think better of them if they paid their bills. Each was trying to defend the Good, not an idiosyncratic value.

One feature of the typical homicide, then, is its character as a self-righteous act undertaken within the form of defending communal values. The next feature is its lack of premeditation. From a law-enforcement perspective, homicides are relatively easy to solve. The police believe they have grounds to make arrests in from 75 to 90 percent of their homicide cases, compared to perhaps 25 percent of their robbery cases and 15 percent or fewer of their burglary cases.¹⁵ The lack of premeditation in the typical homicide is suggested by the number of killers who make no attempt to escape and wait for the police¹⁶ and by the rapidity with which police "solve" the crime. As Marvin Wolfgang reported in his classic Philadelphia study, "Two-thirds of the offenders in criminal homicide who were taken into custody by the police were arrested on the same day they committed the crime."¹⁷ Even when the offenders run away, their simple and unsuccessful "escapes" indicate that they had not realized that they would become killers until they did.¹⁸

These homicides are not morally self-conscious acts on the order of calculated political assassinations or coldly executed acts of vengeance. They emerge quickly, are fiercely impassioned, and are conducted with an indifference to the legal consequences. Thus, the second feature of this form of homicide is that the attacks are conducted within the spirit of a quickly developing rage. In addition to explaining how one could come to see one's attack as a defense of the Good, then, I must explain how one becomes enraged.

The third notable feature of these homicidal attacks, which points to a third explanatory task, is suggested by the arbitrary relationship between what the assailants are attempting to do and their practical results. As many researchers have noted, criminal homicides that are not part of a robbery are substantially similar to assaults. It is artificial to take a "killing" as the act to be explained. What the nonpredatory assailant is attempting to do is more accurately captured by the concept of sacrifice: the marking of a victim in ways that will reconsecrate the assailant as Good. The victim's death is neither a *necessary* nor a *sufficient* element of the assailant's animating project.

Thus, I arrive at a definition of the problem to be explained as "righteously enraged slaughter," or an impassioned attack through which the assailant attempts to embody in his victim marks that will eternally attest to the assailant's embrace of a primordial Good. The explanation I propose is in three parts:

1. The would-be-killer must interpret the scene and the behavior of the victim in a particular way. He must understand not only that the victim is attacking what he, the killer, regards as an eternal human

value, but that the situation requires a last stand in defense of his basic worth.

2. The would-be-killer must undergo a particular emotional process. He must transform what he initially senses as an eternally humiliating situation into a rage. In rage, the killer can blind himself to his future, forging a momentary sense of eternal unity with the Good.
3. The would-be-killer must successfully organize his behavior to maintain the required perspective and emotional posture while implementing a particular project. The project is the honoring of the offense that he suffered through a marking violently drawn into the body of the victim. Death may or may not result, but when it does, it comes as a sacrificial slaughter.

Respectability's Last Stand

The impassioned killers described here were upholding the respected social statuses of husband, mother, wife, father, property owner, virile male, deserving poor/self-improving welfare mother, and responsible debtor. These killers were defending both the morality of the social system and a personal claim of moral worth.

Several patterns in homicide situations indicate that the killers develop a righteous passion against the background of taking a last stand in defense of respectability. First, the behavior of their victims gives them reason to believe that they will no longer be able to ignore a fundamental challenge. David Luckenbill constructed narrative accounts from information in the official files of 71 transactions that culminated in murder in an urban California county over a ten-year period. He found that the roles played by the victims and killers often reversed from the beginning to the end of the event.¹⁹ A study of 159 cases of criminal homicide and assault that were not related to other offenses found that "in most cases, most of the victim's actions were aggressive, indicating that they, [sic] at least partially caused the outcome."²⁰ This was the most recent in a long line of studies that have provided evidence, in one manner or another, of precipitation by the victims.²¹

Precipitation by victims usually is physical, but the significance of the victim's attack is moral as well. At a minimum, the studies on this phenomenon indicate, in a high percentage of cases, that the person who turns out to be the victim was not trying to escape. To the (eventual) killer, the (eventual) victim, by not trying to brush off or avoid the conflict, is indicating that neither party may escape the implications of what is to transpire.

Thus, in each of the killings described earlier, it may be noted that there

were indications that the victim either teased or dared the killer to resolve the conflict. The lurid police account depicts Mrs. Jones teasing her husband to resolve the ambiguous status of their marriage by the openness of her two-year relationship with Mr. Jones's friend Russell; at the fatal moment she and Russell were in a car in front of her house.²² In the infanticide, the baby was, in the killer's eyes, defying parental orders by persistently crying. In the erotically inspired spouse killing, the killer's wife unwittingly teased him during sex by repeatedly calling out the name of an old boyfriend. In the shotgun, "property rights" killing, the victim, when warned by the killer that he would be shot if he did not clear the driveway, said nothing but held his ground. In the fight in the cafe, the victim teased the killer by "borrowing" his food to the point of daring him to do something about it. In the penultimate case reported here, the husband-victim agreed to fight, telling his wife to take off her glasses. And in the last case in this series, a couple fought over who would pay which bill, and the wife-victim, seeing her husband threaten her with a gun, urged him to use it.

Even the Francine Hughes case, with its strong theme of physical self-defense, involved a dare on other issues in conflict. When Francine Hughes set her sleeping husband on fire, she was reacting to his destruction of her school materials and to his prohibition of her return to school, in essence daring her to defy him and to escape degradation.

From the killer's perspective, the victim either teases, dares, defies, or pursues the killer. In all cases, the victim sustains a sense in the killer-to-be that there is no escape from the issue at hand. In the last case, the wife's urging was not necessarily a narrow demand that her husband kill her, but a means of expressing that she, too, felt that the situation was too awful to bear and that something had to be done immediately to resolve the conflict. Most generally, in all these incidents (except that of the infant), the victim could have tried to escape but did not. That the victims did not try to escape physically indicated to the would-be assailants that they could not escape morally.²³

That the killer feels compelled to respond to a fundamental challenge to his worth is indicated as well by the frequent presence and the role of an audience. We might expect that homicides would typically occur in private or in circumstances that would give the killer reason not to worry about witnesses. But in the majority of the cases he studied, Luckenbill found that an audience was present, either supporting the violence—urging the combatants on, pointing out an offense, or supplying a weapon—or observing.²⁴ In no case did the audience oppose or attempt to defuse the situation. When a potentially humiliating conflict occurs in public, an insulted party has grounds to take for granted that he or she cannot simply walk away from the challenge, especially when others are offering such comments as, "Did you hear what he said about you?"; "Are you going to take that?"; and "Here, use this." In any case when bystanders are

present, a potential assailant is apt to realize that the audience may develop and carry away its own version of the scene, staining the assailant's reputation beyond any visible limit. What is happening "now," the would-be assailant senses, will determine my identity "then," in the open-ended future. Thus, the killer acts not to affect the image he will have at any envisioned time or place but to escape the premonition of an unbearable "then."

Finally, the distribution of nonpredatory homicides in social time and space is also significant. In many respects the most serious act one can commit, homicide ironically takes place most often in casual settings. It does not occur at work in those infuriating moments when people are humiliated by their bosses or realize that their careers may have been irreparably damaged by the backstabbing of co-workers. It does not happen at serious social occasions, such as weddings and funerals, when the community gathers to manifest a collective agreement that matters of fundamental importance are at hand. Rather, it takes place at times of sexual intimacy or while one is relaxing at home, out for a good time on Saturday night, kidding around with friends, or having an otherwise unremarkable evening at a tavern.²⁵ And although many killings occur in bars, even these killings typically occur outside an occupational context: "It is less common for a patron to kill a bartender than another person, even though they are all in the same social situation and may have the same demographic characteristics."²⁶ Victims and assailants are usually kin, friends, or at least acquaintances.²⁷

It should be noted that the patterns of homicide do not display a simple, dialectical relationship between Eros and Thanatos. "Mere acquaintance" relations and strangers who met shortly before the fatal event constitute a category of victims as significant as that of spouses, children/parents, and old friends. The casual nature of the setting is more clearly important than the emotional depth of the relationship.

The temporal patterning of homicide further details the ironically casual background of this most serious act. Marvin Wolfgang examined the distribution of homicides over the weekly calendar and described a decisively nonrandom pattern. He found that 65 percent of the homicides occurred on the weekend. Wolfgang noted that homicides pick up dramatically as the weekend starts, reach their height at about midnight Saturday, and taper off as the weekend comes to a close.²⁸ He also found that the offender and/or the victim were drinking in two-thirds of the cases, a finding that has been replicated frequently.²⁹

Although these situational patterns do not speak directly of the understanding of participants, they can be interpreted as consistently indicating a paradox: the casual nature of the setting enhances the sense of challenge to personal identity. No doubt, humiliation is broadly experienced over the workweek and across all types of social settings. Certainly, workers often feel they are treated without respect and even insulted on the job. Why,

then, do they not attack their bosses more often? Why do they instead kill their mates, friends, or slight acquaintances? When tensions arise on the job, one may feel severe humiliation but there are possible escapes: other people, other times, other social places in which one can expect to be free of the humiliation. Thus, one may bear the humiliation one receives from a superior by entertaining visions of the appreciation one will receive at night in bed, of the relaxed approbation one will enjoy on the weekend with friends, or of the drink that waits at the end of the day. Casual life, affectionate relationships, the weekend and Saturday night, or drinking and cruising Main Street—all the characteristic social settings for non-predatory homicide—are distinctively places of last resort for the pursuit of relaxed fun. If one cannot escape serious personal challenges then and there, it may seem as if there were nowhere else to go.

From Humiliation to Rage

When people sense that they have no resort but to confront a challenge to their ultimate personal worth, they need not respond with a violent attack. A common alternative is to turn the challenge against the self and endure humiliation. Transforming humiliation into rage is a second contingency of righteous slaughter.³⁰

As with emotions in general, persons who become enraged must create the sensuality that makes them its vehicle. Thus, the analyst must account for a dialectical process in which assailants make themselves the object of forces beyond their control but retain the possibility of abandoning the process.

The situations from which righteous slaughters emerge are either conventionally humiliating, or involve the victim's self-conscious efforts to ridicule or degrade, or include the assailant's perception that the victim's actions are defiant and disrespectful. In some cases, however, the assailant's rage emerges so suddenly and silently that only when it appears does a preceding experience of humiliation become visible. The challenge here is posed not by a lack of evidence but by the subtlety of the phenomenon. Frequently, the assailant does not acknowledge the humiliation to himself until he attempts to transcend it in rage.

Thus, mortal assaults often arise directly from attempts by the killer to deflect the insult with an air of indifference or cool superiority, which is abandoned only in the attack itself. Anger, he realizes, is a concession. That is, the would-be-assailant often anticipates that if he should respond with a display of anger, he would retrospectively acknowledge that the at-

tempted insults of the victim had hit home and that beneath his pretense, he had been on the edge of humiliation. This acknowledgment may itself be humiliating.

When the assailant suddenly drops his air of indifference, he embraces and creates his own humiliation. He then makes public his understanding, not only that he was hurt by the victim, but that he was falsely, foolishly, and cowardly *pretending* not to care. In this double respect, the once-cool but now enraged attacker acknowledges that he has already been *morally* dominated just as he moves to seek *physical* domination. He becomes humiliated at the same time and through the same action in which he becomes enraged.

That humiliation may be constituted in juxtaposition to a simultaneously constituted rage has an important implication for empirical theory. In order to analyze the move from humiliation to rage, we must simultaneously analyze the construction of humiliation *in* rage. That is, we should not err by treating rage as an escape from humiliation. There is an essential link between rage and humiliation. As a lived experience, rage is livid with the awareness of humiliation.

Rage constructs and transforms humiliation so quickly and smoothly that talking and writing about the process can very easily become artificial and obfuscating. In order not to lose sight of the phenomenon, the best approach is to take the rapid and smooth quality of the dynamic as a focus for this analysis.

It is not always easy to move from certain emotional states to certain others, for example to go from sadness to laughter. Humiliation and rage are as opposite as emotions can be, but the switch can be made quickly. How can that be? And how does rage propose to resolve the problems experienced in and through humiliation? How does rage simultaneously recall and transform the experience of humiliation? What is the logic of rage, such that it can grow so smoothly and quickly from humiliation and lead to righteous slaughter as its perfectly sensible (if only momentarily convincing) end?

These questions may appear a bit odd because the process seems so automatic. But it is contingent: not all who experience humiliation become enraged. Moreover, the experience is a personal construction. Although the assailant typically does not perceive himself as having chosen to become humiliated and enraged—although he believes that he was forced into humiliation and carried away by rage—we can unravel the process by which the assailant constructs the sense of logically smooth coherence in the transition from one state of compulsion to another.

The argument is threefold: (1) As experiences, rage and humiliation have certain identical fundamental features. (2) Like images in a mirror, rage and humiliation inversely reflect each other. (3) Righteousness is not the product of rage; it is the essential stepping stone from humiliation to rage. Like

a person who passes in front of a cracked mirror and recognizes a reversed and flawed depiction of himself, the would-be assailant needs only the most fleeting encounter with the principle of moral reflection to move from humiliation to rage. The "righteous" thrust of the resulting attack does not develop through discursive reasoning; the attack is not a "statement" of moral superiority. It is the outcome of the embrace of righteousness as a means to the perfect resolution of humiliation through the overwhelming sensuality of rage.

HUMILIATION AND RAGE

In both humiliation and rage, the individual experiences himself as an object compelled by forces beyond his control. That is, his control of his identity is lost when he is humiliated. We say, for example, that a person has become an object of ridicule. Thus, a husband knows that others know he is a cuckold, and he senses that they always will see him that way. Suddenly, he realizes that his identity has been transformed by forces outside his control in some fundamental way. He has become morally impotent, unable to govern the evolution of his identity.

It is not by chance that homicides among mates so often spring from complaints about sexual performance and acknowledgments of sexual infidelity. Humiliation always embodies an awareness of impotence. The vocabulary for expressing humiliation takes for granted the feature of impotence: "she has made me a cuckold," "he has made a fool of me," or "he has 'unmade' me by revealing my pretentiousness, my fraud." If the vulnerability to impotence is often metaphorical, when it is sexual, the step from insult to humiliation is especially short.

A loss of control over one's identity may seem irremediable when injury has been inflicted on one's public image; image or reputation is social and, therefore, outside one's personal control. The experience of public degradation carries the fear of bearing the stigma of disgrace eternally.³¹

Humiliation may be passively acquired. For you to become humiliated, you need not do anything new. Humiliation may be experienced when there is a revelation to you about the conduct of others. Thus, you may become humiliated at the sudden revelation of the misleading and immoral acts by which others have long treated you as a fool.

Of course, one may humiliate oneself, for example, by confessing dreadful truths. But the exercise of personal autonomy in beginning the process does not contradict the sense of being controlled by others in the experience itself. Within humiliation, there is a profound apprehension of the power of others to control one's soul.

Although deeply spiritual, the sense of vulnerability in humiliation is neither abstract nor speculative: the person can prove to himself that it is true. Thus, when feeling humiliated, the person often tries to envision a future in which the memory of the disgrace will have faded, but as long

as he stays in humiliation, he discovers that he cannot. He tries to abolish the unbearably awful feeling by reciting folk recipes: "time heals all wounds"; "he's drunk, he doesn't mean it and won't remember it"; "she's upset because of her period"; "life goes on"; "I don't need him, I'll leave"; or "I'll move, and my new associates won't know about my past." Despite the conviction that these propositions are rational, the person who feels humiliated confronts undeniable evidence that these propositions do not work: the humiliation persists.

As is true of humiliation, when enraged one's existence as a social object overpowers one's will. As in humiliation, angry people often talk becalming wisdom to themselves or attempt to control their rage (by, for example, counting to ten) and discover that it won't work; the irritation continues to mount toward rage. Indeed, they are often aware that they might well be foolish or irrational to become angry, and this awareness itself can speed the mobilization of rage: "So, I'm acting like a fool, am I?" one may hear in the private echo of an outward expression of indignation.

Humiliation either washes over the self or provokes ceaseless resistance as it threatens to seize one's being. Rage also exists on a dynamic dimension. Irritation always threatens to ripen into anger, anger threatens a self-reinforcing progression to rage, and rage has already lost a sense of developmental boundaries. As suggested by the dual meanings, anger and insanity, that have historically been associated with being "mad," rage always carries the threat of chaos.

After their lethal attacks, killers often retrospectively acknowledge a determining sense of compulsion. They frequently say, "I got carried away"; "I didn't know what I was doing"; "I wasn't myself." These are not only face-saving devices or ploys to reduce punishment, since, as was already mentioned, killers often do not attempt to escape or spontaneously call the police and confess. At times, the urgency with which they bring in the authorities and condemn themselves seems to be an attempt to prove that they have regained control of themselves—that they are typically rational and that the killing was an aberrant moment that disrupted their characteristic state of moral competence. Thus, the killers may be truly disturbed by the question, "Why did you do that?"

Humiliation and rage are holistic feelings, experienced as transcending bodily limitations. In humiliation, the person is overcome with an intolerable discomfort. Humiliation forces him to feel himself as soul, to become intensely aware that his being is spiritual, not protected by physical barriers between the internal and the external. Unlike embarrassment, which may afflict only the face through blushing, humiliation is not confined to the stomach, like a mild anxiety; limited to the top of the head, like a giddy feeling; or located narrowly in the chest, as in a recognition of unrequited love. Humiliation takes over the soul by invading the whole body. The humiliated body is unbearable alive; one's very being is humiliated.

Like humiliation, rage draws the whole body into its service. It disci-

plines parts of the body that often work out of harmony into coordinated action. When we speak of getting one's adrenalin up to counter physical challenges aggressively, the reference is not only to an unusual level of effort but to a new esthetic that unites all the parts of the body. Athletes and performers of martial arts naturally understand the connection between the energy level and the esthetic flow of effort. The successful execution of aggressive plays requires the precise movements of specific parts of the body, but the dependence on a part can draw consciousness to it and make it overly sensitive and thereby independent of the player's body as a whole. Getting "psyched out" refers to a real problem in such activities. To restore a prophylactic sense of flow, performers may simulate expressions of anger. If they shout, snarl, and stamp enough, maybe they will achieve a "deep acting" that will restore their transcendent sense of holistic identity.

By becoming humiliated, a person has already constructed certain fundamental elements of rage. Once a person has become humiliated, he need not lose control to be carried blindly into a raging violence. Humiliation has already accomplished that. The righteous killer need not lose himself in rage; he need only acknowledge that he is already lost in humiliation. And if he is to take a last violent stand in defense of his basic worth, humiliation has already constructed the moral profundity and metaphysical totality of the moment.

To put the point another way, when a person becomes enraged, he confirms his humiliation through transcending it. In rage, he acknowledges that his subjectivity had been overcome by implicitly acknowledging that he could not take it anymore. But now the acknowledgment is triumphal because it comes just as rage promises to take him to dominance over the situation.

FRUSTRATION, SHAME, HUMILIATION, AND RAGE

The rage that carries an assailant into a righteous attack also shares a fundamentally social focus with humiliation. In this sense, one must distinguish humiliation from *frustration*. People who are frustrated may direct their anger toward another, but only after a transition through which they first socialize their discontent. Humiliation, however, is already a socialized emotion, reflecting an immediate, unquestionable connection between one's discomfort and another's attack. Thus, humiliation is a qualitative leap closer to rage than is frustration.

Because of the essential continuity between the internal dis-ease and the external hostility that provokes it, humiliation is also closer to rage than is shame. Both shame and humiliation are social and moral emotions in the sense that in both, one feels isolated from a community one regards as sacred. But only in shame does the person acknowledge failings or moral inadequacy. Thus, I may "become ashamed of myself" but I do not become

humiliated of myself. Instead, I "am humiliated"; I am acted on by one or more persons who morally assault me by challenging my competence or trying to ridicule me. You may shame me while I remain shameless, but if you humiliate me, I feel it. The loyal trusting wife may experience deep humiliation but not shame from the discovery of her husband's long-practiced infidelity. Although shame acknowledges a personal failing or incompetence, humiliation verges on humility and is compatible with innocence.

If others are trying to help me, I may experience shame because they are reinforcing a public awareness of my condition, but I will not feel humiliation unless I perceive an aggressive, demeaning spirit in their "help," for instance, that they are patronizing me like a charity case. I feel shame in front of those who are trying to love me; I feel humiliation if I am the butt of ridicule. Hence, in humiliation, I presume a self-conscious and overt intention by others to degrade me. If I realize that they silently perceived my incompetence, I will be ashamed. If I understand that they conspired to share and hide their degrading view of me, then I will also be humiliated. And then I may well get mad.

RAGE AGAINST HUMILIATION

Even though humiliation and rage are both experienced as aggressive powers reaching into the soul, they are, of course, different forms of experience. The explanation of the swiftness and smoothness of the transition from one to the other lies precisely in the perfection of their opposition. Humiliation becomes rage when a person senses that the way to resolve the problem of humiliation is to turn the structure of his humiliation on its head.

Both humiliation and rage are experienced on a vertical dimension. Dictionaries define humiliation as an experience of being reduced to a lower position in one's own or another's eyes. Humiliation drives you down; in humiliation, you feel suddenly made small, so small that everyone seems to look down on you. Humiliation often moves through the body by warming the top of the head; then moving to the face, where its acknowledgment may create the blush of shame; and then working itself through the self, ultimately to envelope it from top to bottom. Etymologically, humiliation shares roots with "humble." All manner of degrading, debasing, deflating attacks may produce humiliation.

In contrast, rage proceeds in an upward direction. It may start in the pit of the stomach and soon threaten to burst out of your head. "Don't blow your top" and "hold your lid on," we counsel the angry. In Chicago in the late 1960s, one of the most militant youth publications was called *Rising Up Angry*. Members of militant movements understand implicitly that angry people "rise up" and that to affiliate with symbols of sitting down would express a calm resolution in protest.

If one looks back further in etymology, one finds that *humiliation*, *humble*, and related terms in English grew out of the Latin for *humus*—the same humus prized by gardeners—the organic, wet, fertile earth that is the most natural foundation for what human beings can grow to sustain life.³² The wetness of humus is reflected in the liquid character of the experience of humiliation and its family of related feelings. Embarrassment, shame, and humiliation flow through the self. The blush of shame is a sudden wave of blood to the face. Humiliation threatens to drown one's being. When we have made fools of ourselves or have been made fools by others, we may wish or feel we are sinking into the earth. Someone who is completely wrong is "all wet."

Children use water balloons, not balloons with air or helium, to play at humiliation. Practical jokers place water buckets over doors and push victims into swimming pools. One of the most universal conventions for degrading someone is to spit at them. Somehow spitting, which casts a liquid on someone, significantly conveys disrespect; while blowing at someone, though a substantially similar physical act, carries other meanings. To humiliate others in an extreme way, you might urinate on them. You would then expect them to become "pissed off," their response being in opposition to the liquid provocation. An "angry young man" is said to be "full of piss and vinegar," on the understanding that anger is stimulated by the irritating qualities natural to these caustic liquids.

Humiliation as a drowning liquid and rage leaping up like a fiery gas share a boundary-defying holistic quality. Liquids and gases both seep over the edges of containers; neither has any apparent internal divisions. But they are also intrinsically opposed. Rage is a hot gas, a fire; it burns. As fire is to water, so rage is to humiliation. The heat of rage ontologically transforms the liquid of humiliation. Thus, a person "boils" in anger and then, like Yosemite Sam after he has been humiliated by Bugs Bunny, "blows off steam."

Cartoons are useful for understanding the emotional construction of experience. Popular cartoons represent imagery that has proved effective for representing emotions. Like the images of dreams and poetry, cartoon images make sense according to a symbolic logic that operates ubiquitously in everyday life but that somehow resists expression in the conventions of discursive reasoning. So, just as we know automatically that it is appropriate to say that a person might "blow up" in rage and that it is obviously wrong to say that a person might "blow down" in anger, cartoonists naturally illustrate rage as an explosion coming out of a character's head, not his or her foot. In color cartoons, the enraged character might be depicted as progressing from an initially pink irritation through deepening shades of red anger into purple rage and then into an explosion in the hues of a fire.

Tales that children find effective also reveal the symbols that are natural vehicles for emotions in a given culture. That certain patterns make dra-

matic sense and are persistently fascinating suggests that they fit with the structure of emotions as experienced in everyday life. Metaphoric oppositions, such as those between liquid and gas, cold and hot, and upward and downward movement, are frequently used to juxtapose good and evil.

Take, for example, the death of the evil witch in *The Wizard of Oz*. Dorothy's lethal attack, launched in rage after the witch had snatched one of her silver shoes, consists of throwing on the witch a bucket of water. This is a moral attack, a status-reducing expression of disgust by the young girl from a self-confident stance. Dorothy responds to the witch, whose power is symbolized by the control of fire, by assuming the confident posture of a little princess toward an unspeakably inferior subject, dousing her enemy with a super-spit. The witch then shrinks down to the dirt, ultimately dissolving into nothingness.³³

Finally, the sexual oppositions. In some social circles, an erection is an "angry" penis. Today, impotence is so fundamentally linked to humiliation that in virtually all modern languages the terms for describing impotence are reliable means of effecting ridicule. If rage is red, hot, and explosive, it is like a penis threatening to ejaculate and it is also like the screaming, red-faced birth of a self. Whichever of these metaphors might be more relevant to a given individual, the language and the symbolic structure of the experience of humiliation is metaphorically the perfect opposite: a return to the womb.³⁴ The etymology of humiliation points to the centrality of the metaphor of the womb through humus—wet, fertile soil enriched by decayed vegetable matter—that is the most natural source of all terrestrial life: Gaea, "Mother Earth."

To disparage someone, a contemporary American might readily say that he or she "sucks," a usage that points back to the womb as a reference to the infant's sucking at the breast (as well as to the female in fellatio). Not only what we say but also what we feel in shame and humiliation is symbolically summarized by the metaphor of a return to the womb. In its sensuality, humiliation makes one feel small. In humiliation, one feels incompetent and powerless as if one's stature has been reduced to that of a baby.

Rage is specifically, intensely an oppositional emotion. Thus, humiliation threatens to be endless and diffuse, while rage searches for a target to extinguish itself. In emotional logic, rage has already found its perfect target in humiliation.

When moral attack has us pressed toward humiliation, we may construct rage through a flash recognition of the principle of opposition. The path to rage is right there before us, in the structure of whichever metaphoric features of humiliation may have become most compelling to us long ago, through cartoons, language usage, fairy tales, erotic fantasies, or other regions of popular culture. Along one or the other of the oppositions of upward and downward, static and active, liquid and gaseous, inward and outward, and male and female, we know just where to find an escape route.

HUMILIATION, RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND TRANSCENDENT RAGE

Rage does not emerge spontaneously from the common killer's humiliation. What draws the would-be killer to turn his humiliation on its head and into rage? What triggers the spiritual reversal? To understand the emotional process through which humiliation leads to righteous slaughter we must examine the interconnections in the flow of experience among humiliation, rage, and the Good.

In the tale that the Mouse relates to Alice, Fury tells a mouse that they must go to trial:

Said the mouse to the cur,
 "Such a trial, dear sir,
 With no jury or judge, would be wasting our breath."
 "I'll be judge, I'll be jury,"
 Said cunning old Fury;
 "I'll try the whole cause, and condemn you to death."³⁵

Rage is a sophisticated incompetence. It is deaf in the sense of being indifferent to reasoned argument and dumb in the narrow sense of being inarticulate. Fury judges but without hearing arguments and it does not pause to explain its reasons, not even to itself. Rage is also blind, but it is not stupid. Rage is not necessarily expressed in chaotic thrusts; the common killer does not go berserk, striking at any proximate object and killing only when the victim stumbles by accident in the path of a randomly aimed blow. Rage is often coherent, disciplined action, cunning in its moral structure. Would-be killers create their homicidal rage only through a precisely articulated leap to a righteousness, which logically resolves, just for the crucial moment, the animating dilemma.

Righteousness shares with rage a blindness to the temporal boundaries of existence. Humiliation is a painful awareness of the mundane future, a vivid appreciation that once I get out of the current situation I still will not be able to get away from its degradation. I become humiliated just as I discover that despite my struggles to do so, I cannot really believe that the meaning of the moment is temporary. But rage is mercifully blind to the future. And righteousness, concerned only with what always has been and always will be right, is justly indifferent to the historical moment. In this way, the Good serves as the springboard for the leap into blind rage.

Rage is not blind to the details of the immediate context. On the contrary, in rage, the person is vividly aware of otherwise imperceptible significances in the most minor details: of the angle of the other person's head, which only now can be seen to reveal contempt; of the cumbersome nature of his own comportment as he throws an initial blow that brings him more pain than it inflicts; and of the stupid redundancy of the current conflict

with innumerable fights he has been in before. Rage focuses consciousness completely on the here-and-now situation with an unparalleled intensity. Rage so powerfully magnifies the most minute details of what is present that one's consciousness cannot focus on the potential consequences of the action for one's subsequent life.

Stunned with premonitions of endless humiliation, unable to grasp any tolerable path from the "now" to concrete situations "then," the would-be killer leaps to a righteous plateau from which he can perceive eternal truths in the situation here and now. His attack enacts a feature of his social identity that he presumes will always be communally regarded as valuable: his status as father, husband, property owner, virile male, and so forth. Although the period of moral rest on his righteous perch may turn out to be short lived, in his tortured experience the person in rage searches frantically for something that will end what cannot be taken anymore—and an eternal moral peace.

The blindness to the practical future implications of the moment gives rage, with all its fury, a soothing, negative promise that humiliation painfully lacks. This is its great comfort. Like the promise of an erotic drive, rage moves toward the experience of time suspended; it blows up the present moment so the situation becomes portentous, potentially an endless present, possibly the occasion for a destruction that will become an eternally significant creativity. This is the spiritual beauty of rage.

The irony of artifice and essence in homicide may now be explained. In many motivational respects, it is patently artificial to think that homicide is committed in defense of the Good. A man who kills a stranger who has parked in his driveway or who kills the friend who has taken a piece of his barbecued food does not "really" kill because he values so highly his status as owner of these items of property. But, whatever the deeper psychological sources of his aggression, he does not kill until and unless he can fashion violence to convey the situational meaning of defending his rights. Without the moral artifact, violence would not work even momentarily as an existential escape.

Sacrificial Violence: the Embodiment of Righteous Rage

Although those who kill in righteous rage are attempting to settle matters once and for all, they often have tried many times before. The fatal blow is one of a family of acts that form a coherent field of aggressive conduct. To understand the lived experience of homicides committed in everyday settings in defense of the Good, we must understand a range of related phenomena. Why all the shouting and cursing? Why the shoving and

pushing? How do the acts that are distinctive to violent attacks—"belting" and "stomping" and "cutting up" the other—seem especially fitting to one who is attempting to transcend humiliation with a righteous passion?

A practical project guides and shapes the aggression. Moral attentions after the event focus on the negative, destructive results. But within the event, the impassioned attacker is destroying his victim only to create something for himself. The positive achievement that the attacker pursues can best be seen after we consider the relationship between assault and homicide.

The practical objective of those who kill is not necessarily to kill. In the nonpredatory assault or homicide, "much of the violence is of an impulsive nature. An argument gets out of hand or two old enemies meet on the street, and a fight ensues. It is often difficult to tell who is the victim and who is the offender."³⁶

Recognizing these findings, contemporary writers on homicide and assault routinely note that whether an event ends in a criminal homicide or an aggravated assault depends on such chance factors as the distance to the hospital;³⁷ the quality of medical services available; whether a gun was used and, if so, its caliber;³⁸ whether "a head reeling from a punch strikes a rail or concrete floor";³⁹ or whether the knife chanced to hit a vital organ.⁴⁰

Research on family violence has indicated the hidden or "dark figure" of violent attacks that, but for chance factors, might have ended as homicides. Because victims are reluctant to complain officially, for a variety of reasons ranging from sympathy for the offender to fears of retaliation and self-incrimination, such attacks are notoriously unrepresented in crimes reported to the police. A national survey, whose results were based on what interviewees were willing to admit, found that

every year about one out of every six couples in the United States commits at least one violent act against his or her partner. . . . The rates for actually *using a knife or gun* on one's spouse are one out of every two hundred couples in the previous year, and almost one out of twenty-seven couples at some point in the marriage. . . . *over 1.7 million Americans had at some time faced a husband or wife wielding a knife or gun, and well over 2 million had been beaten up by his or her spouse.*⁴¹

That a large percentage of homicides by gun are effected by a single shot has been interpreted as evidence that there is no specific intent to kill: if the first shot misses, another might not be taken.⁴² In attacks that result in death, the attack often ceases long before the end of the victim's life, when there is clear evidence of serious injury but equally clear evidence of persistent life: cries of pain, pleas for mercy, moves to retreat. As Philip Cook noted:

In a large proportion of assaults with deadly weapons, the assailant ceases the attack by choice, rather than because of effective victim resistance. We can infer in unsustained attacks of this sort that the assailant's intent is to injure or incapacitate the victim—that there is no deliberate, unambiguous intent to kill.⁴³

In short, there are many indications that the victim's death is not a *necessary* concern in either aggravated assaults or the typical criminal homicide. Perhaps a more striking way to draw attention to the practical perspective animating the assailant is to note the indications that the victim's death may not be a *sufficient* concern. In a "stomping," the attacker may announce to his victim the objective of "kicking your eyes out of your head." The specific practical objective—to remove precisely the condition of the attacker's humiliation, the victim's offending gaze—is more imaginatively related to the project of transcending humiliation than would be the victim's death. Sacrificial violence does not particularly seek the neat end of death; rather, it attempts to achieve the existentially impossible goal of obliteration, of annihilating or wiping out the victim.

To "blow away" or wipe out a person goes beyond death, which only takes life from a body but leaves the body: a wipe out leaves no trace of what was removed. It reflects a specifically transcendent project in which death may be "too good" for the victim, as in the following case:

I was a good provider for my family and a hard worker. . . . I told her if she stopped with the divorce, and that I would promise to act better and . . . but she wouldn't buy any of it. I got angrier and angrier. . . . I looked at her straight in the face and said, "Well, X, you better start thinking about those poor kids of ours." She said, "I don't care about them: I just want a divorce."

My hate for her exploded then, and I said, "You dirty, no-good bitch", [*sic*] and started pounding her in the face with my fist. She put her arms up and covered her face, so I ran and got my rifle and pointed it at her. I said, "Bitch, you better change your mind fast or I'm going to kill you." She looked up and said in a smart-ass way, "Go ahead then, shoot me." I got so mad and felt so much hate for her, that I just started shooting her again and again. . . .⁴⁴

At times the attack persists past death, in a spirit that suggests that the assailant wishes the victim would stay alive or return to life, so the strange joy of killing might be sustained through repetition. It is arbitrary to assume that while the attack persists, the victim's death is the objective. Indeed, the victim's death may frustrate the attacker's purpose.

When the victim's death terminates the violent attack, one should still question whether death was the killer's objective or whether it was a means in a symbolically and emotionally compelling project that tran-

scends death. When one mate slays the other after a series of impassioned fights mobilized by charges of sexual disloyalty, it sometimes seems that the killer specifically wants the victim dead. The relationship had become intolerably humiliating; the killer—like Ruth in the next example—“couldn’t take it anymore”; he or she simply wanted to end it.

Ruth seemed to be secretive about her marital problems because of her pride. She was only separated from her second legal husband and did not want people to know about her common-law relationship [with the victim]. . . . He was teasing her about another woman he met who was nicer and more attractive than Ruth. He also ceased giving any physical affection to Ruth. This bothered Ruth a lot as she started to believe that he was going to leave her for the other woman. The day the homicide occurred. . . . he came back with another woman [and] . . . a bitter quarrel ensued. Ruth could not remember what happened after that. . . . She had stabbed to death the man she had lived with for two years. According to neighbours her last remark before the murder was “If I can’t have you, nobody else can!”⁴⁵

The goal of ending the relationship is inadequate to understand the sense of such killings. Ruth’s problem, for which the killing was a resolution, could not be solved by her leaving her lover, her suicide, or her lover’s death, since the relationship was about to end anyway.

From within the assailant’s perspective, killing a deserting lover makes sense as a way of *preserving* a relationship that otherwise would end. If he leaves her or if she leaves him, the relationship they had may well become, in both their romantic biographies, a relatively unremarkable chapter in a series of failed relationships. By killing her mate, Ruth made their relationship last forever; in the most existentially unarguable sense, she made it the most profound relationship either had ever had. Then no one else could have him; no one else could develop a relationship with him that would retrospectively extinguish the special significance they shared. Killing him was her means of honoring and protecting the transcendent significance of their relationship.

MARKING THE OFFENSE IN SACRIFICE

The practical project that the impassioned attacker, lashing out against insistent humiliation, is trying to accomplish is analogous to the practices of criminal punishment under the ancien régime, as analyzed by Michel Foucault.⁴⁶ When absolutist regimes punish theft by chopping off limbs, death becomes more likely, but it is not a necessary objective of this righteous vengeance. And when punishment persists beyond death, to dismemberment and torture of the dead body, it is clear that “capital punishment”—death—is not sufficient to accomplish the penal project.

The eighteenth-century critique of torture as barbaric and irrational called for a utilitarian penology in which the punishment was made to fit the crime. But the details of punishment by torture were given great care by the ancien régime just so the punishment would fit the crime. The punishment of major crimes called for ingenuity in the creation of new methods of torture, as reflected in the time and money spent to construct novel racks for inflicting novel forms of pain. A person who attempted regicide might be tortured for days—and for long after death transpired—first with horses to draw and quarter his body, then by hacking off the remaining limbs, then by piercing the corpse with heated metals, and so on.

Why expend all this effort? Why not make short work of the execution? According to Foucault, the object was to construct the truth of the crime. The nature and gravity of punishment defined the offense of which the condemned was guilty. To sustain the symbolism of the king’s regal sensibilities, each affront to the king’s rule must be given idiosyncratic punishment. The extent of the offense was defined for all to see by the pains the offender was forced to experience. The callous desecration of the criminal’s body was a method of celebrating the precious sensibility that the crime had offended.

Such punishments exacted in the name of divine right were continuous with ancient traditions of sacrifice that demonstrated respect for the sacred. When a lamb’s throat is slashed in a religious ceremony, the production of a dead animal is not the objective. A ritual slaughter might follow, the choice parts to be burned in a deferential offering. On other occasions, the drawing of blood, the scarring of a body, or a nonmortal dismemberment might demonstrate sufficient respect. Overall, the practical project—the concern that organized the bloody, righteous behavior—is the manifestation of respect for the sacred. It is not enough to feel the devotional spirit. Respect has to be objectified in blood.

If we must go back to the early eighteenth century to find an official system in the West that organized criminal punishment according to this understanding, we need only go to the details of contemporary assaults and homicides in families and against friends to find evidence of its persistent appeal. What is at stake in everyday contemporary violence is not a king’s divine right but the sacred core of respectability that the assailant is defending and defining through his violence.

Sometimes the correspondence between the assailant’s sense of offense and the marking he or she accomplishes is relatively direct. In an incident reported by M. Goldstein, a couple living in a trailer camp near his army base began fighting about music. “I felt like I wasn’t being allowed to listen to the music, and she went out to the car and she wrecked my tapes.” He then went “roaring back into the trailer” and, after “knocking over Patsy’s record player,” beat her with a rubber hose.⁴⁷ Before beating her, he attacked her record player, drawing a quick parallel between his attack on

her and her offense to his musical tastes. In the Hughes killing, Francine set a fire around the bed in which her husband was sleeping—a strikingly peculiar way to kill someone—only after, earlier that day, he had compelled her to burn her school books in a barrel.⁴⁸ The form of her attack on him linked her aggression not just to his physical attack on her but to his attack on her educational version of self-worth.

In the details of the assault, the project of sacrificial violence recreates the truth of the offense received. Sometimes the correspondence is drawn in exquisite detail; more often, it is crudely accomplished. We must look carefully at the several levels of correspondence between the offense received and assault undertaken to grasp just how the enraged person finds physical attack compellingly seductive.

Consider cursing. Most studies of impassioned violence reveal a great deal of attendant cursing. Although impassioned attacks sometimes occur without verbal forewarning, it seems natural to move into the assault with shouts of "bitch," "you fucking asshole," "rat bastard," "punk mother-fucker," "nickel-and-dime drunk," "bull-dagging bitch," "cock-sucking piece of shit," and so forth. Why? If attackers were focused on killing their victims, they might be expected to express wishes of that result, for example in the clean pronouncement, "I wish you were dead." If attackers were focused on "venting anger," they might be expected to emit conventional phrases like, "I hate you." If the purpose was to mobilize the body for the attack and perhaps intimidate the opponent, incoherent, guttural cries like those used in martial arts would be most fitting.

Instead, attackers curse, at times visibly struggling against the pressure of rising emotion to discipline the mouth into a vehicle for coherent vilification. They curse, not in the superficial sense of throwing "dirty" words in the vicinity of their victims (for example, by ejecting the asides that seem natural to people when irritated), but in the more profound, ancient sense of casting a spell or invoking magical forces to effect degrading transformations in a polluting offender. Such cursing is at best an indirect way of venting anger and is often useless or even counterproductive in removing the irritant. But it is a direct and effective way of doing just what it appears to do: symbolically transforming the offending party into an ontologically lower status. As in a cartoon, a wife becomes a barking dog. An acquaintance loses his recognizable personal appearance and becomes nothing more than an anus penetrated at will by anonymous others. A person who a moment ago was a friend with a recognizably human name now has become fecal material animated in fellatio.

Cursing is an eminently sensible way of making a subsequent attack into a service honoring the sacred. Now the attack will be against some morally lower, polluted, corrupted, profanized form of life, and hence in honor of a morally higher, more sacred, and—this bears special emphasis—an eternally respectable realm of being. Guttural cries are idiosyncratic, but curses draw on the communal language and its primordial sensibility about the

relationship between the sacred and the profane. If the other is shit, attacking him becomes a community service—a form of moral garbage collection performed on behalf of all decent people. Who, after all, wants to touch shit or scum or a bitch or a dirty whore? Cursing at once makes the accursed repulsive and conjures up an altruistic overlay for an attack on him or her. Now the attack will honor not just the attacker but the Good, in a presumptively primordial sense. In the terms in which cursing defines the battle, who would take the side of bitches against human beings, of fecal material against the sanctity of human life? Cursing sets up violence to be a sacrifice to honor the attacker as a priest representing the collective moral being. If the priest is stained by the blood of the sacrifice, by contact with the polluting profane material, that is a measure of the priest's devotion to society.

In addition to the cursing, the assailant often utters other distinctive preliminaries. Again, these are typically not literal threats or promises of physical injury, prosaically described, such as "I will kill you" or "I will disable you for a long time." They are powerfully portentous words, more like omens than promises or mundane threats: "I'm going to cut up your ass," "I'll kick your eyes out of your head," "I'll cut off your balls and hand them to you," "I'll fuck you up good," "I'll blow you away."

The promise is of a marking that will serve as a permanent witness that the offense previously suffered by the attacker has been transcended. The marking may be a scarring ("I'll cut you up real bad") or a blindness that will remain a visible sign ("I'll kick your eyes out"). It may be a violation of the victim's moral order ("I'll mess you up real bad") and thereby a sign of the transcendence of the assailant's moral coherence over the victim's resulting "mess." Or it may be a threat of obliteration ("I'll blow you away" or "wipe you out"), not just of the victim's future existence, but of any trace of his or her prior existence on earth. Like wiping out, a stomping is an action peculiar to sacrificial violence. Kicking occurs by accident, in sports or in joking behavior. But to attempt to stomp someone specifically seeks to leave the normal universe of routine behavior, with its multiple, morally inconsequential motives, and to enter a battlefield, where the stakes are incomparably higher—where Good and Evil fight for a final victory with a passion that understands the nature of the stakes.

Words are not necessary to make violence a means of honoring offended respectability. The general project is to mark the offense as a sacrifice taken in the victim's sensuality. In some instances, the lack of verbal forewarning is helpful.

She more or less tried to run me and I said no, and she got hysterical and said, "I could kill you!" And I got rather angry and slapped her in the face three or four times and I said "Don't you ever say that to me again!" And we haven't had any problem since.⁴⁹

In this instance, slapping was a device for the sensual manifestation of meaning—sounds were created, pain inflicted, and a sudden move was made. It was effective, in this recollection, in establishing the seriousness of the offense received from the wife and in reestablishing the order of the domestic community.

After the attack, what offenders recall provides further evidence that their objective was a marking. A black eye hidden under sunglasses or kept private by a spouse who stays at home for days, fearing to appear in public, is a naturally satisfying symbolic transcendence of the offense. The organ-source of the offending gaze is now darkened and perhaps shut closed in proved deference to the offended party. Attackers remember black eyes. They also detail the number of stitches required to sew the victim up, the number of bones that were broken, and the length of time the victim was in the hospital; recall the piece of finger or ear that was bitten or cut off; and note that the head was "cracked open." And they talk of blood: how much blood ran, where it ran, and the bloody mess that resulted.⁵⁰

Like the shouting that was the corporeal vehicle for the cursing, the blood and the bones that are the noted results of impassioned attacks bespeak the seriousness of the attacker's purpose. It is not incidental that the marks of sacrifice are signs of the body penetrated and its normally hidden elements revealed. Physical attack is seductively sensible as a device for bringing to the surface what is most fundamental in life. Attackers may understand their victims to have been acting artificially with them, for example, by providing transparent excuses for suspected adultery or by making promises that were made before and subsequently betrayed. The very recurrence of physical fights between spouses makes language more and more superficial and violence increasingly attractive. When words have lost their ability to articulate credible meaning through too-casual use, violent attack is an ultimate way of conveying the message: "Cut the bullshit. Be real with me. This is important to me, more important than anything else, deadly important." In the physical thrust, the attacker focuses on matters of vital significance; the attack reaches bone and spills blood, it aims to go beneath the surface of the everyday persona to reveal what is usually deeply hidden, the essential structure of life.

The imagery of sacrificial marking, however bizarre it seems, is usually not strange to those who kill. National data indicate that about 80 percent of those arrested for murder or nonnegligent manslaughter in 1970 had previous arrests. Among homicide offenders arrested in the United States between 1970 and 1975, almost 70 percent had previous arrest records.⁵¹ A study in Kansas City found that, in the two years preceding domestic homicides, police had intervened in a domestic disturbance at the address of the victim or suspect in about 90 percent of the cases, and that for about half the cases, the police had been at the location for a disturbance call at least five times.⁵²

If sacrificial violence is not exactly a practiced art, it is often a recurrent

practice over careers of violent acts. The attackers, however wild and impassioned they appear at the moment, know deeply and in some detail just what they are doing. The typical killer is familiar with the victim, feels at home in the setting, and has often practiced variations on the themes of sacrificial violence.

Humiliation, Rage, and Sacrificial Violence

Obviously it is possible to feel humiliated without becoming enraged; to become righteously enraged without launching an assault; to perform ritual sacrifices in a pacific, pietistic spirit; and so on. None of the conditions that create a seduction to righteous slaughter, when jointly experienced, independently calls out the others. But the interpretive, emotional, and practical conditions of righteous slaughter often depend on each other. Should one fail, not only will the prospects of an attack fade, the others are likely to be dismantled.

First, it should be noted that assailants do not necessarily construct the conditions of righteous slaughter one by one or in any particular temporal order. Commentators usually place the passion in homicidal and assaultive events before and as the immediately determining cause of the attack—often with metaphors suggesting catharsis or an image of the mind as a munitions dump. Thus, they describe the attackers as finally feeling that they cannot take any more pressure and "exploding" into violence, as "giving vent" to their disturbance through attacking, and as "exhausting" or "expending" their passion through violence. But close accounts reveal a frequent pattern in which an assailant moves into an attack and then rage builds.

In the following account of a fight, the attacker and his brother, after drinking with the victim in a bar, paid for a cab and "a couple of six packs" to take to the home of the victim. On their arrival, the victim announced that the two brothers, who had expected to spend the night, would have to leave. Some curses and threats were exchanged as the brothers moved to leave:

The dude said, "That's right, get your fucking ass out of here now," and pushed me once more. I said to myself, "Fuck it, that's it, I'm going to fuck him up." I hit him with a right hook, went berserk, and grabbed a lamp and busted him over the head and downed him. I yelled, "You punk motherfucker, I'll kick your eyes out of your head" and stomped him in the face.⁵³

After being pushed repeatedly by the victim, the attacker first decided no longer to respect his brother's remonstrations not to attack and began in a relatively civil manner ("with a right hook," as if in a boxing match). Only then did his rage accelerate, generating curses and a wild method of attack. The motions of battle sometimes call up the emotions that would sustain them.

Physical involvement in the style of sacrificial violence commonly precedes the height of rage. In yelling curses, one is deepening the significance of the conflict not only in symbolism but in the physical process as one's whole body is being mobilized for the expression. If anger is a confined experience (for instance, getting red in the face) and rage is a holistic experience (one is in rage or "en-raged"), shouting, screaming, or yelling is a conveniently intermediary step that sensually paves the way for enraged violence.

Family fights often begin in verbal hassling and physical tussling that have an ambiguous status. In such cases, rage does not precede and cause a violent attack; conflictual motions initiated without a source in deep anger may elicit symbolic themes of violent attack that are then taken up in rage. The next quote is from an observer who found himself in the middle of a family battle.

It started sort of slowly . . . so I couldn't tell for sure if they were even serious. . . . In the beginning they'd push at each other, or shove, like kids—little kids who want to fight but they don't know how. Then, this one time, while I'm standing there not sure whether to stay or go, and them treating me like I didn't even exist, she begins yelling at him like she did.

"You're a bust, you're a failure, I want you out of here, I can always get men who'll work, good men, not scum like you." And they're pushing and poking with their hands, like they were dancing. She pushes him, he pushes her, only she's doing all the talking. He isn't saying a word.

Then all of a sudden, she must have triggered off the right nerve because he lets fly with a right cross that I mean stuns. I mean she goes down like a rock! And he's swearing at her, calling her every name in the book.⁵⁴

Not only does rage sometimes develop after the violence begins, its persistence frequently is contingent on the practical success of violence. If it appears that violence will not succeed, the attacker may put an abrupt stop to rage, anticipating that otherwise he or she risks reverting to a more profound humiliation. In the following case of a fight in a jail cell, the attacker called his victim "crazy" and then was knocked down:

I really got hot. I just thought I wanted to kill that dirty s.o.b. I jumped up to my feet and pulled out a fingernail file that I had on me. But then

I thought, "This file won't stop him, and he's too fucking big to fight without something more than this. I better back off." After I backed up a few feet, I said, "Motherfucker, don't you ever turn your back near me; you've busted my fucking nose, and I'm going to get you for it." He looked at me and said "Come on, do it right now." I just said, "I'll catch you later" and walked off fast, real fast.⁵⁵

This attacker, however enraged he was, still had the composure to back off with a face-saving curse and a promise of revenge.

Notice how each of the three conditions of righteous slaughter was dismantled in that situation. First, the attacker suddenly realized the practical project of sacrificial violence could not be successfully organized ("he's too fucking big to fight"). His rage then quickly faded, threatening to turn back into humiliation. The further result was a reinterpretation of the situation as no longer calling for a last stand. There will be other opportunities to settle this, the would-be attacker announced with a now-calculated bravado, "I'll catch you later."

In other events, the causal conditions become undone in a different order. The first step back may come when the assailant seizes on grounds to hope for a future acknowledgment of respectability, as in this account:

I was at home looking for the t.v. guide when I found a note written by my wife. It said that she owed somebody \$6 for babysitting for her twelve hours. I thought to myself "Where in the living hell could she have been gone for twelve hours?" My mind then turned to her stepping out with someone behind my back, so I called her. When she came in the room, I said, "What in the hell is this note about?" She grabbed the note out of my hand and said, "Oh, it's nothing." I said, "What in the hell do you mean that it's nothing? Where in the hell were you for twelve hours?"

Then she started giving me some story about going shopping and to the hairdresser's. I said, "Bullshit, that crap doesn't take any twelve hours to do." She said, "Well, maybe the twelve hours that I wrote on the note is a mistake." I said, "Don't hand me that bullshit; you're fucking around with someone." She said, "No, no, I'm not." Then I yelled, "You no-good tramp, dirty whore, you better tell me where in the hell you have been." She said, "You are acting like nothing but a bum: I'm not going to tell you anything." I thought to myself, "I'm going to beat the damn truth out of that no-good, rotten bitch." I started thinking about tying her up and beating her until she talked, but then I thought that if I went that far, she might leave me, so I dropped it. I was scared that if I did do it, then I would end up losing her.⁵⁶

In this recollection, the alleged adultress denied the accusation ("No, no, I'm not."). There were further curses, but after the denial, the offended

spouse did not need to treat the dispute as a last stand, and he turned from being in hell, surrounded by bullshit, to the mundane future—to what life would be like on the other side of a terminal conflict. Then he abandoned the transcendent aspiration of rage. By labeling his accusations as the crude acts of a "bum," his wife threw out a hint of respectability: they should rise above mean suspicions, they are suited to a more refined level of understanding. And, this time anyway, he jumped at that hint and quickly abandoned what he sensed was an even more precarious last stand.

Even when the parties are enraged and are familiar with the ways of sacrificial violence, the interactive character of the relationship with the victim builds a further dimension of uncertainty into the event. The victim may not sustain the pressure of humiliation but back off, redefining the situation as not requiring a last stand.⁵⁷ These battles are processes of negotiation over how much is practically required before the pressure to humiliate is over, before the last stand is dismantled, and before an objective reconstruction of offended respectability is deemed accomplished. Rage may seem powerful, both to the enraged person and to analysts, but rage itself does not demand an attack on the body of the humiliating party. If a sacrifice is to be taken, it may be made in the forms of inanimate targets, for example, by punching holes in a wall, smashing chairs on tables, shooting out windows, or throwing about objects that are precious to the offensive party.

There are multiple situational contingencies on the road to righteous slaughter. That there is no inevitability to the event is not due to the defects of methodology or theory or solely to the frequently interactional character of the violence. As experienced by the participants, the event is inherently uncertain in at least two respects.

First, much of the conflict leading to sacrificial violence is conducted not in a controlling attitude but in the stance of prayer. Pushing, shoving, shouting—these characteristic aggressive moves are inadequately understood simply as punitive. Why shove or shout? What damage does that do? Pushing is incomprehensible as "irrational" behavior somehow randomly growing out of "explosive anger." It is pellucid as a way of trying to move the other out of his or her posture to end the humiliation and reverse the pressure to take a last stand. Shouting is loud—not so loud to hurt the other's eardrums but loud enough momentarily to block out one's own openness to the other's definition of the situation. If the other would not shout back, if he or she would "just shut up," perhaps that would be enough. If these moves appear in one light to assume postures of dominance, in another, more obscure way, they are prayers that acknowledge the uncertainty of the evolving moment. These common openings to righteous violence signify a still-engaged moral inclination for peace even as they prepare to honor the Good in blood.

Second, the performance of sacrificial violence is an opening of the self to fate. If the attacker does not know just what the practical result of his

attack will be—whether the bullet will hit a vital organ, whether his victim will be strong enough to survive, or how long it will take for medical assistance to arrive—he knows that he does not know. He could know. As I will detail in chapter 8, killers can meditate on and preside over their administration of a coup de grace. They can envision a dead body while they plan an escape and they can arrange corpses after the fact to shape the scene that will greet subsequent discoverers. As can be seen in most modern methods of capital punishment—when carefully balanced chemicals are injected to produce death instantly, painlessly, and without marring the resulting corpse—killing a person can be made the precise, efficient, specific objective of an act.

But distinctive to righteous slaughter is an objective that makes such attentions obscenely mundane: the project of transcending one's existential future. After humiliation makes one painfully aware that what has just now happened cannot be reconciled with a respectable vision of oneself in any imaginable, concrete future, rage rises to block out concern for what will be, "then." These criminal killings are the results of leaps into blind faith. Impassioned slayings are both morally familiar moves typically taken on familiar grounds and acts that make no sense unless they attempt to go beyond the familiar, to produce an irreversible, unprecedented transformation. Ultimately, the open character of sacrificial violence is due not to failings of evidence or to features of interaction, but to the phenomenological fact that its final seduction is the unknown.

Phenomenal Foreground and Structural Background

In the United States, police departments, coroners' offices, federal and state departments of justice, and the U.S. Bureau of the Census routinely produce data on crime. The choice of the variables that are covered in the official data is structured by a multitude of historical and political-institutional forces; causal social theory has played little discernible part in this process.⁵⁸ Surely, the contours and lived contingencies of criminal experience are far removed from the definitions of crime and the demographic factors that such data trace. Still, the government's regular and statistically massive production of crime data has been, to judge from the contents of professional journals, a powerful seducer of academic social scientists.⁵⁹

What can one learn about the relationship of background factors to homicide if one sticks with data that describe the offenders within their backgrounds? By making the understanding of criminal experience the first priority, we do not abandon inquiry into the relation of demographic and socioeconomic factors to crime. On the contrary, we discover

phenomenologically grounded leads to a comprehensive theory. In the next sections, I discuss social class and gender. To understand the disproportionate representation of blacks in homicide requires a discussion of some themes that, to avoid redundancy, are taken up in chapter 7, which treats the even greater overrepresentation of blacks in robbery.

SOCIAL CLASS

Marvin Wolfgang, among others, has asserted that criminal homicide, especially its impassioned form, is committed primarily by those of low socioeconomic status. In addition to examining quantified police data, analysts such as Wolfgang have read extensive underlying evidentiary documents and have personally observed the investigatory process.⁶⁰ The strength of their conviction comes not so much from quantified class data as from the absence of evidence of homicides among the middle and upper classes.⁶¹

To date the best inquiry into middle- and upper-class homicides found not only that the crime is rare but that these rare events are qualitatively different from killings that have the qualities of righteous slaughter. The researchers examined 119 cases of upper-class socioeconomic killers reported in the *New York Times* between 1955 and 1979. They found that

only 2.5% of the upper-class homicides, as compared to between one-third and one-half (in other studies) of the lower-class homicides, were the result of a trivial altercation. . . . Of the lower-class killers, 25.5% in the Wolfgang study, 37.9% in the Voss and Hepburn study, and 22% in the Curtis study could claim some mitigation of the offense by virtue of the initial show of force by the victim. In contrast, none of the upper-class killers in the present study was provoked by a victim's overt act of force. . . . None of the lower-class spouse-killings but 26.9% of those in the upper-class, were linked to pecuniary motives such as insurance benefits or property inheritance, while 28.6% were attributed to profound mental depression. Of the 56 upper-class spouse-slayers, almost one-fifth (six husbands and five wives) hired someone else to do the job.⁶²

Suicide followed homicide in 27 percent of the affluent cases, compared to a range from 0.8 percent to 9 percent in other U.S. studies of all homicides, regardless of class.

Because it was based on newspaper reports, this study is far from ideal. The researchers first tried to locate a sample by contacting law enforcement agencies, but despite a cooperative response, they could not locate more than a handful of cases. The people in the best position to know, know that the cases are not there. If the affluent are more capable of covering up their crimes, such a facility would be less relevant to righteous slaughters

than to murders done for profit. And there is no reason to suspect that newspapers are biased to report murder among the affluent only when it is done coldly for gain. The Jean Harris case—of the headmistress of a prestigious Eastern girls' school who shot the "Scarsdale diet doctor" to death—fit the form of a righteous slaughter and certainly did not lack news coverage.

Unfortunately, the available data are inadequate to determine whether homicide is concentrated among the poor, diffused throughout the working class, at the lower margins of the working class, in a steadily inverse relationship to socioeconomic status at the bottom region of the social structure, or whatever. A double irony captures what is known, through qualitative evidence, about the relationship of social class to righteously enraged homicide. First, although impassioned homicides are extreme attacks on perhaps the most fundamental communal taboo, to the killers they are efforts to defend what they, often idiosyncratically, take to be eternal, collectively shared values. Second, if it is the working and underclasses who are doing virtually all the righteously enraged criminal killings, they are killing to honor not only values often associated with the lower classes (male virility and *machismo*), but values typically labeled as middle class or bourgeois: the sanctity of the marital union, respect for property rights, and the importance of being a responsible debtor. Why should it be the members of the lower working and underclasses who kill (each other) so passionately to defend middle-class values?

An answer is suggested by the oddity of Jean Harris's killing of Dr. Tarnower, which was strikingly similar to common lower-class killings in its dynamics. Caught in the passions of sexual jealousy, after a series of humiliating outbursts in which competing mistresses tore and smeared feces on each other's clothes found in Doctor Tarnower's home, Jean Harris arrived late at night at her lover's home, admittedly with a gun and, in retrospect, obviously without a good plan of escape. Perhaps the most appealing part of her defense was that she did not have an escape plan. But the lack of an escape plan is not unusual in lower-class passion killings. In effect, Ms. Harris relied on her ability to convey a "classy" impression to keep the jury from considering her case a lower-class killing.⁶³

The Harris-Tarnower killing is an exception that indicates the rule—a "negative case" strategically valuable for understanding why social class would ordinarily be related inversely to homicide. Ms. Harris had just learned that she would lose her job and perhaps much of her respectable reputation. What was new in her life was not the destruction of her love relationship—she had been pushed aside by her lover long before—but the threat to her career. Her trip to the doctor's home on the fateful night began not as a murder plot but as a desperate effort to rescue her respectability. The association of lower-class status and homicide is understandable as a product of this sort of convergent disrespect in a person's occupational and intimate life.

Before further speculation is warranted on possible causal connections between homicides of passion and class status, many more close studies are needed of negative cases and of the personal contexts in lower-income settings within which homicidal passions commonly develop. Economic pressures are only occasionally visible within the situated homicide interaction and, even then, one must wonder how the offenders previously managed to handle the pressures. And as to the relative lack of murders of passion in the higher classes, it is too easy to speculate that, given the social structure of his life, the upper-middle-class male has more opportunities to escape humiliation.

There is at least widespread evidence that the modal times and places for homicide track the escape routes of the male working class. This evidence supports one side of the causal theory relating social class to murders of passion. That is, if experience at work becomes intolerably degrading, the worker can fantasize about respect and sensual pleasure at home. If tensions at home become intolerable, he can escape to the neighborhood bar. But at some point on this route, there may be no further escape.

Elijah Anderson vividly conveyed the risks of the neighborhood tavern as one stop on the escape route of urban black poor men. Working as a participant-observer, Anderson was taken home by his informant, Herman, who bragged to his sister that Anderson, who was, at the time, a Ph.D. candidate, was a "doctor." Overhearing this statement as a showy claim of respectability by association, Butterroll, Herman's common-law wife, made sure that Herman heard her tell her sister-in-law that Anderson was just another "wino" from Jelly's, Herman's favorite corner tavern. With that remark, Herman and Anderson left. Anderson explained about Herman and his associates at Jelly's:

This setting often becomes the thick of their social life. Here are the others they really care about impressing. . . . this general audience of peers . . . gains the real capacity to accept or reject the selves exhibited. . . . Here people can gather freely, bargaining with their limited resources, their symbols of status, and their personal sense of who and what they are against the resources of their peers and against what their peers see them *really* to be. . . . It is here among intimate peers that selves on display may be meaningfully accepted, "shot down," "blown away," tried and tested, or simply ignored.⁶⁴

I cannot confidently suggest that escape routes (the office as a respectable retreat, private space and business trips for diversions from the horrors at home, or the power of money to buy shows of respect in consumer transactions) are more readily available to the middle class because no one knows whether people in all the classes experience humiliation in a similar way. The available qualitative data show what humiliation is like when it leads to violent assault. The lives of those who are higher in the social class system

are likely to be so thoroughly different that not just the response but the emergence and shape of humiliation may also be radically different.

GENDER

Independent of the influence of social class, region, race, and all other socioeconomic and demographic factors that have been examined in relation to homicide, men commit criminal homicides at much higher rates than do women. U.S. data show that males are responsible for about 80 percent of the homicides; a relatively low level compared to societies in other parts of the world and especially to nonliterate societies.⁶⁵ The data describing the sex of the offenders and victims in criminal homicides are also consistent. In about 60 percent of the homicides in the United States, males kill males; killings of women by women are significantly uncommon, currently constituting less than 3 percent of all criminal homicides.⁶⁶

These figures seem to fit well the notion of sex-related, generalized psychological or socialized proclivities to violence. But if *machismo* or male cultures of violence have much effect on homicidal behavior, the effects must not be powerful, given the rarity of the event. And such notions seem contradicted by the minor measure of the predominance of men in family homicides. For homicides within families in the modern West, the rates for males are not always higher than the rates for females, and when they are, the edge is often only slight.⁶⁷ The overall preponderance of male homicides consists largely of felony murders by males and fatal fights among male acquaintances. A recent study found that women committed about 40 percent of the family homicides in several American cities (see table 1.1).⁶⁸

TABLE 1.1

Percentage (and Number) of Homicides Committed by Women by City and Type of Homicide, 1978

City	Family Homicide	Stranger Homicide
Oakland	50.0(5)	10.0(1)
Chicago	49.2(30)	4.5(4)
Newark	46.2(6)	16.7(4)
Dallas	39.5(17)	8.3(5)
Memphis	37.5(6)	9.1(2)
"Ashton"	36.8(7)	6.3(1)
St. Louis	33.3(9)	2.9(1)
Philadelphia	27.9(12)	0
Total	39.7(92)	5.7(18)

Source: Marc Riedel and Margaret Zahn, *Nature and Patterns of American Homicide* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, 1985), p. 41.

But whatever the exact balance of male and female homicides in contemporary society, there are distinctive male and female forms of the project. Although the basic dimensions of the causal process of impassioned murder are essentially uniform, differences are notable in the versions of the Good, in the constitution of the "last moral stand," in the experience of the transition from humiliation to rage, and in the style of sacrificial marking that each sex finds compelling.

As attacks undertaken to mark offenses received in sacrifices taken, male-to-female and female-to-male physical abuse, even when counted as equivalent by surveyors, do not necessarily have identical meanings. Men may take pride in the black eyes they have planted on their mates, which force the women into a short-lived *purdah*, their shame confining them at home or, should they go out, compelling them to wear veils constructed of heavy makeup, sunglasses, and hats. The male's appreciation of such scarring depends on his community's understanding of proper gender roles, which do not include pride in the abuse of men by women. Nevertheless, curses may scar when blows would glance off. A woman can distinctively mark a man by ridiculing his virility and, whether or not the woman works, by shaming him for failing to uphold the traditional, symbolic male responsibility for the economic status of the household.⁶⁹

A recent study by Angela Browne of "battered women who kill" suggested another difference in the ways men and women in homicidal relationships may take pleasure in sustaining the other's pain. The subjects, forty-two women from fifteen states, were not randomly selected from female offenders but were found through the efforts of their defense lawyers to document histories of physical abuse.⁷⁰ Several of the women recounted sadistic sexual practices by their mates following the males' vicious attacks. Although the sample is systematically biased, the finding is significant because there are no comparable indications in the literature of an erotic reward for females who may physically attack their male mates. But, although Browne's research did not include data on the male perspective, she noted that the women tended to be from a higher social class than did the men. The women's accounts so strongly attest to their superior refinement and moral sensibility that it seems likely they somehow gave just that impression, not only to their interviewer after the killing but during the life of the doomed relationship to their mates.

As in the cases reviewed earlier in this chapter, in the homicides committed by the women in Browne's study, the victims sustained the offenders' sense that the here and now required a last stand. As Browne stated, "In the eventual homicide incidents, many of the men *dared* their partners to kill them, or ran against the gun as the women were firing."⁷¹ Moreover, the women's sense of the need to take a last stand was frequently constructed for the women by the men's threats to hunt them down and kill them if they attempted to walk out on the relationship.

Perhaps the strongest statistical finding in this area is a negative one—

the rarity of women killing women. Within the social circles in which homicides by women typically occur, women seem so exclusively to place their self-esteem on their relations with men that only their mates, or occasionally a female rival, can press them to a last moral stand. Homicides by women are tightly tied to female roles at home. In contrast to homicides by men, the victims of female criminal killers are much more often family members,⁷² the event typically occurs in the home,⁷³ and there is even some provocative evidence that the act is more often performed in a context—in the kitchen, with knives—suggesting the traditional female role in the home.⁷⁴ Within the home, differences in the social identities of men and women more clearly shape the process than the probability of homicide.

Jane Totman's study of female killers incarcerated in California portrayed an extreme degree of isolation. Many of Totman's subjects had suffered histories of violent attacks by their mates and despaired of having any alternatives; they had no employment prospects, no educational opportunities, not even hobbies or interests outside their families. Of the thirty-six women who killed mates, no woman expressed pleasure or interest in previous academic or vocational experiences:

Very few ever imagined, even as a child, doing anything with themselves other than getting married and having children. . . . The women interviewed wanted to feel loved by their men. . . . "Life" can perhaps be defined as their circumscribed mate relationship.⁷⁵

Men stand up for virility in its traditional folk meaning when they fight it out with other men in bars and on the street. Women who kill likewise defend traditional versions of the female identity.

As to the emotional process of moving from humiliation to rage, the evidence does not indicate a constitutional or socialized incompetence among female killers. If violence is a vehicle of masculine sensuality, that is, if rising up in hot, angry physical aggression embodies a phallic metaphor, women are not especially put off by the unfeminine character required to do battle with men. Even in traditional societies in which women's killing of their mates is virtually nonexistent, there are often patterns of female killing of children and disciplinary practices in which physical attacks are routine.

If anything, the evidence is that women's transition to rage is even more sudden than is men's. A study of family violence conducted at a rural medical clinic found, that in cases of assaults, "the violence by women was related to a direct threat to life and usually came as a surprise since they themselves were unaware of the extent of their rage."⁷⁶ Browne's volume elaborated on this theme with evidence from several cases in which the women so thoroughly portrayed themselves as long-suffering martyrs that they could not make sense of the moment in which they finally and fatally

moved into an aggressive posture.⁷⁷ There is virtually no evidence that any of the women had become angry, much less physically counterattacked, before. These women retrospectively reported the abandonment of passivity as an automatic, alien process. It is as if they regarded the embodiment of rage as so out of character that they could achieve it only by refusing to recognize themselves as authentically engaged. Thus, as Browne described:

Suddenly, Karen was just tired of being threatened this way and never knowing if she was going to live or die. . . . The next thing she remembers, she was standing in the kitchen and realized that Hal was shot. . . .

The next thing Kim remembers is standing in the living room facing Billy, putting a 7mm rifle to her shoulder and firing once. She remembers a huge sound. . . .

Bella thinks she said, 'How could that happen?' She wondered how the fire could have started. It was like she was in a daze; she didn't really think she did it. . . .

Mary Wheeler was found at the scene of Chuck's death in a state of profound shock, by police officers who responded to a call from a neighbor.⁷⁸

Women do not live the offense by stumbling about, shooting erratically, setting fires haphazardly, or acting with an air of uncertainty while they are committing it. The blackout comes afterwards. They appear to have a distinct problem in self-consciously acknowledging the sacrificial rage that they were able to effect, apparently quite naturally, at the fatal moment. The experience of traumatic shock that they authentically construct suggests a direct and desperate effort to reconstruct a posture of innocence. The innocence most deeply at issue is not a matter of legal responsibility for the homicide; with respect to legal difficulties, they are generally in as difficult a position as are men who are spontaneous passion killers. Their more distinctive problem is to explain *to themselves* how, after so many cycles of receiving physical abuse from and extending forgiveness to their male mates, they could have accomplished the killing so naturally. The ability to execute righteous slaughter at the first try may imply something inconsistent with their autobiographies of martyrdom: that they had long been living the anger and practicing the elements of righteous sacrifice, but in ways that previously left no public scars. Perhaps rituals of forgiving abusive mates can substitute for rites of cursing; surely, as visible marks of sacrifices taken and respectability honored, tears and wrenching pleas can substitute for blood. When battered wives make a sudden switch from

suffering to avenging martyr, they are often concluding an epic moral tale characterized on one side by a series of attacks in which the male exacts testimony to his respectability from the body of the female and on the other by recurrent cycles of reconciliation in which the female is honored by pleas for forgiveness and acts of humbled contrition.⁷⁹

In short, with the limited evidence now available for comparative analysis, it appears that both men and women construct impassioned murders through roughly the same steps but frequently in distinctive styles. On the one hand, murder is too rare an event and male and female homicide rates within families are too close, for the study of homicide to be an important source of knowledge about differences in male and female identity. On the other hand, the study of gender differences is essential to the study of homicide. Killing a mate is too important an act not to reflect the shape one has given his or her sexual being.

CHAPTER 2

Sneaky Thrills

Various property crimes share an appeal to young people, independent of material gain or esteem from peers. Vandalism defaces property without satisfying a desire for acquisition. During burglaries, young people sometimes break in and exit successfully but do not try to take anything. Youthful shoplifting, especially by older youths, often is a solitary activity retained as a private memory.¹ "Joyriding" captures a form of auto theft in which getting away with something in celebratory style is more important than keeping anything or getting anywhere in particular.

In upper-middle-class settings, material needs are often clearly insufficient to account for the fleeting fascination with theft, as the account by one of my students illustrates:

[82] I grew up in a neighborhood where at 13 everyone went to Israel, at 16 everyone got a car and after high school graduation we were all sent off to Europe for the summer. . . . I was 14 and my neighbor was 16. He had just gotten a red Firebird for his birthday and we went driving around. We just happened to drive past the local pizza place and we saw the delivery boy getting into his car. . . . We could see the pizza boxes in his back-seat. When the pizza boy pulled into a high rise apartment complex, we were right behind him. All of a sudden, my neighbor said, "You know, it would be so easy to take a pizza!" . . . I looked at him, he looked at me, and without saying a word I was out of the door. . . . got a pizza and ran back. . . . (As I remember, neither of us was hungry, but the pizza was the best we'd ever eaten.)

It is not the taste for pizza that leads to the crime; the crime makes the pizza tasty.

Qualitative accounts of *initial* experiences in property crime by the poorest ghetto youths also show an exciting attraction that cannot be explained by material necessity. John Allen, whose career as a stickup man living in a Washington, D.C., ghetto will be examined in detail in chapter 6, recalled his first crime as stealing comic books from a junkyard truck: "we de-

stroyed things and took a lot of junk—flashlights, telephones." These things only occasionally would be put to use; if they were retained at all, they would be kept more as souvenirs, items that had acquired value from the theft, than as items needed before and used after the theft.²

What are these wealthy and poor young property criminals trying to do? A common thread running through vandalism, joyriding, and shoplifting is that all are sneaky crimes that frequently thrill their practitioners. Thus I take as a phenomenon to be explained the commission of a nonviolent property crime as a sneaky thrill.

In addition to materials collected by others, my analysis is based on 122 self-reports of university students in my criminology courses.³ Over one-half were instances of shoplifting, mostly female; about one-quarter described vandalism, almost all male; and the rest reported drug sales, non-mercenary housebreaking, and employee theft. In selecting quotations, I have emphasized reports of female shoplifters, largely because they were the most numerous and sensitively written.

The sneaky thrill is created when a person (1) tacitly generates the experience of being seduced to deviance, (2) reconquers her emotions in a concentration dedicated to the production of normal appearances, (3) and then appreciates the reverberating significance of her accomplishment in a euphoric thrill. After examining the process of constructing the phenomenon, I suggest that we rethink the relationships of age and social class to devious property crime.

Flirting with the Project

In the students' accounts there is a recurrent theme of items stolen and then quickly abandoned or soon forgotten. More generally, even when retained and used later, the booty somehow seems especially valuable while it is in the store, in the neighbor's house, or in the parent's pocket-book. To describe the changing nature of the object in the person's experience, we should say that once it is removed from the protected environment, the object quickly loses much of its charm.

During the initial stage of constructing a sneaky thrill, it is more accurate to say that the objective is to be taken or struck by an object than to take or strike out at it. In most of the accounts of shoplifting, the shoplifters enter with the idea of stealing but usually do not have a particular object in mind.⁴ Indeed, shoplifters often make legitimate purchases during the same shopping excursions in which they steal. The entering mood is similar to that which often guides juveniles into the short journeys or sprees that result in pranks and vandalism.⁵ Vandals and pranksters often play

with conventional appearances; for example, when driving down local streets, they may issue friendly greetings one moment and collectively drop their pants ("moon") to shock the citizenry the next. The event begins with a markedly deviant air, the excitement of which is due partly to the understanding that the occurrence of theft or vandalism will be left to inspirational circumstance, creative perception, and innovative technique. Approaching a protected property with disingenuous designs, the person must be drawn to a particular object to steal or vandalize, in effect, inviting particular objects to seduce him or her. The would-be offender is not hysterical; he or she will not be governed by an overriding impulse that arises without any anticipation. But the experience is not simply utilitarian and practical; it is eminently magical.

MAGICAL ENVIRONMENTS

In several of the students' recountings of their thefts, the imputation of sensual power to the object is accomplished anthropomorphically. By endowing a thing with human sensibilities, one's reason can be overpowered by it. To the Alice in Wonderland quoted below, a necklace first enticed—"I found the one that outshone the rest and begged me to take it"—and then appeared to speak.

[15] There we were, in the most lucrative department Mervyn's had to offer two curious (but very mature) adolescent girls: the cosmetic and jewelry department. . . . We didn't enter the store planning to steal anything. In fact, I believe we had "given it up" a few weeks earlier; but once my eyes caught sight of the beautiful white and blue necklaces alongside the counter, a spark inside me was once again ignited. . . . Those exquisite puka necklaces were calling out to me, "Take me! Wear me! I can be yours!" All I needed to do was take them to make it a reality.

Another young shoplifter endowed her booty, also a necklace, with the sense of hearing. Against all reason, it took her; then, with a touch of fear, she tossed it aside in an attempt to exorcise the black magic and reduce it to a lifeless thing.

[56] I remember walking into the store and going directly to the jewelry stand. . . . This is very odd in itself, being that I am what I would consider a clothes person with little or no concern for accessories. . . . Once at home about 40-45 minutes after leaving the store, I looked at the necklace. I said "You could have gotten me in a lot of trouble" and I threw it in my jewelry box. I can't remember the first time I wore the necklace but I know it was a very long time before I put it on.

The pilferer's experience of seduction often takes off from an individualizing imputation. Customers typically enter stores, not to buy a thing they envisioned in its particularities but with generic needs in mind. A purchased item may not be grasped phenomenally as an individualized thing until it is grasped physically. Often, the particular ontology that a possession comes to exhibit—the charm of a favorite hat or an umbrella regarded as a treasure—will not exist while the item sits in a store with other like items; the item will come to have charm only after it has been incorporated into the purchaser's life—only when the brim is shaped to a characteristic angle or the umbrella becomes weathered. But the would-be thief manages to bring the particular charm of an object into existence before she possesses it. Seduction is experienced as an influence emanating from a particular necklace, compact, or chapstick, even though the particular object one is drawn to may not be distinguishable from numerous others near it.

In some accounts, the experience of seduction suggests a romantic encounter. Objects sometimes have the capacity to trigger "love at first sight."⁶ Seduction is an elaborate process that begins with enticement and turns into compulsion. As a woman in her mid-thirties recalled:

A gold-plated compact that I had seen on a countertop kept playing on my mind. Heaven knows I didn't need it, and at \$40 it was obviously overpriced. Still, there was something about the design that intrigued me. I went back to the counter and picked up the compact again. At that moment, I felt an overwhelming urge.⁷

Participant accounts often suggest the image of lovers catching each other's eyes across a crowded room and entering an illicit conspiracy. The student next quoted initially imagines herself in control and the object as passive—she is moving to put it in her possession; but at the end of her imagining, the object has the power to bring her pocket to life.

[67] I can see what I want to steal in plain sight, with no one in the aisle of my target. It would be so easy for me to get to the chapstick without attracting attention and simply place it in my pocket. . . . I'm not quite sure why I must have it, but I must.

On the far side of "It would be so easy" is an appreciation of the object already in her pocket. Now she has imagined not just the thing and a secret, collusive relationship with it; she perceives the thing as having transcended her personal boundaries and as residing in her pocket. The thing has demonstrated its power to act in her world by bringing her pocket into experiential existence.

The ordinary customer, even one being seduced to a purchase by the charm of an object, would not be aware of the pocket in which she would place her purchase until, through inserting the object, she would sense

herself creating her sensual awareness of the pocket. But a flirtation with the project of theft can make the pocket exist for the person before the object has entered it, and through the powers of the object itself. Through nothing more than the sheer power of a slight bit of deviant intention, a pocket can magically become alive. In more detailed accounts, we would find descriptions of just how the pocket is sensually alive: perhaps hot or perhaps begging to be filled.

Like a wanderer in an enchanted land, the thief or vandal seems to be captive of an environment that knows just what she needs or what he wants to do. Ten brand-new subway cars, shiny new, at rest overnight, no guards around—just perfect; it would be so easy! The keys are hanging in the ignition of that sports car, as if the car knew just where it should be and when—as if it was just waiting for me to come along; it would be so easy! Having secretly reentered the country club after all the members left for the night, I suddenly feel the need to defecate. There, just at the right time, is the cash register drawer, with compartments in just the right shape. It's not that I came in with this in mind but, my God! it would be so easy! By chance, seeing the green necklace lying on top of the pile, she suddenly realizes that it is just what she has been looking for; she glances around and notices an oblivious environment. The setting seems almost to look the other way, respectfully allowing the new intimacy to develop in private.

'IT WOULD BE SO EASY'

An environment that is sensually endowed; items capable of speaking, hearing, or lighting up an awareness of usually dead parts of clothing; a "Eureka!" or "my God!" at the recognition that the situation is miraculously constituted perfectly for the emergent project in deviance—these are signs of success in conjuring up magic. This is not a magic used to trick the audience of observers who are not in on the magician's sleight of hand; this is a magic that takes in its magician-creator. In some sense, the would-be thief is imputing to objects and the scene the sensual capacities to seduce. But, just as obviously, in some other sense the would-be thief must be accomplishing the imputation tacitly for the feeling of temptation to be raised.⁸

The initial movement toward the dialectics of sneaky thrills is into the culture of deviance. "It would be so easy" is experienced as compelling within a broader awareness that what is to follow will be a deviant privacy maintained within a realm of public conventionality. The reference in "It would be so easy" is at once to the budding project in deviance and to the particular object to be stolen, vandalized, or broken into. Only because she is contemplating theft does it make sense for her to appreciate how easy it would be to acquire the object.⁹ The excitement of the challenge in the deviant project—an excitement that the acquisition would not have were

it not deviant—is experienced as an external provocation that works independently on the self.

Some of the details that would make the deviant project hard or easy really are not up to the would-be shoplifter. In part the facility of the project is a matter of environmental arrangements for which she has no responsibility. While she is appreciating the object as a possible object of theft, she considers it at a particular angle. She will approach it from this side, with her back to that part of the scene, taking hold of it at just that part of its surface. In her experience that "It would be so easy," she is mobilizing herself to concentrate on the tangible details of the object. Thus the would-be shoplifter's sense of the facility of the project is constituted not as a feature of her "intent" or mental plan, but as a result of the position of the object in the store and the posture the object takes toward her.

To specify further how the would-be shoplifter endows the inanimate world with a real power to move her, we might consider why the initial stage of magical provocation is part of the project of sneaky thrills and not of other, equally fascinating, forms of deviance. Not all projects in deviance begin with the seductive sense, "It would be so easy." Indeed, some projects in deviance that are especially attractive to young people begin with an appreciation of the difficulties in becoming seduced to them.

Often novices to deviant activities enter with a self-conscious awareness that they are unsuccessfully struggling to conjure up compelling forces in the world. Consider the path into marijuana smoking. The sensual pleasure typically emerges only after some repeated use and the mastery of new practical tasks, (such as sucking in smoke and holding it down), and then only after learning how to interpret the new experiences as pleasurable.¹⁰

There is no evidence that prospective users, before they come to appreciate the unusual possibilities of the substance, experience any seductive power emanating from it. During initial attempts, would-be marijuana users often are struck by the mundane character of the technical requirements of the activity: how to roll a joint, how to hold onto the tiny lengths that are being passed around, how long to hold in their breath, and so on. In initial experiences with many types of contraband substances, the novice often seems to sense the trial as consequential and possibly intimidating—not as an act that the substance itself draws them to perform. Only after they develop the competence to enjoy illicit substances do they come to see items that are associated with its sustained use—such as "roach" clips, crooked little "hash" pipes, and shiny little "coke" spoons—as charming. And, depending on numerous further contingencies, they may develop a feeling of compelling attraction to the substance itself.¹¹

Objects already defined as deviant by social convention may reveal their seductive powers only after practiced use. Whether the novice is becoming acquainted with marijuana smoking in a group or privately, he knows that

the activity is regarded as deviant before he begins. His initial responsibility is to master the technical requirements of the practice; the construction of the moral significance of the activity has already been taken care of by society. With sneaky, thrilling property crimes such as shoplifting, however, a conventional object, like a chapstick on a store counter, becomes fascinating, seductively drawing the would-be shoplifter to it, only and just because she is playing with imposing a deviant project on the world.

Thus, it appears that the origin of the seductive power of the objects is in the person's *origination* of the deviant character of the event. "It would be so easy" signals to her not simply that no external obstacles stand firmly in the way, but a secret, internal desire to be deviant. The person's fascination with the particularly attractive features of the object—the paint and the wall that are in irresistible proximity, the stillness of the car that could so quickly be driven away, and the chapstick on the counter—is the outside of the person's fascination in discovering his or her deviant creativity.

As the budding shoplifting project brings the object of deviance to life, the person and the object enter a conspiratorial relationship. "It would be so easy" contains a touch of surprise in the sudden awareness that no one else would notice. The tension of attraction/hesitation in moving toward the object is experienced within a broader awareness of how others are interpreting one's desires. For all *they* know, one's purposes are moral and the scene will remain mundane. The person's situational involvement in sneaky property crimes begins with a *sensual concentration on the boundary between the self as known from within and as seen from without*.

In this first stage of sneaky thrills, the metaphysical magic of the deviant project takes the person in. She knows that as she plays with appearances to manipulate others' perceptions of her, the object may come into her life in uniquely provocative ways. Depending on how she manipulates the object and the boundary between self and others, *they* may soon manipulate her as a dependent creature suddenly at their mercy, held deeply within their world. What happens depends not just on how she handles the object, but on whether others are watching it as closely as she is.

The Reemergence of Practiced Reason

Independent of the would-be shoplifter's construction of a sense that she might get away with it are any number of contingencies that can terminate the process. For example, the sudden attentions of a clerk may trigger an intimidating awareness of the necessity to produce "normal appearances."¹²

At some point on the way toward all sneaky thrills, the person realizes that she must work to maintain a conventional, calm appearance up to and through the point of exit. The timing of this stage, relative to others in the process, is not constant. The tasks of constructing normal appearances may be confronted only after the act is complete; thus, during the last steps of an escape, vandals may self-consciously slacken their pace from a run to normal walking, and joyriders may slow down only when they finally abandon the stolen car.

In shoplifting, the person occasionally becomes fascinated with particular objects to steal only after appreciating an especially valuable resource for putting on normal appearances. In the following recollection of one of my students, the resource was a parent:

[19] I can clearly remember when we coaxed my mom into taking us shopping with the excuse that our summer trip was coming up & we just wanted to see what the stores had so we could plan on getting it later. We walked over to the section that we were interested in, making sure that we made ourselves seem "legitimate" by keeping my mom close & by showing her items that appealed to us. We thought "they won't suspect us; two girls in school uniforms with their mom, no way". As we carried on like this, playing this little game "Oh, look how pretty, Gee, I'll have to tell dad about all these pretty things."

Eventually a necklace became irresistible.

Whichever comes first, the pull of the person toward the object to be stolen or the person's concentration on devices for deception, to enact the theft the person must bracket her appearance to set it off from her experience of her appearance, as this student's account shows:

[19] My shoplifting experiences go back to high school days when it was kind of an adventurous thing to do. My best friend & I couldn't walk into a store without getting that familiar grin on our faces. . . . Without uttering a word, we'd check out the place. . . . The whole process pretty much went about as if we were really "shopping" except in our minds the whole scene was different because of our paranoia & our knowledge of our real intentions.

Sensing a difference between what appears to be going on and what is "really" going on, the person focuses intently on normal interactional tasks. Everyday matters that have always been easily handled now rise to the level of explicit consciousness and seem subtle and complex. The thief asks herself, "How long does a normal customer spend at a particular counter?" "Do innocent customers look around to see if others are watching them?" "When customers leave a store, do they usually have their heads up or down?" The recognition that all these questions cannot possi-

bly be answered correctly further stimulates self-consciousness. As one student expressed it,

[19] Now, somehow no matter what the reality is, whether the salesperson is looking at you or not, the minute you walk in the store you feel as if it's written all over your face "Hi, I'm your daily shoplifter".

Unless the person achieves this second stage of appreciating the work involved—if she proceeds to shoplift with a relaxed sense of ease—she may get away in the end but not with the peculiar celebration of the sneaky thrill. Novice shoplifters, however, find it easy to accomplish the sense that they are faced with a prodigious amount of work. "Avoiding suspicion" is a challenge that seems to haunt the minute details of behavior with an endless series of questions—How fast should one walk? Do customers usually take items from one department to another without paying? and so on.

To construct normal appearances, the person must attempt a sociological analysis of the local interactional order. She employs folk theories to explain the contingencies of clerk-customer interactions and to guide the various practical tasks of the theft. On how to obscure the moment of illicit taking:

[44] The jewelry counter at Nordstroms was the scene of the crime. . . . I proceeded to make myself look busy as I tried on several pairs of earrings. My philosophy was that the more busy you look the less conspicuous.

On where to hide the item:

[15] Karen and I were inside the elevator now. As she was telling me to quickly put the necklace into my purse or bag, I did a strange thing. I knelt down, pulled up my pants leg, and slipped the necklace into my sock! I remember insisting that my sock was the safest and smartest place to hide my treasure. I knew if I put it in an obvious place and was stopped, I'd be in serious trouble. Besides, packages belonging to young girls are usually subject to suspicion.

Some who shoplift clothes think it will fool the clerks if they take so many items into a dressing room that an observer could not easily keep count, as this student recalled:

[5] We went into a clothing shop, selected about six garments a piece (to confuse the sales people), entered separate dressing rooms and stuffed one blouse each into our bags.

Others, like the following student, think it sufficiently strategic to take two identical garments in, cover one with the other, and emerge with only one visible:

[46] We'd always take two of the same item & stuff one inside the other to make it seem like we only had one.

Many hit on the magician's sleight of hand, focusing the clerk's attentions on an item that subsequently will be returned to hide their possession of another.

[56] [While being watched by a clerk] I was now holding the green necklace out in the open to give the impression that I was trying to decide whether to buy it or not. Finally, after about 2 minutes I put the green necklace back but I balled the brown necklace up in my right hand and placed my jacket over that hand.

In its dramatic structure, the experience of sneak theft has multiple emotional peaks as the thief is exposed to a series of challenges to maintaining a normal appearance. The length of the series varies with the individual and the type of theft, but, typically, there are several tests of the transparency of the thief's publicly visible self, as one student indicated:

[122] I can recall a sneak theft at Penny's Dept. store very well. I was about 12 years old. . . . I found an eyeshadow kit. I could feel my heart pounding as I glanced around to make sure that others weren't watching. I quickly slipped the eyeshadow in my purse and sighed heavily with relief when I realized that no one had seen. I nervously stepped out of the aisle and once again was relieved when I saw that there was no one around the corner waiting to catch me. I caught my friend's eye; she gave me a knowing glance and we walked to the next section in self satisfaction for having succeeded so far.

When the person devises the deviant project in advance, even entering the store normally may be an accomplishment. Having entered without arousing suspicion, the would-be shoplifter may relax slightly. Then tension mounts as she seizes the item. Dressing rooms provide an escape from the risk of detection, but only momentarily, as in this student's account:

[19] So, here we were, looking at things, walking around & each time getting closer to the dressing room. Finally we entered it & for once I remember feeling relieved for the first time since I'd walked into the store because I was away at last from those "piercing eyes" & I had the merchandise with me. At this point we broke into laughter. . . . We

stuffed the items in our purses making sure that they had no security gadgets on them & then we thought to ourselves "well we're half way there." Then it hit me, how I was safe in the dressing room, no one could prove anything. I was still a "legitimate" shopper.

Then a salesperson may come up and, with an unsuspecting remark, raise the question of transparency to new heights:

[19] I remember coming out of the dressing room & the sales lady looking at me & asking me if I had found anything (probably concerned with only making her commission). I thought I would die.

Finally there is the drama of leaving the store:

[19] Walking out the door was always a big, big step. We knew that that's when people get busted as they step out & we just hoped & prayed that no one would run up to us & grab us or scream "hey you"! The whole time as we approached the exit I remember looking at it as a dark tunnel & just wanting to run down it & disappear as I hung on to my "beloved purse."

Once they have hidden the booty and so long as they are in the store, the would-be-shoplifters must constantly decide to sustain their deviance. Thus, the multiple boundaries of exposure offer multiple proofs not only of their ability to get away with it but of their will toward immorality:

[5] We went into the restroom before we left and I remember telling Lori, "We can drop all this stuff in here and leave, or we can take it with us." Lori wanted to take everything, and as we neared the exit, I began to get very nervous.

Many of these shoplifters understand that clerks or store detectives may be watching them undercover, in preparation for arresting them at the exit door. They also believe that criminal culpability is only established when they leave with the stolen goods. As they understand it, they are not irretrievably committed to be thieves until they are on the other side of the exit; up to that point, they may replace the goods and instantly revert from a deviant to a morally unexceptional status. Were they to believe that they were criminally culpable as soon as they secreted the item, they would continue to face the interactional and emotional challenges of accomplishing deception. But because they think they are not committed legally until they are physically out of the store, they experience each practical challenge in covering up their deviance as an occasion to reaffirm their spiritual fortitude for being deviant. One student described the phenomenon this way:

[56] I guess I had been there so long that I started to look suspicious. I was holding a bright lime green necklace in my left hand and a brown Indian type necklace in my right. A lady, she must have been the store manager, was watching me. She was about 20 ft. away from me and on my left. I could feel her looking at me but I didn't look directly at her. . . . I remember actually visualizing myself putting back both the necklaces and walking out the store with pride and proving this bitch she was wrong and that I was smarter than her, but I didn't. . . . I started out the store very slowly I even smiled at the lady as I passed by the cash register. It was then that she started toward me and my mind said okay T. what are you going to do now. There was a table full of sweaters on sale near me and I could have easily drop the necklace on the table and continued out the door. I knew I could and I considered it but I wouldn't do it. I remember just holding the necklace tighter in my right hand. As she was coming toward me I even thought of dropping the necklace and running out the door but I continued in a slow pace even though the thought of them calling my mother if I was caught and what she would do to me was terribly frightening.

In addition to focusing on the practical components of producing a normal appearance, the would-be shoplifter struggles not to betray the difficulty of the project. This is the second layer of work—the work of appearing not to work at practicing normal appearances. The first layer of work is experienced as the emergence of a novel, analytical attention to behavioral detail; the second, as a struggle to remain in rational control, as the following statement by a student illustrates:

[19] You desperately try to cover it up by trying to remember how you've acted before but still you feel as if all eyes are on you! I think, that's the purpose of settling in one area & feeling everything & every-one out. It's an attempt to feel comfortable so that you don't appear obvious. Like maybe if I'm real cool & subtle about it & try on a few things but don't seem impressed w/ anything, I can just stroll out of here & no one will notice.

In the sensual character of the experience, the person literally embodies the issue of transcendence that is at stake. The would-be thief is attempting to prove that outsiders cannot perceive the deviance of which the thief is internally aware. Correspondingly, the thief experiences a struggle to keep her insides from becoming telltale signs on the outside. Some part of the body threatens to reveal the secret deviance; the project seems "written all over your face," knees may feel like they will give way, the stomach threatens to erupt or drop to the floor, and the heart suddenly puts the coverup at risk by racing or trying to leap out of the chest:

[56] She stopped me about 5 ft. from the door, my heart was beating so hard, not fast just hard like it was going to jump out of my chest. The lady asked me "Didn't you find anything you liked?" I knew she was trying to see if I was nervous and to let me know she had seen me earlier. I said no, that I hadn't discovered anything that I couldn't live without. I remember trying to phrase the sentence as grownup as possible so she wouldn't think I was a dumb little kid. Then she said "What about that green necklace I saw you holding." . . . I said "I simply don't own anything to go with it so I hung it back on the rack." She said "Oh" and started toward the rack, so I continued out the door.

Being Thrilled

Usually after the scene of risk is successfully exited, the third stage of the sneaky thrill is realized. This is the euphoria of being thrilled. In one form or another, there is a "Wow, I got away with it!" or an "It was so easy!" A necklace shoplifter stated:

[56] Once outside the door I thought Wow! I pulled it off, I faced danger and I pulled it off. I was smiling so much and I felt at that moment like there was nothing I couldn't do.

After stealing candy with friends, another student recalled:

[87] Once we were out the door we knew we had been successful! We would run up the street . . . all be laughing and shouting, each one trying to tell just how he pulled it off and the details that would make each of us look like the bravest one.

The pizza thief noted:

[82] The feeling I got from taking the pizza, the thrill of getting something for nothing, knowing I got away with something I never thought I could, was wonderful. . . . I'm 21 now and my neighbor is 23. Every time we see each other, I remember and relive a little bit of that thrill.

Success brings in its wake emotions that go far beyond the joy of material acquisition. The "it" in "getting away with it" is not just the object, but something significantly shameful. Thus, the other side of the euphoria felt from being successful is the humiliation from being caught. What the

sneak thieves are avoiding, or getting away with by not being caught, is the shame they would feel if they were caught:

[19] I remember visualizing for a split second that she had snatched the jacket off my arm and was leading me off by the arm and I was crying hysterically because my mother was going to kill me. I had about 27 dollars in my purse at the time and the necklace couldn't have cost half that much.

To these young thieves, being caught is an experience of degradation. Just as success can bring a thrill to one's entire being, so failure can threaten one's moral existence. The discovered thieves often feel that their parents will "kill" them:

[44] It was a lady about 35 yrs. with a big shopping bag in her hands. We looked at each other and then at her and realized she was talking to us. My stomach dropped to the floor and I suddenly felt faint. . . . The lady wrote up everything and Betsy just sat there mouthing at me "My mom is going to kill me." . . . Boy did we get it when we got home. It was so degrading to face my parents and tell them what I did. They were so disappointed in me and couldn't believe that their perfect little angel would ever do anything so awful.

In a literal sense, the successful thieves were being thrilled: they shuddered or shook in elation, often to the rhythms of laughter. For many, whether successful or not, the experience of youthful shoplifting was profoundly moving, so moving that they could vividly recall minute details of the event years later. Juvenile and adult nonprofessional shoplifters typically experience arrest with a genuine moral horror.

"This is a nightmare," said one woman pilferer who had been formally charged with stealing an expensive handbag. "It can't be happening to me! Why, oh why can't I wake up and find that it isn't so," she cried later as she waited at a store exit, accompanied by a city and a store policeman, for the city police van to arrive. "Whatever will I do? Please make it go away," she pleaded with the officer. "I'll be disgraced forever. I can never look anyone in the face again."

Store detectives report that the most frequent question women ask is, "Will my husband have to know about this?" Men, they say, express immediate fear that their employers will be informed of their arrest. . . . Children are apprehensive of parental reaction.¹³

The thrills of sneaky thrills are metaphysically complex matters. On the one hand, shoplifters and vandals know what they are doing is illegal; the deviant character of the practice is part of its appeal. On the other hand,

they typically register a kind of metaphysical shock when an arrest induces a sense that what they are doing might be treated as a *real* crime. It appears that an essential attraction of these practices is that although they are risks taken in the real world and hence not just play, they are accomplished in a playful spirit. Once an arrest occurs, the shoplifting career typically ends in response to an awareness that persistence would now clearly signal a commitment to a deviant identity.¹⁴

In contrast, boosters (professional shoplifters), who are comfortable with being seen and with explicitly seeing themselves as part of a criminal subculture, may take for granted and treat their arrest as a cost of doing business.¹⁵ Just because it is not an inevitable result for all thieves, the achievement of euphoria, which can make sneaky property crime thrilling, must be explained.

For a sneaky property crime to produce a thrill, the person must understand that it incorporates several challenges that have personal, existentially fundamental, significance outside the act of theft. The experienced profundity of the event—both as deeply moving in the moment of success or failure and as one of the rare, brief events of private life that can be recalled vividly years, even decades, later—embodies the awareness of its multiple metaphoric implications.

For the typical amateur, sneaky property crime is a symbolically protean experience that simultaneously mobilizes metaphors of (1) the self and its boundaries from other selves, (2) scoring in a game, (3) the defilement of the sacred, (4) sexual intercourse, and (5) the existential interdependence of deviance and charisma.¹⁶

THE SELF AND ITS BOUNDARIES

Sneak theft and vandalism test one's ability to bound the authentic morality of the self from others' perceptions. At stake is an exemplary experimentation with interactional metaphysics. This point is illustrated by the following account of theft of cash from a co-worker's drawer:

[91] I watched carefully as they all drove off then I ran to my desk draw [*sic*], got my purse out & took out the keys. I was excited. I felt I was on the verge of a new discovery. I was almost like a kid the first time he discovers something new. I was like a child looking in a mirror for the first time and discovering that the image you saw was yourself. The image did everything you did.

Sneaky property crimes are especially well constructed to transform any ubiquitous concerns about the transparency of the self that the thief may harbor into a concrete problem of situated interaction. Vandalism and shoplifting create a practical reason to worry about what others are seeing of oneself; they specify precisely what the deviance is that others might

suspect in oneself, and they delimit an occasion for transcending others' perceptions.

The young shoplifter, in particular, puts the perceptions of adults to a series of tests. By discovering that clerks and house detectives in department stores cannot prove that she has deviant intentions, the young shoplifter may acquire confidence that adults cannot detect that she harbors other forms of deviant spirit, shameful inclinations, or personal incompetence. As he invades another's boundaries of private rights, the vandal publicly proves that he can "get away with it." If successful, the vandal or the shoplifter leaves with objective proof that he or she can bound a morally unacceptable self from powers that are materially motivated to detect it.

THE LUDIC METAPHOR

Sneaky thieves do not necessarily or only consider their criminal experience to be an experiment with the boundaries of the self. If the implications of the experience are metaphysically rich, immediately the experience is a lot of "fun." One dimension of the thrill is ludic: the process is a kind of game.¹⁷

More clearly than any other crimes, sneaky property crimes resonate with the structure of ambulatory sports contests. Like games, shoplifting and vandalism can be tried again and again, with no more justification than that it seems to be fun. Like games, sneaky property crime occurs in a field of delimited space and within time constraints. Temporally, the starting and ending whistles may be blown privately, but the contest begins and ends at defined moments and locations. And like all ambulatory games, there is a provision for "time out," such as when the shoplifter retires to the safety of a dressing room.

Spatially as well, the player knows at all times whether he is in or out of risk. In all his locations, the criminal player knows he is either on or off the playing field. The analogy is perhaps strongest with such forms of theft as shoplifting and burglary in which, as compared to vandalism, a formally defined spatial boundary must be crossed to achieve victory. But even with joyriding and vandalism, the sense of a getaway implies at least an amorphous goal line.

Unlike most conventional concerns or relationships in life, sneaky property crimes produce a clear winner and loser. Like the athletic contestant, the shoplifter and the vandal know just when and where they can sigh with relief and burst into euphoria. In contrast, those who suffer from anxious self-consciousness frequently review scenes that they managed with apparent aplomb, only to raise new questions of how they might unwittingly have divulged some form of inner ugliness.

As in familiar sports contests, there is a zero-sum outcome to sneaky property crimes, as well as a way of calculating the margin of victory or

defeat. You either get away with it or you do not, and, at least in the case of success, there is a way of calculating precisely how much you have won. In each flush of victory, the margins of success among clearly independent contests can be compared in detail.

In contrast to the structure of diffuse, everyday anxieties (such as those attending membership in a social clique), the thief and the vandal, like athletes on a team, participate in a contest with relatively clear sides. In shoplifting, it is always clear which side you are on and who is on the other side. The shoplifter and the vandal, like a player guiding a ball down a field, focus on "psyching" and "faking out" perceived opponents, although they realize that they may be intercepted by surprise from a blind side.

As in games, there is an infinite variety of plays in sneaky property crimes. In shoplifting, as in all the major ambulatory sports contests in the Western world, there is a mutually agreed-on thing of value that the player tries to carry toward a goal line while the opposing side tries to frustrate him or wrest it away. Shoplifters who work in teams may devise pre-planned codes and secretly communicate defensive signals that provide warnings about their opponents' countermoves. If an opponent draws too near, a player, responding to a signal, may pass off the booty in a tricky move.

The analogy of sneaky property crimes and ambulatory sports contests becomes ambiguous if pushed too far. Property crime is likely to be treated by the opponents as more than a game. The analogy also fails with respect to the opponent's freedom to choose to play. Stores must be suited up and ready to play at all times, although they might not consider the contest fun, and vandals' victims often have no chance to adjust their defenses. In other respects, sneaky property crimes are less serious than games. As a game, shoplifting is only child's play; if the thief does not like the approaching outcome, she often assumes that she may drop the goods and call it off, like a child who takes his ball away rather than lose.

But the ludic metaphor is distinctively applicable to sneaky property crimes, as opposed to other forms of criminality. For example, drug dealers are not so sure of when and where they may be caught; the possession of contraband, financial arrangements, and distribution networks may keep them so constantly involved that they enjoy no "time out." Robbers also have no chance for "time out" once they publicly define the situation as a stickup. And unlike the ludic aspect of sneak thefts, robbery risks consequences so serious that, as I will show later, the crime must be justified as profitable. In murders of passion, the winner of a fight often regards himself as a loser only a few moments later; the calculation of success and failure is much more confusing. Unlike assailants in fights, which often erupt without forewarning, the sneaky property criminal can make up plays in advance and may estimate the magnitude of risk. Each of these other types of criminality have their own form of excitement, but the form is not as close to that of the game.

THE RELIGIOUS METAPHOR

The dramatic possibilities of sneaky property crimes are not exhausted by the metaphysical structures of games. "Property" has boundaries separating insiders, or authorized users, from outsiders, or unauthorized occupants, and these boundaries are often sensed as sacred. In many sneaky criminal acts, part of the sensuality of the sneaky thrill is that of a secret defilement; the process can be experienced as a black sacrament with identifiable stages.

In the first stage, the person secretly and in the spirit of a desecration penetrates another's world. The means of penetration vary; vandalism usually involves some "foreign" or profane object, such as a rock or paint; shoplifting, perhaps the person's hand and purse; and burglary, the person's whole body. No doubt the emotional embodiment of the spirit of violation depends, in subtle ways, on the way and the extent to which the deviant's body pierces the sanctity of the victim's world.

The spirit of violation that accompanies the penetration is derived from a tacit collective agreement between the deviant and the victim to regard the penetration as a violation. In much of the property crime committed by young people, the possibility of achieving a sneaky thrill is strongly supported by economically irrational, intensely moral sensibilities surrounding property. The criminals are likely to anticipate correctly that those they would make "victims" will so define themselves. Why the latter should do so, however, is often not immediately obvious, since the items that are taken typically are petty and the damage that is done is often only a minor nuisance to repair. The shock at finding a gang name painted on one's garage, one's car sitting on the opposite side of the street from where it had been parked, or beer cans mysteriously taken from one's refrigerator and left empty on the kitchen counter cannot be accounted for in utilitarian terms.

After the initial trespass of a boundary that has been collectively consecrated, the thief or vandal must, if he is to continue to build the drama of the sneaky thrill, do something to prove that the invasion has occurred. This is the organizing objective of vandalism, but in theft it is, perhaps surprisingly, a key step as well. On the surface, the thief's purpose is to take something away, but as I mentioned before, the targeted object is often without sacred or motivating character, independent of or outside the theft. More deeply, on the way to a sneaky thrill, the criminal's aim is to project something negative into the victim's world, deposit proof of his deviance, or create a moral stain.

One of my students described an elaborate fascination with nonacquisitive burglary. The following is my summary of her lengthy account:

When she was 13, she would enter neighbors' homes and roam around. Somehow being in a neighbor's house without express permission made

the otherwise mundane environment charged. She had been invited into all these homes before but by entering without notice through an unlocked door or an open window, she found that a familiar kitchen or living room was magically transformed into a provocative environment. The excitement was distinctly sensual. She would feel objects in various rooms; in a sense they would feel her, creating a variety of exotic sensations through her touch. But she rarely took anything. Instead she might simply rearrange the furniture. It seems she was not so much "playing house" or decorating to fit her tastes as she was trying to leave evidence that someone had been there. Many years later, recollecting her year or so of nonmercenary burglary, she thought the events were "crazy." She had never told anyone about them. But she could still recall the thrill of the experience. The pattern stopped the day that neighbors unexpectedly came home and almost caught her.

Victims of burglary often return to find human feces in the middle of their homes. Although the rhythm of excitement in the act may promote bowel movement and the circumstances may make the usual proprieties of the bathroom seem dispensable, the larger patterns in property crime suggest that some trespassers defecate to desecrate. Elliott Leyton described the following incident that may serve as an example:

Carrying a crowbar, 13 year old Tyrone entered his neighbour's new bungalow. Swinging the bar wildly, he smashed an expensive mock-antique mirror and then turned his destructive attention to every piece of glass and furniture in the house. His work completed, he squatted to leave a pile of excrement on the living room floor, and left.¹⁸

Usually the symbolism of desecration is less obvious. The shoplifter who shakes from the risk of the act anticipates shaking up the victim's world. Even if the victim never discovers that the item is missing, the thief and the vandal understand that the moral order of the victim's objective world will have been altered. Recall the shoplifter who took the brown necklace that she deemed capable, when addressed in the safety of her bedroom, of understanding her reproving speech. Within the magical world of sneaky thrills, the thief and the vandal take the objective world of their victims to be a knowing presence. If the victim never notices that the item is missing or damaged, still the *place* or the *order* of things there will retain the character of a deviant past.

Once the theft has been accomplished, the character of its place is unalterably changed in the experience of the thief. Forever (or, at least, so it seems at the time of the event) it will be the scene of the crime. Although all the clerks may change and although months or years may pass, the place has been magically transformed. It will have a special charm, perhaps tinged with the threat of discovery, whenever it is reentered. If hallowed

places convey the presence of a sacred host by their special aura, the places that are stolen from have been negatively hallowed for the thief. They remain haunted for some time after, perhaps for eternity, by the memory of his previous, deviant presence. That haunting is a continuing testimony to desecration.

THE SEXUAL METAPHOR

From a sensitivity to the sacred metaphor implicated in sneak theft, the person can, with a short step, appreciate the sexual references of the act. In many of the accounts of shoplifting, there is an experience of seduction turning into irrational compulsion, a rush of excitement as contact is made with the item and another as it is guided across personal boundaries and inserted into a private place, then a physical process of movement in which the body is guided to a point of climax. For the sophisticated perpetrator, there are phases of rest and opportunities to play with the transcendence of successive boundaries of risk. And, finally, there is the experience of shameful failure or euphoric success (which many youths naturally follow with the ceremonial smoking of a cigarette).

As one student stated, "Every time I would drop something into my bag, my heart would be pounding and I could feel this tremendous excitement, a sort of 'rush', go through me." The sexual analogy, if implicit at the time, later became obvious to some offenders:

The experience was almost orgasmic for me. There was a build-up of tension as I contemplated the danger of a forbidden act, then a rush of excitement at the moment of committing the crime, and finally a delicious sense of release.¹⁹

A necklace thief quoted earlier recalled: "It's really funny being 23 years old now and in writing this, I can't stop feeling how thrilling it was, certainly a feeling much like the anticipation of sex."

The accounts in this chapter come largely from females, and the sexual metaphor they describe may be shaped to represent sex from a feminine perspective. Various incidental features of the shoplifting accounts indicate a secret attempt to realize female sexual identity. Thus the items stolen do not represent a random collection of the things that might be stolen. Money itself is only rarely the objective. Instead, the young girls seem especially seduced by items of makeup, jewelry, and clothes: things used to cover-up the naked female self, to give the body the appearance of the mature female, and to make the self dazzlingly attractive to a world blinded to the blemishes underneath. Females take symbols of adult female identity—cosmetics, jewelry, and sexy underwear—while males take gadgets, cigarette lighters, and wallets. It is notable that female shoplifters, rarely steal items to give to men or children.²⁰

Other objects of theft implicate the body in other ways: items used on the beach, such as suntan lotion, and various forms of food that, like the proverbial forbidden fruit, become especially tasty when illegally acquired. The sexual metaphor is also implicated in criminal methods. Shoplifters hide things on their body, often beneath their clothes, in one case, in a "beloved purse." One of my students worked as a detective in the campus store. She reported an unaccountable proclivity of female shoplifters to steal underwear.

The sexual reference of shoplifting by young amateurs is doubly illicit. Not only is the young shoplifter projecting into a criminal project an experience prohibited at her age, but the form of sex is illicit. The sneaky property criminal is not participating in a consensual act; the pleasure is distinctly asymmetrical. Colloquially, the thief and the vandal fuck their victims.¹⁹

We may now see the richly isomorphic, extraordinarily protean symbolic structure of sneaky property crimes. Each of the metaphoric layers resonates independently with more general themes of consciousness: the metaphysical problem of bounding the self, the primitive religious dread of defilement, the fun of ambulatory games, and the development of a sexual identity. In addition, each layer resonates with each of the others. A description of the metaphysical metaphor experienced in sneaky property crime borders on a description of sexual intercourse; an analysis of the ludic structure of sneak theft could readily describe sacred spaces and ritual degradations; familiar ambulatory games recreate the imagery of sexual intercourse, as do such familiar folk phrases of double entendre as "scoring"; and so on. And there is at least one more metaphoric layer to examine.

THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF DEVIANCE AND CHARISMA

The thief who would take by stealth opts to construct a paranoia. She makes a usually abhorrent emotional condition suddenly functional: the more you are aware of how others are watching you, the more likely you are to get away with it. The thief makes herself "self-conscious" by creating a practical reason for others to suspect that she harbors a deviant spirit. One student described her thoughts this way:

[19] What kept running through my mind was this idea of self-centeredness. I felt like everyone was watching me, following me & and like the whole store was at a stand still just concentrating on my next move.

As a practical matter, this self-consciousness, which before the theft may have been only a burdensome threat to the smooth projection of a desirable self into the world, has, under the discipline of the criminal project, become a positive resource promoting theft. The positive moral

achievement of sneaky property crimes signals perhaps their most elusive metaphoric layer. The thief is not just enacting her deviance; through being secretly deviant, she is discovering charisma.

The sneak thief and the vandal achieve a resonant metaphoric relationship between positive and negative, between the capacity to violate and to transcend moral constraint, and between deviance and charisma.²¹ In the getaway, after having pulled off a particularly cunning method of faking out house detectives, the sneaky thief knows with all her being that "that was beautiful." By doing something ugly to another, the sneak thief or vandal establishes that she can bring beauty into the world. Appreciated from within, a sneaky property crime by an amateur is not a failure of social control but a personal esthetic triumph.

In the first stage of sneaky thrills, when the sense "It would be so easy" guides the person to a particular material focus for her deviant project, the seductive powers of objects sway her. Then she faces a test of whether she can maintain a personal "cool" and execute the sneaky theft through willful, calculating manipulations. If she can, she has proved that she will not "freak out" from the pressures of pulling it off. The euphoria that rewards success, then, embodies the awareness that the sneak thief can allow herself to be seduced by the world without fear. Through taking from others, sneak thieves may learn that they can let themselves go, that they can safely be taken by the secret charm and black magic in the world. Like charismatic personalities, they may discover that the mysterious forces of the universe are on their side. Others walk in fear of the unknown; they confront the unknown and walk away with the goods.

The consequences of sneaky thrills are not usually to launch criminal careers or otherwise to define the future self. On the contrary, the protagonists in sneaky property crime more often thrill to the expanded possibilities of the self, in the knowledge that they have opened up ways of being that previously seemed inaccessible.²² Social theorists have resisted strongly the recognition that deviance is not merely a reaction against something negative in a person's background but a reaching for exquisite possibilities. Researchers like to point out the popular error of considering as essentially deviant people who, whatever their crime or infraction, overtly commit deviant acts only during rare moments of their lives. But deviant persons also appreciate the economy of doing evil for characterizing the self generally: it is literally wonderful. Through being deviant for a moment, the person may portray his or her general, if usually hidden, charismatic potential.

The Sensual Metaphysics of Sneaky Thrills

Although they know they are breaking the law, nonprofessional shoplifters and vandals commonly feel when they are arrested, an irresistible protest that "this can't be happening to me!" It is as if they lived the process of the crime like a character moving in a myth or a dream. And in the emotional meaning or sensual dimension of the event, they do.

Sometimes the mythical quality of the experience is highlighted. The 13-year-old housebreaker who would enter neighbors' homes not to take things but in search of she knew not what and who would run the risk of being caught by surprise to rearrange items, is reminiscent of Goldilocks entering the home of the Three Bears.²³ More commonly, if less obviously, the mythical meaning of the event is experienced emotionally. To understand the experience of sneaky thrills, we must appreciate how the structure of everyday sensuality is continuous with the structure of fantasy worlds.

As Alfred Schutz specified, there are fundamental contrasts between experience in mundane activities and in various alternative "worlds," such as those of the theater, night and day dreams, and jokes or laughter.²⁴ Experience in the mundane world of practical reality is confined by time, space, and social boundaries. People conduct practical social action with the limiting awareness that they are acting in a specific "here," during a specific "now," and in a particular type of publicly recognizable social situation. Dreams, fantasies, and various meta-mundane worlds do not respect these limitations.

The dreamer (asleep, while daydreaming, in the theater, or caught up in listening to a fairy tale) suspends the focus of his consciousness on the historical time and the geopolitical space he is in and the socially bounded process of sleeping and dreaming that he is going through. As a member of the audience who becomes absorbed in the theatrical drama, he "suspends disbelief" on these three dimensions. He dulls his awareness of the clock time during which the drama transpires, the physical location of the theater, and the fact that he is watching a dramatization of life. The dreamer witnesses movements through time, over space, and across the boundaries that usually separate internal awareness and externally visible expression and that are inconsistent with what he rationally knows of the structures of everyday practical life.

The world of everyday practical life and dream worlds are not existentially inconsistent. (And indeed, they may always be co-present. Even in the deepest sleep, we maintain an awareness of time, space, and social situations; we are not lost to the noises around us or the pressures of our

autonomous physical selves.) Thus pilferers do not move through department stores as sleep walkers or day dreamers, but neither do they construct their sneaky crimes simply as exercises of self-reflective reason. Through their feelings and the evolving sensuality of the event, they walk through its mythical dimensions.

In a metaphysically similar way, although within a different transcendent project, so do the killers examined in chapter 1. For both the pilferer and the passion killer, a dash of reality is often an effective "cure," although in the latter case it comes much too late. Those who murder in a passionate effort to dramatize their defense of the Good, like shoplifters who are arrested, are surprisingly without emotional defenses. Many wait for the police to arrive or confess quickly; few make good on escapes. Brought to the fatal moment by a leap to a timeless, primordial version of the Good, the impassioned killer momentarily transcends the demand to relate his behavior "now" to the meaning it will have "then." When he returns to practical everyday concerns a few moments later, he realizes that he must innovate an escape if he is to have one.

Similarly, the essence of the sneaky thrill is an attempt to transcend an existential dilemma, but, in this case, the dilemma is to relate the inner to outer identity. The shoplifter goes about her sneaky efforts to see if she can get away with it—"it" being a freely drawn, playfully artificial projection of the self into the world. Must I appear to be who I know I am? Need I struggle to shape what I know about myself into an acceptable appearance to others, or can I play with it? Can I dispense, not with moral appearances but with the *struggle* to produce moral appearances? Thus, the thrill embodies an awareness that the experience is essentially a play about dilemmas of moral authenticity arranged on a public staging of the self.

Those who pursue sneaky thrills appreciate this perspective with emotional immediacy. They know it sensually, not self-reflectively. Ask, and they may cite one of the stock background explanations, such as peer pressure; find the causation mysterious; or simply state, because it's fun. To appreciate the distinctive character of this phenomenon, we must ask, Why the mystery? What explains the odd metaphysical mood of the event? How can doing *this* be fun? The immediately relevant answer lies not in the problems of personal or social group background nor in mundane material results, but in a project with distinctively transcendent pretensions.

Foreground and Background in Sneaky Thrills

ADOLESCENCE

It is tempting to move the analysis from the foreground of sneaky thrills to the background of adolescence and to suggest causes rooted in this stage of the life cycle. If the thrill of accomplishing a sneaky property crime is, in part, a recognition that the person has been successfully opaque in public, surely that is an especially meaningful message for adolescents. Through sneaky property crimes, we may easily conclude, adolescents can metaphorically enact the double dilemma that promotes their self-consciousness. They are becoming anxious about many forms of internal ugliness that it would be shameful to display—of all the unseemly things that threaten to leap out of the body into the world—from pimples to sexual desires; of manifold, unpredictably displayed, telltale signs of intellectual inferiority; and of parochial attitudes linked to ethnic or class identity. And they are becoming aware that mature moral competence in society means that they should not only maintain privacy over the ugly parts of their identities, but they should be graceful in the process, covering up the process of covering up.²⁵

Add to the extraordinary self-consciousness of adolescence the extraordinary social machinery for producing interpersonal transparency that is the school. Surrounded throughout the day with more or less the same people, the young student is forced to strip in virtually every literal and figurative way imaginable; any wart, whatever its region of physical or intellectual location, will have its moment of public display. The members of this constant audience are selected by age, neighborhood, and even intellectual level to be homogeneous and, as such, they are uniquely capable of discerning inner realities through reading external signs. There will usually be an overlap between out-of-school associates and schoolmates, which promotes a ubiquitous concern with transparency. Moreover, the same group follows the student from year to year, which fosters the accumulation of a collective memory that may never allow him to escape far from his initial reputation. If this were not enough, schools often structure time in ways that are so boring that peers have nothing more fascinating to do than to attempt telling observations.

With all this in the background, surely it is easy to understand why sneaky property crimes are especially attractive to adolescents as devices for proving that they can be deviant in society and get away with it. To test themselves on socially approved criteria of personal competence, adolescents have a multitude of socially institutionalized opportunities: courage and physical prowess may be challenged in sports, cosmetic attractiveness may be put on the line in the dating market, and intellectual

capacity may be tested in school or, perhaps more profoundly, in informal repartee. A wide and popular range of nonsneaky violent forms of crime, from reckless driving to group fights, offer adolescents additional opportunities to take risks openly and prove they are not afraid of physical harm. The distinctive appeal of the sneaky property crimes that seem to have a special salience for adolescents—shoplifting, vandalism, joyriding, and nonmercenary breaking and entering—is the particular dialectic of being privately deviant in public places.

There are at least two reasons for resisting a quick analytical shift from the phenomenal foreground of adolescent property crime to the psychological and social structures in the background of adolescence. The first is that the apparent association may well be circular and spurious. Shoplifting may be concentrated in adolescence, but it may well peak before puberty,²⁶ and it clearly continues long after. Our enthusiasm for examining the nature of adolescence as the causal background of sneaky property crime should be restrained by the recollection that, as recently as 1964, Cameron had to argue, against a substantial body of criminological opinion, that shoplifting was not a response to a different phase in the age cycle, this one gender specific: the crisis of menopause.²⁷

For obvious reasons, preadolescents are less likely to be picked up by official statistics on shoplifting. And postadolescents may steal from employers at a higher rate than adolescents shoplift and vandalize, and from a variety of nonutilitarian attractions to the practice. When the thief is old enough to work in the shop, the crime no longer fits the category of "shoplifting."²⁸ Before we push off adult property crime as obviously more practically minded than the adolescent varieties, we should explore the contrast more closely. Like adolescent shoplifters, embezzlers²⁹ and corrupt politicians and tax frauds³⁰ often suffer intense shame on arrest and no less than adolescents, they may take from successful deceptions and cover-ups an emotionally meaningful measure of faith in their abilities to obscure areas of routine personal incompetence.

Within the context of this study, the more important reason not to move too quickly toward theorizing about the etiological background of sneaky crimes is the danger of misrepresenting the quality of the phenomenon. Explanations of the structures of adolescence may jump into the reader's mind because the data here, for reasons of convenience, were largely limited to recollections of youthful experiences. But it is not clear that the sneaky property criminals we have been examining are precisely concerned with the structures of adolescence. Indeed, the attractive power of the experience is essentially dependent on its ambiguous, indirect significance for the rest of the person's life. To preserve the emotional power of the thrill, the process should implicate more than one metaphor. A single meaning would threaten to make the practice too literal and mundane.

If sneaky property crime was simply a form of practical therapy for the dilemmas of adolescence, it would not be fun. But shoplifting, while it

tests the transparency of the self also follows the structure of a game. As a game it can be erotically evocative; however, it is not just a sexual play. The relevance of particular metaphoric frameworks varies from one form of sneaky property crime to the next. Vandalism plays up desecration and plays down the potential to prove a superior ability to manipulate perceptions of moral character in face-to-face interactions. One shoplifting episode may be structured in a particularly effective way along the lines of a sex act; another, accomplished by using the mother's presence as a shield, may carry a special message about independence. It is just because it can resonate with any and all these meanings from one moment to the next that sneaky property crime can convey the experience of a thrill.

SOCIAL CLASS

The data I have used, which come from an overprivileged group, perhaps overemphasize the irrelevance of material objectives.³¹ These shoplifters often had sufficient money in their pockets to pay for what they stole and, if not, they often knew that they could readily obtain the necessary funds from parents or friends. Even when the object was economically beyond their reach, their aim was not necessarily to use the booty. In marked contrast, studies of preadult working-class "serious" thieves emphasize the practical use of the products of sneak theft to sustain a materially improved lifestyle.³² But just as it is with age, it is easy to misconstrue the relation of economic status or social class and the thrilling quality of sneaky property crime.

Vandalism does not appear to be a class-specific form of delinquency. If this hedonistic adolescent offense runs parallel to adolescent theft, should we not reconsider the relevance of materialist motives for both?³³ Even with respect to shoplifting and burglary, at least up to the point of the initial arrest, the animating attraction toward sneaky property crimes appears to be some form of thrill, even for youths who, in middle-class eyes, must have pressing material needs. Recall the autobiographical excerpt presented earlier of John Allen, a poor black youth from Washington, D.C., who went on to a serious criminal career.

Researchers who let their subjects do the sociological analysis for them often get folk theories that emphasize material causes and objectives. In his interviews with black gang members in Philadelphia, Barry Krisberg was sometimes told that their initial thefts were done to satisfy material needs, but when he checked into official records on the events in question, he found contrary indications. For example, one interviewee claimed that he committed his first theft to feed his family, but Krisberg found in records of an arrest related to the event that the fellow had been stealing a gun to use in fights between peer groups.³⁴ And there are indications that even in desperately poor areas, adolescent thieves turn to theft for emotionally compelling rather than materially necessary reasons. A study of

thieves in the low castes in India found that the initial victims of theft were frequently the youths' parents.³⁵

The initial experiences in sneak thefts of poor, working-class, and middle-class youths, alike, appear to be more clearly projects in constructing sneaky thrills than efforts to satisfy previously defined material needs. Thus, there is no basis for assuming any particular social-class pattern in the background of sneaky thrills.

Yet, for *persistent* or "serious" property thieves, repetition itself tends to undercut the experimental, discovery foundations of sneaky thrills. In a rare participant-observation study conducted in lower- and working-class areas in Toronto, Canada, Gordon West described "serious adolescent property offenders" who cooperate in "casing" targets, sharing tips on places to victimize, collectively arranging the "fencing" of stolen items, and lending each other money when one is down on his thieving luck.³⁶ Because they often steal to resell, these serious thieves may appear to be stealing for material objectives, rather than for the thrill. In addition, they often make a calculated choice to abandon thievery at the age of majority, when penalties substantially increase. Many of these patterns were recently documented by Mercer Sullivan among poor Hispanic and black youths in New York City.³⁷ Nothing in this chapter speaks to the social-class factors that may lie behind such "serious" short-term careers or behind long-term careers in nonviolent, sneaky property crimes like burglary, boosting, and confidence games.

But even in the case of "serious" thieves, I would suggest, we should not too readily assume that material objectives are dominant. If we looked more closely at how they define material needs, we might get a different image of these "serious" thieves. West's thieves, at times, go out specifically to steal for such "needs" as buying Speed and entertaining friends in a flashy manner. The drugs and clothes differ in Sullivan's settings, but the theme is similar. In lower-class areas, adolescent theft satisfies the objective needs common to the class—buying food, paying rent, and acquiring clothes—less obviously than it supports a form of material taste that the youths can only satisfy through more theft. It is also notable that older thieves, in their recollections of "big" scores, commonly report the value of the item at its retail price rather than at the discounted price realized through fencing; the situational charm of the event to the thief apparently does not decline quite as much as does the market value of the stolen items. And although with persistent practice, the thrills of sneaky property crimes may diminish, the various metaphors that make up the thrill of the event do not necessarily become irrelevant. Rather, they may become diffused throughout a way of life in which situated property crimes, by themselves, may not be the most exciting, deviant, or risky moments. At least, this often appears to be the case for "career" stickup men, whose complex relationships between material and transcendent purposes will be taken up in chapter 6.

CHAPTER 3

Ways of the Badass

In many youthful circles, to be "bad," to be a "badass," or otherwise overtly to embrace symbols of deviance is regarded as a good thing. How does one go about being a badass? How can that become a compelling project?

One can develop a systematic understanding of the ways of the badass by distinguishing among three levels or degrees of intimating aggression. Someone who is "real bad" must be tough, not easily influenced, highly impressionable, or anxious about the opinions that others hold of him; in a phrase, he must not be morally malleable. He must take on an existential posture that in effect states, "You see me, but I am not here for you; I see you, and maybe you are here for me."

The second stage in becoming a badass is to construct alien aspects of the self. This construction may be achieved barbarically, by developing ways of living that appear hostile to any form of civilization, or by inventing a version of civilization that is not only foreign but incomprehensible to native sensibilities. If being *tough* is essentially a negative activity of convincing others that one is not subject to their influence, being *alien* is a more positive projection of the world in which one truly fits. The existential posture of the alien states in effect, "Not only am I not here for you, I come from a place that is inherently intractable by your world." The foreigner may often be charming; the alien is unnerving. Managing the difference between appearing to be interestingly foreign and disturbingly alien is a subtle business; much of the work of the adolescent badass plays on the fineness of the distinction.

Either alone or in combination with a posture of toughness, the perfection of an alien way is not sufficient to achieve the awesomely deviant presence of the badass. Toughs who set off sparks that call for attention but never explode risk being regarded as "punks." And many who elaborate alien ways achieve nothing more than the recognition of being "really weird." In addition to being tough and developing an alien style, the would-be badass must add a measure of meanness.¹

To be "bad" is to be mean in a precise sense of the term. Badasses manifest the transcendent superiority of their being, specifically by insisting on the dominance of their will, that "I mean it," when the "it" itself is, in a way obvious to all, immaterial. They engage in violence not necessarily sadistically or "for its own sake" but to back up their meaning without the limiting influence of utilitarian considerations or a concern for self-preservation. At this level, the badass announces, in effect, "Not only do you not know where I'm at or where I'm coming from, but, at any moment, I may transcend the distance between us and destroy you. I'll jump you on the street, I'll 'come up side' your head, I'll 'fuck you up good'—I'll rush destructively to the center of your world, whenever I will! Where I'm coming from, you don't *want* to know!"

To make vivid sense of all the detailed ways of the badass, one must consider the essential project as transcending the modern moral injunction to adjust the public self sensitively to situationally contingent expectations. The frequent use of phallic metaphors is especially effective for making this process bristle with sensational moves. At the end of the chapter, I will clarify the distinctive relevance of masculine sexual symbols and suggest why being a badass is so disproportionately seductive to males. In chapter 4 I will relate class and ethnic status to differences in adolescent cultures of deviance. In chapter 6 knowledge of the ways of the badass will contribute to the explanation of the self-consciously criminal careers of hardened stickup men.

Being Tough

The ways of being tough may be summarized along two lines. First, a tough appearance may be accomplished by using symbols and practical devices that suggest an impenetrable self. Here we can place the attractions, to those who would effect a tough appearance, of leather clothing and metal adornments. Here, too, we can understand the connection of a publicly recognizable "toughness" with signs that unusual physical risks have been suffered and transcended; scars are an example. High boots frequently enhance a tough look, in some styles suggesting cowboys or motorcyclists, in other styles implying that the wearer has passed or expects to pass through some sort of disagreeable muck.²

Prominent among the devices of toughness are dark sunglasses. As the street name suggests, "shades," unlike sunglasses in general, pull down a one-way curtain in face-to-face interaction, accomplishing nicely the specific interactional strategy that is toughness. On the folk assumption that the eyes are windows to the soul, in face-to-face interaction we regularly

read the eye movements of others for signs of the focus of their consciousness, to grasp their subjective location, and to track what is "here" to them. Simultaneously, we manage the direction of our gaze to shape the perception by others of what is "here" to us. Thus, we usually avert our gaze from passersby after an implicitly understood interval, so that our apparent continued attentions do not suggest an improperly intimate interest; conversely, if we want to suggest that the other is intimately "here" for us, we do not avert our gaze. Shades permit the wearer to detect what is "here" to passersby, while the wearer's focus of consciousness remains inaccessible to them. When this interactional reading does not hold, for example, when we know the wearer is blind, darkly tinted glasses will not work as a device for intimating toughness.

Because toughness manifests that one is not morally or emotionally accessible, one recognizable style of being tough is to maintain silence, sometimes referred to as a "stony" silence, in the face of extensive questions, pleadings, comic antics, and other efforts to evoke signs of sympathy. As an audible analog to the eyes' "shades," when "tough" guys have to say something to get things from others, they may mumble or speak in a voice muffled by gum, a tightly closed mouth, or a downcast face.

The symbols and devices of impenetrability are a simple ready-made way of being tough; many of them can literally be bought off the rack. What is culturally more complex and individually more challenging is the requirement to offset the moral malleability inevitably suggested when one enters communicative interaction. I may easily appear tough to you when I am not attempting to shape your understanding to any effect other than that I am tough. But if I want to do any other sort of business with you, my apparent rigidity will, sooner or later, become a problem. If I want to communicate substantive desires, I must attend to whether you have correctly interpreted my messages; if not, I am constrained to alter my expression to get the point across—all of which risks suggesting that, to shape your experience of me, I am willing to shape and reshape myself and, hence, that I am not so tough.³

It is common for young people to take on the first layer of toughness without being accomplished in the second. What appears to be a hard-and-fast toughness often dissolves in the first moments of substantive interaction. Thus, in the privacy of a bedroom, one may drape the body in leather and chains, practice a hard look in the mirror, apply apparently permanent but really erasable tattoos of skulls and crossbones, and so forth. When one enters a store to buy cigarettes, however, it may feel impossible not to wait one's turn with the clerk politely, and even to finish the transaction with a muttered "thanks."

The openings and closings of face-to-face interactions in public are routine occasions for indicating that one has the moral competence to be in society. With "How are you?" we often formally open and move into an interaction. The response, "And how are you?" without a pause is

accepted and thus the interaction proceeds smoothly without either party explicitly responding to the question.⁴

The primary project of the questioner is usually to indicate that he is the sort of person who cares. Even though his failure to await a response might logically be taken to indicate just the opposite, the move makes sense to the participants because it indicates that the speaker is open to moral concerns. He has used convention to indicate that he is open to change based on the state of the other's being. Here is a little ceremony performed to ritualize the beginning of interaction, a ceremony in which each indicates to the other that he is capable of mediating his existence with others through social forms.

Compare a common ritual opening of interaction among adolescents who are attempting to be tough. When boys in American junior high schools pass each other in the halls while changing classes, they sometimes exchange punches aimed at each others' shoulders. They may then continue past each other or, even more oddly, they may abruptly abandon the dramatization of hostilities and pause for a short interchange of affable comments that make no reference to the opening blows. Literally, the thrust of the message is the thrust of the message. Familiarity with this ritual breeds a competition to be first in detecting the other's presence and to land the first punch. In a little ceremony performed to mark the initial moments of interaction, each attempts to indicate to the other that he exists for the other in the first instance physically, independent of civility and social form.

Note that not only is the implicit statement the inverse of that made by the customary civil ritual, so is its irony. The tactful adult shows that he is the sort of person who cares by inquiring about the other's sensibilities and then proceeding without pausing for a response. But the playfully combative adolescent shows that he is present most fundamentally in his socially unrestrained physical being, by more or less artfully employing a well-established social form.

One of the most elemental ways of being tough is to mark the beginning and the ending of an interaction gutturally, with a sound that emanates from deep in the body and whose form indicates that the sound maker ("speaker" would not be quite accurate here) exists outside of civil conventions. Members of street gangs in Italian sections of Brooklyn in the 1950s would often signal their entrance into a streets corner assemblage of their fellows with an "eh" (or "ay") that would trigger a cycle of responsive "ehs."⁵ This utterance is guttural, both in significance and sensual practice; the physical exertion indicates to the others that he is present for them from his stomach—not from his mind or from any socialized sensibility.

Endings of interactions are again typical occasions for expressing a competently socialized moral character. The strength of the moral demands made during an interaction is revealed by the amount of culture and proficiency of skill required to end an interaction without retrospectively

undermining its moral framework. Such verbal and written civil endings as "Take Care," "Yours Truly," and "Have a Nice Day" reaffirm the person's competent social sensibility. Despite a near-universal awareness of the banality of these forms, they remain difficult to avoid.

Such ritual endings are executed because people who have been interacting anticipate that a new threat will emerge at the end of the interaction. This threat is not to the future of their relationship (these conventions are used as much, perhaps more, among strangers who may well never see each other again as among friends), but to the reinterpretation of what has just transpired. Often formally prospective (*Have a nice day: I remain sincerely yours, take care, best wishes*), these devices are implicitly and more fundamentally retrospective. In effect, farewells assert that even though my care for you is so limited that I can now move on to other cares—even though by ending this interaction I may suggest that I have not been authentically here for you—I really have been deeply, sensitively involved with you all the while. The misleadingly prospective direction of the form is essential to suppress awareness of the implicit retrospective doubt, the existential doubt that either participant was (and perhaps ever can be) really "here" for the other. As phenomenal worlds begin objectively to separate, civil interactors rush to reaffirm that those worlds really were isomorphic and that each person really was morally sensitive to the other. I anticipate your sense that if I can break off abruptly from you, you may reflect, "He never really gave a shit about what I felt in the first place!"

To produce toughness is, in part, a matter of failing to perform these prophylactic rituals on the moral health of everyday life, but it is also a matter of inventing substitutes. Consider as a striking example of a guttural exiting ceremony, the *cholo's* "Shaa-haa!" In East Los Angeles, adolescent *vatos*, *cholos*, or "homeboys" frequently mill about in a casual mood that shows no particularly malevolent spirit until the assemblage is brought to a close when one of the participants utters a forceful or cool statement of bravado to which he appends a "Shaa" or "Shaa-haa," which the others join in.

The following instance was part of a homeboy's recollection of his first day in the tenth grade at Garfield High School in East Los Angeles. He was "holding up the wall" with fellow homeboys from his *barrio*—a traditional practice in which groups congregate at traditional spots, lean against the wall, and look out at groups clustered in other spots. The school bell rang to call students to class. The homeboys continued to mill about, aware that, with time, their passivity would take on an increasingly deviant significance as a tacit rebellion against the school's attempt to control their interaction. A vice principal came over to urge the group to go to class, and one homeboy responded, "Say, professor, don't you have something better to do? If you don't take my advise, go sit on the toilet and flush yourself down. Shaa-haa!"⁶

Like "eh," "Shaa-haa" (which can be short or long and more syncopated

or less, depending on the occasion) comes from deep in the body, from the very bottom of the throat, if not from the guts. It involves letting out a burst of air audibly, over a jutting jaw, with mouth open but without shaping lips to form letters, all to accomplish a broad, deep, serpentine hiss that is often succeeded by a machine-gun burst of belly laughing. Having publicly defined the interaction that preceded the termination as one in which all the boys were present in a gutturally direct, socially uninhibited way, the aggregation can disband and the participants can head toward class.⁷ With this utterance, a group of young men can harmoniously articulate a common moral posture of being tough without fear that the medium will contradict the message.

In addition to opening and closing interactions, those who would be tough must routinely counter the moral vulnerabilities suggested in the very nature of human existence. For human beings eating, for example, is a figurative, as well as a literal, opening of the self. For tough guys, eating (and defecating, ejaculating, extracting mucus from the nose and throat, and so on) must be carefully cultivated to offset the breach of self inherent in the process. Sweating, however, should require no special ceremony for toughs: perspiring occurs simply in a transpiring; no act of opening the body is necessary to make visible these drops from inside.

In adolescent cultures, toughness is commonly displayed as a subtle negativity, barely glossed onto an otherwise morally sensitive interaction. Consider two everyday ironies from black street life, hand-slapping rituals and the use of "shit" to begin a turn at speaking in conversation. Handshaking is a conventional form for displaying a civil sensibility when face-to-face interactions begin or end. It expresses a gentle man's spirit by physically enacting a moral malleability and a moral vulnerability: I open my hand, my self, to feel the force of your presence, and vice versa; we are united by social form, such that each may be influenced by the other's will.

Young men in black ghettos have constructed from this convention a means of displaying a paradoxical form of social contract. With the hand slap, the moral malleability suggested by the handshake becomes a cooperative hitting—I hit you and I let you hit me. The moral vulnerability suggested by the offer and acceptance of physical contact is simultaneously countered by its opposite. The hitting or slapping, an action that in other contexts might be humiliating punishment, usually passes as an unremarkable gloss of toughness.

This dialectical principle is elaborated within ongoing group interactions as speakers and listeners seek and confer agreement. The more a listener agrees with a speaker, the harder he hits him, and conversely. As R. Lincoln Keiser noted:

In general, when a hand-slapping episode occurs during social interaction it emphasizes agreement between the two parties. If an individual has said something someone thinks particularly noteworthy, he will put

out his hand to be slapped. By slapping it, the alter in the relationship signals agreement. Varying the intensity of the slap response indicates varying degrees of agreement. A Vice Lord may say, "Five Lords can whup fifty Cobras!" and then put out his hand, palm up. Another club member responds by slapping the palm hard, thus indicating strong agreement. The first Vice Lord might then say, "I can whup ten Cobras myself!" and again put out his hand. This time, however, the second individual may respond with a much lighter slap.⁸

The more the listener indicates that he has been moved by the speaker, the more emphatically he simultaneously acknowledges and counters his malleability through enacting aggression.

"Shit," pronounced melodically over long vowel sounds ("Sheee-it"), has had an extraordinary run of popularity in black street life. It is a way for a speaker to begin a turn in conversation or to mark publicly the movement of his consciousness from one theme to another within a monologue. Compare, as the inverse in form and function, the British use of "Right" to begin a turn in conversation, for example, the Bobby's "Right, what's going on here?" the Mexican's use of "Bueno, es que" to begin a response to a question; and the use of "okay" by white middle-class adolescents in the U.S. to begin a turn and repeatedly to reorient a narrative account in a conversation. Although with "shee-it" the speaker pulls himself out of a communal moral order even as he audibly begins to enter it, "Right," "Bueno," and "Okay" invoke a transcendent moral order to tie people together into a conversation at moments when the coordination of their sensibilities has become problematic. With "Right," the Bobby invokes a framework of moral approbation to begin the assertion of his authority. With "Bueno, es que," the Mexican begins to respond to a question by formally overcoming the dim, horrific possibility that the asking has inexorably alienated the speakers. With "okay, okay, okay," the young suburban American asserts his moral commitment to sustain order in conversation just as he anticipates that, because of problems in the evolving structuring of a narrative, it may soon fall into doubt.⁹

"Sheee-it" is elegantly negative, both in content and in form of delivery. When pronounced in a descending melody, the phrasing gives the word, even apart from its content, a cynical, negating tone. In content, shit is about as purely negative an image as any that could be thrown into a conversation. The existential fact that we are, each of us, literally (if also narrowly), walking, talking containers of excrement is remarkable for its typical absence from overt public attention. When used to start a speaker's turn in conversation, "shee-it" brilliantly executes a simultaneous expression of two dialectically related themes: (1) the fact that I speak to you coherently displays my ability to shape myself to fit into your understanding and (2) the fact that I begin by tying your impression of me to shit suggests that the social form I take on is but a thin veneer over a nature

that is obdurately beyond social domination. The following example, which illustrates the point both in form and content, came from an interview with a member of a black street gang in San Francisco:

I feel my high school education is the most important thing in my life right now. That's how I feel.

[Interviewer:] How long have you felt this way?

Shit. Maybe a year.¹⁰

These subculturally varied devices for producing a veneer of toughness are all countervailing commentaries on the image of personal moral openness that is persistently implied in social interaction. To sustain interaction while remaining tough, one can repeatedly negate the continuously resurrected implication that one is sensitive to others by throwing shit onto the scene, with guttural outbursts, by physically hitting at the image of moral sensibility, and so forth. Attacks on the conventions and clichés of civil demeanor constitute one of the stock ways of being tough. An account of street gang violence in Glasgow, Scotland, provides a final illustration. According to one retelling by members of the "Young Team" of an attack on a solitary victim, the victim, a boy aged 14, rolled himself into a ball for self-protection and was then stabbed seventeen times in the back. Just before the attackers ran off, Big Sheila, a barmaid who was sympathetic to the Young Team, created a memorable closing line by dropping a handkerchief on the boy and offering: "That'll help ye tae mop yir brow."¹¹

Being Alien

Being tough is essentially a process of negation, achieved either with a visual block, a symbolic sartorial shield, an audible muffle, or a maneuver that inverts the suggestions of a morally open self that are inevitably born in such everyday activities as eating, meeting friends, and conversing. Of course, being tough is not sufficient to construct a deviant identity; we admire poker players, respect businessmen, and honor political leaders who appear to be "tough." In all cases, the quality being celebrated is a negative moral capacity—an ability not to give away, not to give up, and not to give in.

By developing ways of being alien, adolescents can move positively beyond the negativity of a tough posture without abandoning it and without embracing respectable conventions. In congruence with the statement made from the stance of toughness, "I am not here for you," adolescents have fashioned an ever-expanding set of subcultures in which they can

style great swaths of their everyday lives with indications that they come from some morally alien place.

STREET STYLES

Across subcultures would-be badasses exploit the hermeneutic possibilities in walking. Young blacks who would strike up the admirable image of the "bad nigger" work on orchestrating their pace to a ghetto "bop." John Allen, a black from Washington, D.C., who became a "professional" stickup man, recalled that when he was first committed to a juvenile detention facility,

I learned a lot of things. . . . it was a place where you fought almost every day because everybody trying to be tougher than the next person. As a kid you pay so much attention to how a dude's supposed to be a bad nigger, he really having his way around the joint with the counselors and with everybody. . . . So you wanna be like him, you wanna act like him and talk like him. I think down there I must of changed my voice about hundred times 'cause I had a high-pitched voice and was bothered being small. And I changed my walk from supercool to ultracool.¹²

In East Los Angeles, the night before his first day in high school, a barrio homeboy anxiously anticipated humiliating challenges. He debated whether to take a gun to school and practiced his "barrio stroll": "a slow, rhythmic walk with ample flamboyant arm movement, chesty posture, and head up towards the heavens."¹³

Each of these styles transforms walking from a utilitarian convention into a deviant esthetic statement made routinely in the practice of getting from here to there. Each suggests that the walker takes some special pleasure in the existential necessity of putting one foot in front of the other to get ahead. Each suggests that the walker will not take a simple "straight" path through the social structure. He will take up more attention and more space in his social mobility than is called for by civil routines, perhaps, with those flamboyantly swayed arms and his side-to-side gait or slightly jumping bop causing problems for pedestrians who are attempting to pass unnoticed in the other direction.

Most notably, each style of walking suggests not only that the walker is not here for the others around and "walks to a beat of a different drummer," but he is from a morally deviant place. The *ghetto* bop and the *barrio* stroll, identify the walker as a native of a place that is outside and antagonistically related to the morally respectable center of society. Similarly, the streetcorner male's habit of repeatedly making manual contact with his genitals and hoisting up his pants is a prominent way of pointing to the walker's animal life, a life carried on somewhere beyond the perception of respectable society. The currently popular "sag" look makes the

same point by inverting these symbols. Pants are held by tight belts below the buttocks, where they permit the display of a "bad" ass covered by flacid boxer shorts, which are often worn over a second, unseen pair of underpants.¹⁴

From Japan to Scotland to East Los Angeles, tattoos are appreciated as devices for embracing a deviant identity. Tattoos may be used minimally to suggest toughness by drawing attention to the skin as a barrier between the tattooed person and others. They also conjure up toughness by suggesting that the person has suffered and survived pain. Tattoos are not necessarily ominous, but often their content conveys an additionally "bad," alien theme by suggesting a totemic relationship with evil. In one circle of street fighting young men in Glasgow in the early 1970s, "Mick . . . sported on his forearm a red dagger entering the top of a skull and reappearing through its mouth. It was considered to be the finest tattoo in the neighbourhood."¹⁵ Los Angeles cholas are partial to black widow spiders and death skulls. Hell's Angels sport swastikas, German crosses, and skulls-and-crossbones.

These symbols suggest that the wearer presumes himself fundamentally rooted in a world of deviance and so is unresponsive to conventional moral appeals. What is more interesting is that the same effect is often achieved with tattoos that are traditional, respectable symbols of moral content—of "Mom," "love," and American Eagles; in the Japanese criminal subculture of *yakuza*, the whole body may be tattooed with chrysanthemums.¹⁶ Beyond suggesting toughness and almost regardless of content, tattoos emphasize personal intransigence and are symbols of permanent loyalty to a particular subgroup's interpretation of the Good. They seem to say, "Wherever I am, whatever is going on, without my even trying, this will be fundamental to who I am." Even when the moral commitment is to "Mom" or to the American flag, the tattoo will often have threatening, deviant overtones. (Contrast the morally innocuous wearing of pins bearing club or patriotic images: unlike tattoos and like college ties and tie-clips, these can be taken off.)

Like walking, the would-be badass may also fashion talking into a deviant esthetic. John Allen, the professional "bad nigger" whose recollections of his street education in a juvenile detention facility were quoted earlier, noted: "There was a big thing there about talking. You had to express yourself, and you saying, 'Damn, jive, Listen man' and going through all the motions and changes."¹⁷ In Glasgow, young street fighting men use a slang, reminiscent of Cockney forms, that hides its meaning through a multistep process of alteration from conventional expression. Thus, "It's jist yir Donald" means "It's just your luck": "Donald" calls up "duck," and "duck" rhymes with "luck." "Ya tea-leaf ye!" means "You thief!" which, if pronounced with their accent, would sound something like, tea-eef. "Ah fancy yir tin flute" means "I like your suit."¹⁸

The ethnographer who recorded these phrases grew up in Glasgow but

was initially frustrated in attempting to understand the young toughs' everyday conversations. As Allen indicates with regard to the United States, "jive" talk is not a natural talent of ghetto blacks.¹⁹ Within the local context of ghettos, these argots are resources for taking the posture of an alien presence, a being who moves coolly above the mundane realities of others. As with being tough, being alien is not necessarily a posture taken toward conventional society. It is a way of being that may be taken up at any moment. As Allen's quote made clear, being ultra cool is most essential in the company of other tough young men. Being alien is a way of stating, "I am not here for you," when anyone—friend, family, or foe—may be the "you."

The ways of being alien begin to define an alternative deviant culture. As such, they call for the study of their distinctive esthetic unities. Here, I can only indicate a few lines of analysis that might be elaborated by investigations devoted solely to ethnographic documentation.

THE CHOLO

A coherent deviant esthetic unites various manifestations of the low-income youth culture of the barrio known as *la vida loca* and identified with the cholo, vato loco, or Mexican-American homeboy. Language, body posture, clothing fashions, car styles, and graffiti exhibit a distinctive, structurally similar, "bad" perspective. As individuals, young people in the barrio take on and shed this esthetic from situation to situation and to different degrees, but they continuously take for granted that affiliation with it will signify, to their peers and to adults alike, the transcendence of a line of respectability and the assumption of a high-risk posture of moral defiance.

In its essential thrust, the cholo esthetic assumes an inferior or outsider status and asserts an aggressive dominance. In body posture, this dialectic is achieved by dropping below or falling back and simultaneously looking down on others. Thus, when Mexican-American young men wish to take up a cholo or "bad" posture for a photograph, they often squat, placing their buttocks just off the ground, sometimes on their heels, while they throw their heads slightly back to a position from which they can glare down at the camera. This posture is not easily sustained; its accomplishment is at once an athletic test and an esthetic demonstration of "bad" toughness.²⁰

This position might be characterized as an aristocratic squat. Reminiscent of a resource known to peasants throughout the world, the cholo's squat creates a place for him to sit when there are no chairs. But by throwing his head sharply back, the cholo takes on a paradoxically aristocratic air. Once in the lowered and reared-back position, a sense of superiority is attached to him, as it is to one who is born to privilege: naturally and necessarily, like a law of nature.

Faced by a squatting cholo, an observer sees himself observed by a down-the-nose glance, like the stereotype of a peasant under the regard of an aristocrat. For his part, the cholo accomplishes something magical: he simultaneously embraces and transcends an inferior status. Before your very eyes and dressed in an undershirt that has no sleeves to put anything up, the cholo drops down to the ground, becoming lower to you in physical position but putting you down morally. Miraculously, the cholo manages literally to look down on you from beneath you.

The dialectical structure and aggressive symbolic force of this body posture is also carried out in the classic *pachuco* stance and in the contemporary "barrio stroll." Unlike the cholo's aristocratic squat, the pachuco style is both historically dated and well-known outside Mexican-American barrios, in part because of the popularity of the play and then movie, *Zoot Suit*. Although the pachuco's Zoot Suit or "drapes" were fashions of the 1930s and 1940s, contemporary cholos proudly, and sometimes self-consciously, continue elements of the pachuco style, wearing overly large, multiply pleated, sharply pressed khaki pants and pointed, brightly shined black shoes. And if the narrator of *Zoot Suit* took an exaggerated back-leaning stance, the contemporary cholo is similarly inclined.²¹

When being photographed, a group of cholos will often divide up into some who squat, lean forward, throw their heads back, and cast their eyes down to meet the camera and some who stand, maintaining the wide angle between their side-pointed feet that the squatters also adopt, throwing the trunk slightly back, throwing their heads back even more, and casting their eyes down to meet the camera. This standing position is put into motion in the barrio stroll. In forward movement, the foot position adopted by squatting and stationary cholos is maintained, but now it becomes far more noticeable, causing a ducklike waddle. To balance out the waddle and the backward slant of the trunk, the barrio stroller bends his elbows sharply, drawing the hands up parallel to the ground.

In the stationary position and in the stroll, the "being low" of the squat is replaced by a "being outside." While the squatting cholo is in a remarkably low social position, the backward-inclined, standing and strolling cholo is remarkably beyond reach. The magical effect is that while being emphatically beyond conventional reach, the cholo appears to be unusually aggressive and assertive as he strides into your world.

The low position of the cholo's aristocratic squat is repeated in the automobile esthetic of the low rider. By altering stock shocks and springs, cholos make cars ride literally low. If the rear is lowered more than the front, the driver will naturally incline backwards. Even without mechanical alterations, they may achieve the same effect by driving with their arms fully extended, their trunk and head inclined back, and their eyes cast down at the world above.

The overall effect is less an approximation of the advertised modern man in an up-to-date car than a fantasy image of a prince in a horse-

drawn chariot, sometimes racing with other chariots and sometimes promenading slowly through public boulevards. The cars themselves are restored and dressed up at a substantial expense. The challenge is to demonstrate a transcendent esthetic power by raising the dead and discarded to a vividly displayed superiority. The low-rider is a distinctively American construction of alien being; foreign cars are not used, but the style is pointedly different from anything Detroit has ever tried to get Americans to buy.

The form of graffiti that is popular among Mexican-American youths in Los Angeles also has an emphatically alien esthetic and a backward leaning slant. In New York City, graffiti, produced by blacks, Puerto Ricans, and others, is often colorful and graphic, sometimes extensively narrative, and cartoon figures are often mixed in with individual and gang names, threats, and ideological slogans. New York graffiti writers consider one of their highest achievements to be the creation of an integrated set of images running over up to ten subway cars. In East Los Angeles, graffiti is primarily monotonic calligraphy; as one writer put it, everything is in the line:

Graffiti is all the same line, the same feeling, even though different people use it for a different purpose. . . . Anyway, I dig that line, I dug that line. That's how I got involved. It's my thing—that line.²²

Experienced graffiti "writers" in New York denigrate "tags" (writing only a name or nickname) as amateurish and unsophisticated. But in Los Angeles, graffiti is called *plaqueasos*—from *placa*, which in various contexts means a car license plate, a policeman's badge, or a plaque announcing one's business to the world. The *plaqueasos* of Los Angeles are elaborated in line and adornment far beyond the "tags" derided by New York writers.

Mexican-American *plaqueaso* writers appear to be working from traditions that are so ancient and foreign as to make the content of their graffiti routinely indecipherable to outsiders, often even to residents of their own barrios. The emphasis in the content is on individual and gang names, phrases of bravado and threats, nightmarish (black widow spiders, laughing skulls) and deviant (the number 13 for the letter "M" for marijuana) iconography, and a protective curse (*Con Savos* or *Con Safos*, often written simply as C/S) that is reminiscent of those inscribed on Egyptian tombs. Individual letters in words, designed in a style that is unfamiliar to any written tradition known in the barrio, are often mixed with symbols (for instance, stars between letters), as in a hieroglyphics.

In a sensitive study of East Los Angeles graffiti, Jerry and Sally Romotsky argued that major styles of *plaqueasos* are based on Old English, Gothic, Dürer-like calligraphy.²³ Perhaps the style that is most difficult for outsiders to decipher is what *plaqueaso* writers call the "point" style. Romotsky and Romotsky showed that the point style is achieved essentially by tracing the outlines of blocky, Old English-style letters. In effect,

plaqueaso writers achieve a strange, alien appearance by working out of Anglo-Saxon cultural traditions in a disguised way. They achieve a distinctive presence by the ingeniously simple device of negation, that is, leaving out the substance of letters.

A superior posture for *plaqueaso* is achieved by using the same dialectical technique that is used in body posture. When drawn in three dimensions, the letters sometimes march to one side or huddle together like colorful cartoon characters engaged in a light, comic spirit. But in their "bad" forms—when they announce the names of gangs or make ominous declarations, three-dimensional letters often rear back and come down heavily on the observer as they declare their author's existence.²⁴

The same esthetic runs through clothing and language. Cholos favor armless undershirts, as if to embrace a sign of the working-class status that has been abjured by conventional fashion. Unlike garments that are manufactured to be worn as "tops," these tops are also bottoms: traditionally worn beneath shirts, their display is a negation that emphasizes what is not worn. And by studiously maintaining their undershirts in brilliant white, cholos proclaim their transcendence of dirty work. Plaid shirts, referred to in the barrios as "Pendletons," are part of the everyday uniform of many school-age cholos. Worn over a bright white undershirt, the Pendleton recalls the cotton plaid shirts common among impoverished Mexican immigrants as well as the expensive wool shirts associated with the Oregon manufacturer. As a practical matter, the style is alien to the reality of the cholos, whose first days of classes in the fall often have temperatures topping 100 degrees. With colorful bandanas wrapped around their foreheads, cholos look like they come from rural Indian areas rather than urban barrio neighborhoods.

Homeboys in East Los Angeles speak and write graffiti with elements from Calo, a unique amalgam of Spanish and English that continues a "pachuco" argot whose roots are in pre-World War II, Mexican-American gang life.²⁵ On the one hand, cholos often ridicule recently arrived Mexicans who are incompetent in English.²⁶ On the other hand, their version of Spanish is incomprehensible to native Mexicans as well as to many of their U.S.-born parents. Pachuco or Calo is not a foreign language; it is ubiquitously alien.

In sum, the cholo-pachuco style is a deviant posture of aggressive intrusiveness made from a position that is proudly outside the reaches of the various societies it addresses. Through the stationary and the walking body and in clothing, cars, everyday language, and stylized writing, the pachuco-cholo-homeboy-vato loco conjures up a deviance rooted in a world that is self-consciously and intrinsically alien. The special claim of this esthetic is not just that its bearers are tough, but that they are from a spiritually rich, morally coherent place that Anglo authorities, native Mexicans, parents, or conventionally styled peers may only grasp minimally and at a distance as existing somewhere over "there."

THE PUNK

Consider next the novel way in which the punk culture locates its bearers in an alien moral system. An observer of the original British working class-based punk culture offered this summary:

The punks turned towards the world a dead white face which was there and yet not "there." These "murdered victims"—emptied and inert—also had an alibi, an elsewhere, literally "made up" out of vaseline and cosmetics, hair dye and mascara. But paradoxically, in the case of the punks, this "elsewhere" was a nowhere—a twilight zone—a zone constituted out of negativity.²⁷

The alien character of punk culture has been achieved in several ways. One is to embrace as appearance enhancing the devices that, according to strong moral injunctions and contemporary fashion, ought to be kept hidden. Thus, safety pins and sanitary napkins are worn as adornments on shirts and skirts, lavatory chains are draped like a necklace on the chest, and makeup is applied in degrees and places that ensure that its application will be seen. And hair is not only dressed in unconventional ways but is dyed blue, green, intense red, yellows, and combinations of these colors that are not found naturally on any humans. The suggestion is of an alien culture whose standards are the opposite of conventional esthetic standards. The thrust of punk culture is not only foreign or "weird" but consistently antipathetic.

The alien theme in punk culture has not been limited to dress and appearance. Dancing "was turned into a dumbshow of blank robotics." The pogo—a dance style of jumping up and down, hands clenched to the sides, as if to head an imaginary ball, the jumps repeated without variation in time to the strict mechanical rhythms of the music—"was a caricature—a *reductio ad absurdum* of all the solo dance styles associated with rock music." Bands took names like the Unwanted, the Rejects, the Sex Pistols, the Clash, and the Worst and wrote songs with titles like "I Wanna be Sick on You" and "If You Don't Want to Fuck Me, Fuck Off." There was a "wilful desecration and the voluntary assumption of outcast status which characterized the whole punk movement."²⁸ A memorable example was a sort of pet hairdo constructed by carrying live rats perched on the head.²⁹

Another alien theme, one that was given a particular reading in punk culture but that has had broad appeal to many "bad" youth cultures, might be called, being inured to violence. Clothes display holes and rips that suggest not wear but war; hair is shaped into daggers; makeup may suggest bruises, scars, and black eyes. In this theme, the suggestion of an alien origin for the punk is that he or she has just come to the instant social

situation, to what is going on here, from a place that is, to all in civil society, somewhere inhospitably "there."

Despite radical differences in the substance of their symbols, the punk and cholo cultures dramatize a tough invulnerability and the status of a visitor in the conventional world. For the individual adolescent, the adoption of the cholo or punk style has often meant a weighty decision of moral citizenship. On the one hand, the bearer sets himself off as a member of an alien culture in the eyes of school and police authorities, parents, and conforming peers. On the other hand, the alien style enables even the loner to induct himself, through what sociologists call collective behavior, into a deviant community.

Punk culture was manifested during its classic stage in the mid-to-late 1970s by an informal social organization underlying a strong esthetic coherence. The punk style inevitably became commercialized, softened, and sold to "normal" adolescents and to middle-aged adults through beauty salons, high-priced boutiques, and mass-marketed music. But for several years, tens of thousands of adolescents were working out a personal style and helping to produce the emerging collective esthetic. By acquiring pieces of used clothing, costume jewelry, and miscellaneous "junk"; altering items already in their closets; and applying makeup and assembling outfits with a care for detail; adolescents, male and female, were literally fitting themselves into a controversial collective movement. That the culture as a whole achieved a persistent coherence even while the details of the punk "look" constantly changed could be taken by individual members as proof both of the autodidactical, idiosyncratic creativity of individual punks and of the existence of a common spiritual bond running through the age group, cutting across formal divisions of school classes, neighborhoods, sex, and ethnicity.

Many adolescents live alien subcultures with far more everyday meaning than simply that of a bizarre dressing ritual. Beyond exploring the reactions of conventional others, adolescents who are dressed in an alien style are recurrently challenged to behave in a distinctively cholo or punk (or "bad nigger," or Hell's Angel) style in routine interactions. How, for example, does one order food at a restaurant in punk style? How does one answer a teacher's question like a cholo?

If the alien adolescent is in exile from a society that does not and never has existed, we still must appreciate the transcendent loyalties that are being evoked. Alien adolescent subcultures are collective movements on the way toward class consciousness, but they rarely reach explicit self-awareness or survive efforts to organize them formally. The cholos' aristocratic squat and other elements of arch style suggest their inchoate collective efforts to weave themes from their unique historical reality: the Mexican peasant origins and U.S. agricultural exploitation of earlier generations combined with a revolutionary tradition in which battles between peasants and aristocrats were joined by bandit leaders. Just as the black

ghetto pimp, dressed in a white suit and a planter's hat, defiantly embodies the stereotype of slave owners he has never known, so the cholo, looking down on his environment by taking up a stance beneath and outside, unwittingly but defiantly gives expression to his people's historical subjugation.

The punk movement in the United States emerged in the mid-1970s, coincident with the recession, rapid inflation, and the passage into political quiescence of the "sixties" generation. It emerged after the withdrawal from Vietnam, after the culmination of Watergate, and as the oil crisis was beginning to push up prices throughout the economy. Meanwhile the sixties generation, which originally gained collective self-consciousness, in part by taking over radio station formats and displacing the pop stars of the fifties, was now in its thirties, moving into higher income brackets, but still holding onto its cultural representation of youth. In rock music, the arena in which adolescents uniquely attempt to detect and define the waxing and waning of generations, scores of bands struggled for mass recognition in a youth market that was tenaciously dominated by stars and styles nearing middle age. Styled like a militant vanguard, the punk band represented, in the market of collective symbols, the distinctive historical struggle of the emerging generation. The punk movement was bitterly antihippie; rumors of attacks on sixties youth types were constant. And the punk music and performance style was not simply raucous but a move back to an historical era before the sixties. It was an effort to get back to the fertile, earliest, crudest days of rock and roll in the fifties, as if to begin the youth culture again but in a way in which the currently young could take their place.

To regard these as more than speculations is to miss the open-ended, protean quality of the subculture. What the movement is about in terms of collective material interest and historical position is necessarily unclear as long as it retains the openness to individual esthetic creativity that makes it a compellingly exciting process to its members. But not to speculate on underlying, implicitly sensed themes of collective class interest is to miss an essential element in the excitement of being in these movements. The alien subcultures of adolescence are vehicles for cooperative speculation, means of exploring, through the reactions of others to clothing and new speech forms, which devices "work" and which do not; which fit the alien soul and which are incomprehensible in it; and which compromise the alien order by evincing a subtle sympathy to mainstream conventions. To the extent that young people who do not know each other can create, through indirect interactions and informality, a rich coherence among such minor details as the shape of a line in graffiti, the colors painted on hair, a rag worn around the head, a stirring accent, or a memorable phrase uttered before a class, they can sense the reality of an alien spiritual home—a place as yet concretely present in no definable geography, but surely "there."

THE ANIMAL AND THE COOL

Cutting across the various alien adolescent subcultures is a dualism between the animalistic and the cool. One way to indicate that you are not just tough but essentially outside contemporary civilization is to manifest an animal incapacity for moral responsiveness. Hell's Angels embraced this folk anthropology with their studied affinity for dirt. Inverting the practice of teenagers who shrink "designer" jeans through multiple washings before wearing them skin tight in public, Hell's Angels would train new denim jackets through multiple baths in dirt and grease before wearing them on the road. To shock outsiders, they turned rituals of civil society into occasions for displaying their animal natures, as when one 250-pound Hell's Angel would greet another in a bar by taking a running jump into his arms and planting a wet kiss on his lips.³⁰ To be animal is to suggest chaotic possibilities—that, through you, at any moment, forces of nature may explode the immediate social situation.

Being cool is a way of being alien by suggesting that one is not metaphysically "here" in the situation that apparently obtains for others, but is really in tune with sensually transcendent forces in another, conventionally inaccessible dimension. To be cool is to view the immediate social situation as ontologically inferior, nontranscendent, and too mundane to compel one's complete attentions. A common way of being cool is to realize or affect a moderate drug mood: the "cool cat" of black street life has its origins in the culture of the heroin world.³¹ In Los Angeles barrios, an analogous, drug-related phenomenon is *tapaismo*, an air of being so into a deviant world (*la vida loca*) that one cannot "give a shit" about any situational restraints. In contexts of extreme poverty, a cool version of a "bad" look may be achieved by a self-consciously exaggerated display of luxury in the form of flashy styles worn casually. In their ghettos, the pachuco who is "draped" in overflowing fabric and the black cat who is "dripping" in jewelry imply sources of wealth that must exist at a distance from conventional morality, in some underground realm, perhaps that of the pimp or the drug dealer.³²

The two emphases of alien style have spawned different descriptions of fighting. On the animal side, in Puerto Rican street gangs in New York in the 1970s, to be beaten up was to be "dogged up." In many black ghettos, group attacks on isolated individuals are described as "rat packing" or "wolf packing." In East Los Angeles, attempting to intimidate others with a fierce expression is known as doing a "maddog" look.

On the cool side, to Chicago's Vice Lords of the early 1960s, a fight was a "humbug," and some of the West Side branches became known as the "Conservative" Vice Lords. With "conservative" as with "humbug," they were assuming a pose of calm reserve toward what others find extremely upsetting. It also is cool to refer to risky deviant activities with a diminutive. John Allen, the "professional" stickup man, liked to talk about a

period in his life in Washington, D.C., that was nicely organized—a time when he could do “my little sex thing,” “my little drug thing,” and “a little stickup.”³³

As used in black street culture, “shit,” “jive,” and “stone” have been used to express both the animal and the cool sides of an alien posture. To talk “jive” is to talk in a cool, poetically effective way, but it may also be to talk nonsense and to bullshit, as in the pejorative “don’t give me that jive talk!” or “you jive motherfucker!” “Jive” and “shit” also refer to a gun. In this sense they suggest an overwhelming force that puts the individual beyond the restraints of civilized morality. To be “stoned” is, in one aspect, to be drugged beyond competence for morally responsive interaction. Stone is also a cool object; metaphysically, it emphasizes a hard, unmovable reality, as in the praiseworthy, “He’s a stone motherfucker,” or in The Black P. Stone Rangers, a famous gang name in Southside Chicago in the 1960s. The gang’s name was supercool, since it exploited a double entendre (“stone” played off the name of a local street, Blackstone). Actually, the phrase was ultracool, in that it fortuitously created a triple or quadruple entendre; the club’s name was celebrated by poetically inserting a “P” within the street name, which audibly set “stone” apart from “black” just long enough to register racial as well as metaphysical connotations.

Finally, a lack of expressiveness is used widely to construct alien adolescent subcultures in both animal and cool forms. “Animals” in fraternity houses and on sports teams represent a frequently admired way of being “bad” by showing themselves, in loud and wild forms, as being governed by inarticulate, uncivilized forces. On the cool side is the use of silence to affect the style of the professional killer or the Mafia chief. When asked by a sociologist, “What would you like to be when you grow up?” it is cool to answer, “an assassin.”³⁴

More elaborately, it is dramatically “bad” style to exercise power publicly through silent codes. Turtle, “the Chicano ‘Fonz,’” first verbally dressed down homeboys from another barrio in a dangerous face-to-face confrontation and next gave a hand signal and walked away; then twenty or so of his homeboys “spontaneously” attacked in unison.³⁵ This move is “supercool” or extraordinarily “bad” owing to its doubly silent structure. It is a silent message that mobilizes a more profoundly silent dialectic. That is, the most minimal imaginable physical move causes a major physical attack, a momentary shift in posture produces a permanent change in being, a silent signal creates screaming pain, and a cool move turns on the heat and burns the victim.

No attack need follow such a silent message, however. A gesture by one, apparently undifferentiated, man that turns all the others in a place into his servants—for instance, in a bar, at the snap of a finger, an aisle is cleared and a central table is left vacant—also shows a bad “cool.” Watching the silent signal and its results, both the participants and bystanders suddenly appreciate a powerful, alien presence. The indications are not only that a

structure of authority clearly exists in the group, but that it is implicitly illicit: no formal indicia demarcate those who act as waiters, chauffeurs, and couriers from those who are served as customers, car owners, and chiefs. Exercised with an aura of mystery, “bad” because it cannot show its sources publicly, this power always exists at a distance from the situation that obtains here and now. For those under its spell, its sources are always in some unreachable location vaguely apprehended as over “there.”

Being Mean

The person who would be tough must cultivate in others the perception that they cannot reach his sensibilities. Adolescents who would achieve a foreign and hostile presence in interaction must go further and participate in a collective project to produce an alien esthetic. But the shaping of a tough image and the practice of an alien sensibility are insufficient to ensure that one will be “bad.” Those who would be bad are always pursued by powerful spiritual enemies who soften tough postures and upset the carefully balanced cultures of alienation, making them appear silly, puerile, and banal and thus undermining their potential for intimidation. To survive unwanted imitators, you must show that unlike the kids, you’re not kidding; unlike the gays, you’re not playing; unlike the fashionable middle class, you understand fully and embrace the evil of your style. You must show that you mean it.

By being mean, I refer to a distinctive sensuality worked into the experience of interaction. To complete the project of becoming a badass, it is necessary to impress on others the apprehension that, however carefully they may maintain a respectful comportment, you might suddenly thrust the forces of chaos into their world. If he is serious about being tough and alien, the would-be badass can inundate the routine social settings of his everyday life with this “awe-full,” ominous character. But how can he show that he means it so clearly that he is never confused with childish, playful, or otherwise inauthentic imitators?

The key distinction is not between physical action and its symbolic representation. If the badass is to make everyday social situations routinely ominous, he cannot, as a practical matter, depend simply on violently harming others.³⁶ As has frequently been found in studies of street “gangs,” those with the “baddest” reputations are not necessarily the best nor even the most frequent fighters. And in the qualitative materials which follow, the actual infliction of physical harm seems always imminent but is not.

Whether through physical attack or via dramatization at a distance, the

badass conveys the specific message that he means it. If we ask, what is the "it" that he means? we miss the point. To construct and maintain an awesome, ominous presence, the badass must not allow others to grasp the goals or substantive meaning of his action. He must seem prepared to use violence, not only in a utilitarian, instrumental fashion but as a means to ensure the predominance of his meaning, as he alone understands it, whatever "it" may be.

To make clear that "he means it," the badass celebrates a commitment to violence beyond any reason comprehensible to others. For example, at a dance hall in Glasgow, Tim, a dominant personality in the Young Team, turned to Dave and pointed to a bystander, "'Ah don't fancy the look o' his puss. Go over an' stab him fur me.' Dave had duly carried out the request."³⁷ From London's East End, an ex-skinhead recalled, "We only 'it people for reasons, didn't we? . . . like if they looked at us."³⁸

In conflicts between street gangs, there is little room for a reasoned exchange of grievances; "discussion" and "debate" risk suggesting a deferential bow to rational order that would undermine the project of the badass. Manny Torres, a member of the "Young Stars" in Spanish Harlem in the late 1950s, recalled that in his work as "warlord," debate was not a means of avoiding conflict but a signal that a fight was inevitable:

My job was to go around to the other gangs, meet with their chiefs, and decide whose territory was whose. And if we had any debate about it, it was my job to settle on when and where we would fight it out and what weapons we would use.³⁹

Physically, badasses are always vulnerable; in U.S. ghettos, someone can always "get to" them, since guns are widely available. But if they communicate that they will persevere without limitation until they dominate, then they force others to confront the same choice: are they willing to risk bodily injury, and even if they escape injury, are they willing to risk arrest? Is a momentary sensation of dominance worth it? The badass's logic of domination is to mean nothing more or less than meanness. He succeeds by *inducing others* to reason, to reflect on the extraneous meaning of violence, to weigh the value of experiencing dominance against the fear of physical destruction and legal punishment, when *he* will not make the calculation. Now and again, he must go at least a little bit mad.

Ethnographic details demonstrate the would-be badass's awareness of the necessity to dramatize his transcendence of rationality. Badasses are not irrational or antirational, and they certainly are not stupid. They understand precisely the nature of rationality and they position themselves carefully to manifest that their spirit, their meaning, is not limited by their need to make intelligible to others or even to themselves the purposive coherence or utilitarian sensibility of their action. Within this framework, we can understand the following comments by black Philadelphia street

toughs to sociologist Barry Krisberg not as evidence of intellectual incompetence or moral insensitivity, but as the opposite. A group leader named William told Krisberg that he "wouldn't argue with someone—just stab them."⁴⁰ There was no need to argue or explain because: "whatever comes to my mind, I know it got to be right because I'm thinking of it."⁴¹ Another leader, Deacon, characterized his everyday posture with:

Doesn't have to be anything, it could be just the principle of a conversation. If I thought it was justifiable, like, they was trying to, like fuck over me, I would shoot them, whatever way that came into my mind at that moment.⁴²

Where badasses congregate, showdowns are likely. In showdowns, we can sometimes see the eminently rational use of seemingly irrational violence to manifest a transcendence of rationality. In the following incident, drawn from R. Lincoln Keiser's ethnography of Chicago's Vice Lords, there is no suggestion of sadism or even of much anger; rather, there is a mutual recognition of the meanness required to be a badass. The background is a fight between two cliques within the Vice Lords, the Rat Pack and the Magnificent Seven. The speaker, a member of the Rat Pack, began a fist-fight with Fresh-up Freddie of the Magnificent Seven:

He couldn't touch me, so I said, "I quit," and I dropped my guard. That mother fucker, he hit me in the nose, hit me in the mouth, and my mouth started bleeding. Now Cool Fool had my jive [gun]. I said, "Fool, gimme my jive!" and Fool, he gave me my gun. I said to Fresh-up, "I ought to shoot you!" Now Fresh-up got the intention of snatching the gun. He done snatched three or four guns out of different fellows hands, and he started walking at me. He said, "Shoot me if you want to. I don't believe you going to shoot me." I knew what he's going to do when he got close, he going to grab the gun. I didn't want to kill him so I shot him in the arm. I had to shoot him. You see, if I hadn't done it, he would of took my gun away from me.⁴³

Fresh-up was attempting to be the baddest, first by manifestly not limiting himself by principles of honor or conventional morality (he struck out at the speaker after the latter had "quit") and second, in moving to snatch the gun away, by demonstrating the other's moral weakness—the other's fear not of him but of the consequences of using the gun he possessed. The speaker shot, not necessarily out of fear that Fresh-up would take the gun and shoot him, but so Fresh-up would not transform the speaker's pretense of meanness into an evident bluff.

Being mean, then, is a pristinely rational social logic for manifesting that one has transcended rationality. Having grasped its paradoxical rationality, we can now more readily understand various ways in which badasses

breathe awesomely mean airs into everyday life. To the would-be badass, being mean is not an abstract commitment but an exciting world of distinctive phenomena. Becoming a badass becomes seductive when one senses in interactional detail the transcendent significance of manifesting meanness. I will trace three segments of esthetically and sensually compelling ways of being mean under the categories: "Soulful Chaos," "Paraphernalia of Purposiveness," and "Mind Fucking."

SOULFUL CHAOS

The ominous presence of the badass is achieved in one respect by his ways of intimating chaos. The person who is most fearsomely beyond social control is the one who does not appear to be quite in control of himself because his soul is rooted in what, to us, is chaos.

The following is a poem written by an ex-skinhead.

Everywhere they are waiting, In silence.
In boredom. Staring into space.
Reflecting on nothing, or on violence. . . .
Then suddenly it happens. A motor-cycle
Explodes outside, a cup smashes.
They are on their feet, identified
At last as living creatures,
The universal silence is shattered,
The law is overthrown, chaos
Has come again. . . .⁴⁴

In this poem, chaos is represented as the force that moves one from boredom to liveliness, awakening one's senses, providing essential energy, making the world a seductive place again. The suggestion is that chaos is at the very source of one's spiritual being.

If badasses are not often poets, they are most fundamentally creators of a special culture. Consider the explanation offered by Big L, a member of a Puerto Rican gang in Brooklyn in the 1970s, of why the Bikers have the reputation of being the baddest:

Rape old ladies. Rape young girls. Kick people out of their homes. Steal. Vandalize the whole neighborhood. Burn cars and all this. And they're bad. That's why they consider them bad. They're bad.⁴⁵

Beyond the specific acts cited, the Bikers have, for Big L, a transcendent, ringing reality as bad, real bad, the baddest: his description quickly becomes a recitation in which the intonation of evil goes on and on, resonating in choruses of awe.

Rape and mayhem may sometimes be useful to construct a bad reputa-

tion, but as a routine matter, the badass will exploit a more cultured, symbolically economic means of sustaining an awful presence. He may dramatize a sadistic pleasure in violence to suggest that chaos is natural to him and, therefore, that it is always his potential. Skinheads described cutting someone with a razor as "striping," as if there was an esthetic appeal, a matter of artistic achievement, in the process of destruction. In Glasgow, another place where knives have been a favorite instrument of group violence, "team" fighters distinguish between being "slashed" and being "ripped" (the latter involving a special turning of the knife) and they further distinguish a method of kicking aimed at opening the wound.⁴⁶ When gangs have successfully established terrifying reputations, they are often accorded myths of bestial sadism. Ellison reported that in the 1950s in Brooklyn, members of the most feared gang, the Puerto Rican Flyers, were said to drink blood.⁴⁷

By celebrating hedonism as the underlying motivation for their violence, badasses avoid the interpretation that their violence is contingent on the prospect of extrinsic rewards and, therefore, ultimately controllable by others. A Vice Lord explained to Keiser the essential attraction of "wolf packing":

Wolf packing—like for instance me and some other fellows go out and knock you down 'cause we feel like it. That's what it is. I might take your money, but I really want to kick some ass anyway, so I decide to knock the first thing in my way down.⁴⁸

Across various sociocultural settings, badasses sometimes seem to attack victims because they "need" a beating. A graffiti writer from the South Bronx recalled a time when a few Black Spades arrived at their clubhouse with guns, turned lights on, and discovered that some of those present were not of their group: "first they took and beat up a couple of guys because, though they weren't in a gang, they just needed a good ass-kicking at the time."⁴⁹ There is an ambiguity in this statement as to who "needed" the beating, the attackers or the victims. In some contexts, badasses posture virtually as altruistic servants of their victims' "need" for a beating. At other times, the "need to kick ass" is more clearly their own. In either case the suggestion is of soulful chaos: of a nature governed by overwhelming, destructive forces that demand release through the instrumentality of the badass or of irresistibly seductive weaknesses in victims that compel the badass to attack, like a priestly servant who is duty bound to preserve a certain harmony of evil in the world.

Being mean is achieved with a special economy by attacks directed at especially vulnerable victims and especially respectable places. Accompanying a Glasgow gang, Patrick described a rush into a public library. They began setting fire to newspapers in the Reading Room, knocked a magnifying glass out of the hand of an elderly man, and en route to the street, a

male attendant in a green uniform was punched and kicked out of the way. "Some, behind me," he noted, "could hardly run for laughing."⁵⁰

Ex-skinheads recalled an excursion to London's Hyde Park: "When we got to the Park we just went wild." Disturbing "Pakis," for example, by putting fingers in the way of a man taking pictures of his wife and children, was a focal activity. At the local park, they would throw stones at ducks; go to the cafe, order food, and not pay; and hide behind bushes waiting for a boat to come by, say to the child in it, "give me a lift, mate," and then collectively jump in, promptly sinking the boat.⁵¹ Their targets were "nice" in a conventional moral sense. The attacks had no utilitarian purpose; many were treated exclusively as "fun." With these elements of context, meanness may be manifest with remarkably little physical effort.

In fights, meanness may be demonstrated by exceeding moral limitations and utilitarian justification. From the white ethnic gang scene of 1950s Brooklyn, Ellison recited

the primer for gang kids. . . . When he's down, kick for the head and groin. . . . gang warfare is typified by a callous disregard for Marquis of Queensbury rules, or for that matter, rules of simple decency. When they fight, they are amoral . . . totally without mercy . . . almost inhuman. A cat that's down is a cat who can't bother you, man! Stomp him! Stomp him good! Put that lit cigarette in the bastard's eye! Wear Army barracks boots—kick him in the throat, in the face, kick him where he lives. Smash him from behind with a brick, cave in his effin' skull! Flat edge of the hand in the Adam's Apple! Use a lead pipe across the bridge of his nose—smash the nose and send bone splinters into the brain!⁵²

PARAPHERNALIA OF PURPOSIVENESS

All manner of weapons contribute to the badass's project of being mean. From a Philadelphia black gang leader, Krisberg recorded this spontaneous expression of affection:

I love shotguns. . . . And if anybody ever bother me, that's what they better look out for. Cause I'm going to bring it. . . . Cause I know I ain't going to miss you.⁵³

In adolescent "bad" society, weapons and their incidents are matters for sacred ritual. In the South Bronx in the early 1970s, the Savage Nomads were ordered by their leader to clean their guns meticulously twice, sometimes three times, in weekly, group sessions.⁵⁴ In Chicago, Ruth Horowitz observed Mexican-American gang members' fascination with the special instruments of violence.

One afternoon I was sitting on a bench talking with the Lions. Suddenly all conversation stopped and attention was focused on Spooft and Fidel, two Senior Nobles in their mid-twenties. Spooft flipped his keys to the nearest Lion and told him to get his lounge chair from the trunk of the car. His orders were carried out silently. Spooft settled comfortably in his chair. He proudly produced three bullets: one had a cutoff head, one had a flattened head, and the third was unmodified. He carefully described just how each of the bullets reacted inside the body. Everyone listened quietly and a few asked technical questions. No one was allowed to hold the bullets. . . . Then we were treated to a show and history of their scars while the Lions nodded their approval and were properly awed. Even after the two departed, the Lions discussed nothing else for the rest of the evening.⁵⁵

As Ellison observed in Italian gangs in 1950s Brooklyn, "the weapons of the gang kid have a charm all their own." In this setting, the charmed objects resembled a medieval knight's battery of arms: garrison belts with razor-sharp buckles to be wrapped around fists, raw potatoes studded with double-edged razor blades, zip guns, barracks boots with razor blades stuck between toe and sole, and Molotov cocktails.⁵⁶ One fellow drew special attention for possessing a flare-shooting Navy Very pistol. As Robert DeNiro effectively captured in the movie *Taxi Driver* (after he asks the mirror, "Are you looking at me?"), would-be badasses may spend hours practicing the rapid production of a knife or a gun with a special flourish.⁵⁷ Among Chicago's Vice Lords, a three-foot sword was, for a time, a popular weapon for robbing passengers on the El. A gang member named Cupid recalled the time "my mother came up and busted me with six shotguns!" including a buffalo gun, and Cupid will

never forget this. It was . . . crazy ass King Solomon, [in a fight with the Comanches] he had one of these little Hookvilles. It's a knife, a linoleum knife. Got a hook on the end. . . . [which he used when he caught "Ghengis Khan" and] Cut the stud's whole guts out!⁵⁸

Among the fighting teams in Glasgow, a member named Baggy kept a "sword" in his scooter and would often recount how, in a battle with the Milton Tongs at a bowling center, he had rushed to his scooter, taken up his sword, cut one boy, and watched the rest scatter. When stopped by bouncers at a dance hall, members of the Young Team were required to give up a concealed hatchet and bayonet, but one got by with a hidden, open razor. In a fight outside a dance hall, Tim charged into battle, brandishing his open razor, but only after grabbing a wine bottle that he broke on the wall, cutting his hand badly. Later, Tim embroidered his account of the fight, adding an air rifle. "The open razor and the broken wine bottle he had carried were apparently not sufficient to create the image he hank-

ered after."⁵⁹ In the United States today, we might find the objects of awesome charm to be Uzi machine guns and Ninja stars.

Fascinated, charmed, seduced—the badass is completely taken by the paraphernalia of his purposiveness. Note that although some of these objects might fit presumptions about the power of phallic imagery, others (stars, garrison belts, and linoleum knives) surely do not. Note also that the fascination persists apart from any envisioned practical context of the use of these objects. Just to have these things, to hold them, inspect them, and observe them swiftly introduced into the focus of the moment is exciting. These objects suggest that others will have to take seriously the intentions of the badass who controls them, whatever those intentions may be—that he will mean it, whatever he may make of "it."

We might attribute the significance of these things to the power they represent, but "power" is an impoverished metaphor for this world of experience. "Being mean" picks up the evil undertones set off by the display of these objects. Many of these weapons are notable not just for their power but for their brutish, sadistic character; others, fitted for covert possession, are notably illicit in design. In contrast to "power," "being mean" captures the project at stake: to assume a tough, alien posture beyond all danger of mockery and metaphysical doubt that ensures that one will be taken seriously. These things excite by attesting to a purpose that transcends the material utility of power.

MIND FUCKING

In various languages, badasses have a special affinity for the culture of "fuck you!" Chas, an East Los Angeles graffiti writer, recounted his transformation from "Chingaso."

A friend gave me that nickname. Started calling me that about three years ago. . . . Now it's funny. I don't like "Chingaso" any more because it's too "bad," it's too heavy. "Chingaso" means the one who's a fucker. Not a stud, just one who fucks people up. I don't like that. I feel like I'm not saying the right thing out there. I like it, but I think I'm telling the right people the wrong thing. So I write "Chas" now.⁶⁰

In Glasgow, both the police and the street toughs they attempt to control are deeply involved in the same culture. In the following account, Patrick, Tim, and Dave from the Young Team were at Saracen Cross, on their way to a dance hall:

Tim was prevented from moving forward by the approach of two policemen, one of whom shouted across at him: "So fuckin' Malloy is out again? Is yir fuckin' brothers still in fuckin' prison?" Tim's answers also made liberal use of Glasgow's favourite adjective. The second policeman

turned to Dave and me, and, noticing the marks on Dave's face he began: "So ye goat fuckin' scratched, trying' tae get yir fuckin' hole."⁶¹

The confrontation ended when one of the policeman said, "Weil, get aff this fuckin' Cross, or Ah'll fuckin' book ye."

Used grammatically in myriad ways and conveyed through posture and conduct perhaps more generally than in explicit verbal form, the distinctive thrust of the "fuck" culture is captured nicely in the English form, "fuck you!" Although it may seem obvious, it is worth a moment's pause to articulate just what makes this phrase so effectively "bad." To wish sex on another is not necessarily negative, but this is clearly not an alternative form for "Have a nice lay." Nor is the use of "fuck" for denoting sex necessarily negative; the phrase is universally "bad" while crude sex is not.⁶²

At the essence of "fuck you!" is the silent but emphatic presence of the "I." "Fuck you!" implies the existence of the speaker as the key actor (compared to "get fucked!" and the appropriately feminine form, "fuck off!"). It is the assertion of an anonymous insertion—a claim to penetrate the other in his most vulnerable, sensitive center, in his moral and spiritual essence, without revealing oneself to the other. "Fuck you!" thus achieves its force through projecting an asymmetry of the most extreme sort between the fucker and the fucked; I will force myself to the center of your existence, while you will not grasp even the most superficial indication of my subjectivity.

In its essence, then, "fuck you!" is a way of being mean as a transcendent existential project. "Fuck you!" equals "I'll thrust my meaning into your world, and you won't know why, what for, what I mean; I'll hide the 'I' from you as I do it." Of course, in context "fuck you!" may connote anything from a dare to a muted message uttered on retreat. But with the existential significance of "fuck you!" in mind, we may more readily grasp, as devices for mind fucking, several widespread, practical strategies of would-be badasses that are otherwise deeply enigmatic.

THE BUMP

Consider the "accidental" bump, used either to begin a fight or to force a humiliating show of deference. Manny Torres recalled from his adolescent years in Spanish Harlem,

walking around with your chest out, bumping into people and hoping they'll give you a bad time so you can pounce on them and beat 'em into the goddamn concrete.⁶³

In the literature on adolescent street violence, there are innumerable analogous examples of fights beginning from what in one light appears to

be accidental and minor physical contact. Sometimes the badass is the one arranging the accident, sometimes he is the one who is accidentally bumped. Thus, when some laborers accidentally nudged Pat at a Glasgow bar, he challenged them to a fight, immediately moving his hand into his jacket as if he had a weapon. Wee Midgie hit the laborers on their heads with a lemonade bottle, Pat and others kicked them in the face, and Tim cracked a bottle over their heads. The fighting team suddenly exited when someone shouted, "Run like fuck."⁶⁴

To understand specifically what is happening in these scenes, it is insufficient to interpret the attackers as "looking for a fight." The enigmatic aspect is the dramatization of a "bump"—an accidental physical clash—as the necessary condition or catalyst of the violence. Pat and his friends seemed so intent on attacking these laborers that one wonders why they waited for the chance, unintentional nudge.

Nor will it do to project onto the attackers a felt necessity to neutralize moral prohibitions against unwarranted attacks, that is, that the attack would make no compelling sense to them until and unless they had the "excuse" of a bump. The same young men can be seen at other moments proudly attacking without the moral necessity of any excuse or justification, as when the party attacked is treated simply as one who "needs his ass kicked."⁶⁵ Attackers often arrange bumps that are publicly, self-consciously transparent. Why do they bother to feign accidents?

Because their focus is not on physical destruction or moral self-justification, but on the transcendent appeal of being mean. The feigned accident is not a moral necessity for attack; it is, however, a delightful resource for constructing from the attack the stature of the attacker as a badass. Manny and Pat did not "have to have an excuse" to attack. Nor were they compulsive sadists "getting off" on physical destruction. They were seduced by the bump. They rejoiced in the special reverberations that could be given the interaction by making the attack the product of a transparently "accidental" bump.

At its first, most superficial, level of appeal, the bump clarifies and enhances the meaning of a subsequent physical attack as the work of a badass. After a bump, an attack inevitably reflects the spatial metaphor, the existential dilemma of "here" and "there" with which all the ways of the badass are concerned.

The badass does not invent the revolutionary moral potential in the bump; he simply seizes on it. When you and I, two polite members of civil society, bump into each other, there is at once a literal and figurative invocation of the toughness of each of us. Wishing to avoid giving offense, with bated breath we race each other to the stage of apology. Through my apology, I drop any possible pretense of toughness, showing you that I am morally responsive to your well-being. In apologizing, I enact a shameful recognition that the bump occurred because, as far as I could tell, our

phenomenal worlds had been independent; I had practiced an apparent indifference to your existence.

In the bump, what had been "here" to you, bounded off from me, penetrates my phenomenal isolation and becomes "here" to me, and vice versa. As quickly as polite members of civil society scurry to avoid the moral tensions that they sense have suddenly become potential, so can the badass flood the situation with awful possibilities. By treating the accidental bump as an obdurate, unforgettable fact of history, the badass opens up a glorious array of nasty courses of action.

No matter who was at "fault" for the bump, once the "bump" has occurred the badass can exploit a precious ambiguity to charge the situation with the tensions of a moral crisis. Any fool can see and only a coward would deny that the bump takes each into the other's phenomenal world. In the bump, you become "here" for me and I become "here" for you. The bump provides the grounds for each to wonder, Was it accidental? Or were you "fucking" with me, thrusting yourself into my world for purposes I could not possibly grasp?

At this stage, the least the would-be badass can do is obtain public testimony to his badass status. If the other tries to ignore the bump, the badass can easily make this attempt an obvious pretense for repeating the bump. He may stop at any point in this process, taking as his sole booty from the situation the victim's evidently artificial posture that "nothing unusual is happening."

More enigmatically, immediately after he has produced an intentional bump or received an obviously accidental bump, the badass may launch an attack without waiting for an apology, whether sincere or pretended. This, an even tougher, "badder" move, plays off the metaphor of mind fucking.

Once we have accidentally bumped for all to see, everyone knows that you must wonder whether I will let it go as an accident or charge you with an intentional attack. Everyone knows that you are wondering about my purpose and spirit and that merely by wondering, you are taking me into your world of moral judgment and putting me at risk of negative judgment. In other words, the bump suddenly raises the momentous possibility that "you are fucking with me." I can now, without more provocation, strike out physically to "fuck you up" as a transcendent response to your publicly visible "fucking with me."

Before examining elaborations on this interaction, we should take special note of the profound explosion of meaning that has already occurred. Through the most inarticulate, most minor physical contact between two individuals, without any apparent plan, intention, or reason, without any forewarning any man could detect, a small moral world has suddenly burst into full-blown existence. Once the bump has occurred, for whatever original cause or antecedent reason, everything has forever changed; the

bump cannot be removed from moral history. A chain reaction can then sensibly follow in a spirit of coherent determinism. The badass, as it were, struts out as the Great Creator, capable of arranging the most transcendent cosmological experience from the chance encounters of everyday life; with a little bump, he has occasioned a moral Big Bang.

But this is only the first theme of significance that may be drawn by the badass from the "accidental" bump. That the accidental quality of the bump should be put in quotes is not only obvious to the would-be badass; he may arrange the bump so that it is obvious to all that the fictive accidental character of the bump is obvious to him, to the victim, to all. And with this move into universal moral transparency, the would-be badass moves the drama to the level of what might be called on the streets, "royal mind fucking."

'WHACHULOOKINAT?'

In perhaps all subcultures of the badass, there is a homegrown version of a mind-fucking strategy that is deeply rooted in the danger of eye contact. It is recognizable with the opening phrase, "Whachulookinat?"

A badass may at any moment treat another's glancing perception of him as an attempt to bring him symbolically into the other's world, for the other's private purposes, perhaps to "fuck with" him. This may be treated as a visual bump. As with the physical bump, the badass may allow the victim to cower his way out of danger by enacting a transparently artificial display of deference, for example, through offering profuse excuses and literally bowing out of the situation.

Of more interest are those situations in which the badass wishes further to exploit the potential to construct a transcendent theme of evil. Victims of "Whachulookinat?" frequently answer "Nothing"; with this response, they open up what sometimes seems to be an irresistible opportunity to fill the air with awesomely threatening meaning. "You callin me nothin?" is the well-known reply.

Just as he thought he had regained a measure of self-protective control over the situation through an effusive display of deference, the victim realizes that he has damned himself, for he has been caught in a lie. *He* is now the immoral party. Everyone knows that he had glanced at the badass. "Nothing" was intended as a ritual of deference, but the badass will not go along with the fiction. The badass suddenly adopts the posture of the only honest man in the transaction: he's being lied to, as all can see. But, he now has the right to ask, why? What malevolence moves the victim to lie and answer, "Nothing?" Has he been fucking with the image of the badass in the privacy of his mind? What is he covering up?

From this point, the badass can readily build tension by playing for a while with the victim, tossing him from one to the other horn of his dilemma. Now the badass treats the victim's "Nothing" as a lie, a fiction

designed to cover up a shameful or hostile perspective. Next, the badass insists on a literal interpretation, that the victim's response should be taken as a claim that the existential value of the badass is really "nothing." Then, the badass mocks his own metaphysical stance; everyone knows that the badass knows that the "Nothing" was artificial and, therefore, that the badass's indignation is artificial. All know, as they have known all along, who is the victim and who is the badass—who is attempting to avoid any association with evil and who is embracing it.

In short, all recognize that by feigning victimization, the badass is really mind fucking the victim. The universal transparency of the badass's moral posturing makes it "royal mind-fucking"—a high art that may be practiced through a variety of analogous strategems. Thus, analogous to the simple mind fucking of attacking after a bump is the strategy described by Yablonsky of a New York boy who

will approach a stranger with the taunt, "What did you say about my mother?" An assault is then delivered upon the victim before he can respond to the question.⁶⁶

And analogous to the royal mind fucking constructed from the visual bumping of "Whachulookinat?" is the Vice Lords's practice of wolf packing. With several mates present, a Vice Lord begins an interaction with a stranger passing by with the formal request, but informal demand, "Hey, man, gimme a dime!" As Keiser noted, "If a dime were given, then a demand for more money would be made until finally the individual would have to refuse."⁶⁷

Physical dominance is not the key concern, since it often seems a foregone conclusion. And, what is even more interesting is that, as some of the Glasgow incidents showed, it sometimes seems not to matter to the badasses that they might lose the battle. From the standpoint of physical power and outcome, these mind-fucking maneuvers are gratuitous. After all, one could physically destroy victims without entering into any interaction with them, for example, by shooting them without warning from a distance and without emerging from camouflage. The ambush of a stranger might maximize one's physical success, but it would not necessarily construct an identity as a badass.

Mind fucking, however, shows the badass in control of the meaning of the situation. Bumps are accidents or intentional provocations, depending on what the badass has in mind. The badass controls the moral ontology of the moment. On the one hand, he may allow life its little bumps, its give and take, recognizing that, owing to imperfections in the nature of social life for which no one is responsible, men must have at least small spaces free from responsibility. On the other hand, he may make life inexorably purposive, affording a man no rest from the moral implications of his conduct. The badass rules the moment as the master of its metaphysics.

Moral pretenses become real and unreal as if by magic, at the snap of his finger. At his discretion, words mean just what they say on the surface or are revealed to mask shamefully hidden intentions. "Nothing" will mean nothing at all or everything fateful, as he chooses. Apart from physical dominance, mind fucking allows the badass to demonstrate the transcendent character of his meaning.

Foreground and Background: The Sex of the Badass

I have attempted to demonstrate that the details of the distinctive adolescent culture of the badass can be grasped as a series of tactics for struggling with what the adolescent experiences as a spatially framed dilemma—a challenge to relate the "here" of his personal world to the phenomenal worlds of others who he experiences as existing at a distance, somewhere over "there." Thus, being tough positions the self as not "here" for others. Being alien goes further, indicating that the self is not only not here for others but is native to some morally alien world, inevitably beyond the intimate grasp of others who are present here. And being mean produces its awful air by intimating that where the self is coming from is a place that represents chaos to outsiders and threatens constantly to rush destructively to the center of their world, attacking their most intimate sensibilities.

The ultimate source of the seductive fascination with being a badass is that of transcending rationality. What "rationality" means to the adolescent, as a challenge that stimulates his seduction to a world of deviance, is not primarily legal authority, institutional discipline, or social expectations of an ordered and integrated competence to reason. These phenomena may, at times, become the foils for badasses of all types, but more routinely, the provocative issue is a matter of demonstrating rationality as the modern moral competence to adjust the self to situationally specific expectations.

To understand the seductive quality of this project and why the data have been overwhelmingly though not exclusively from males, we might consider what, after all, makes the phallus so powerful a symbol for the badass. Phallic imagery is obviously prominent in the ways of the badass, from the "hardness" of the tough posture, to the "hot rodder" style, to the "cool" quality conferred on speech by random thrusts of "fuck," to the drama of "mind fucking." But the motivating, emotionally compelling concerns of the badass cannot simply be reduced to a sexual metaphor; the distinctive presence of the badass is not particularly erotic. Posed like a phallus, the badass threatens to dominate all experience, stimulating a

focus of consciousness so intense as to obliterate experientially or to transcend any awareness of boundaries between the situation "here" and any other situation, "there." And in this appreciation, the phallus has the further, socially transcendent power to obliterate any awareness of boundaries between the ontologically independent, phenomenal situations of different people. The fascination here is with the paradoxical, distinctively masculine potential of the phallus: by threatening to penetrate others, the badass, this monstrous member of society, can absorb the whole world into himself.

Street Elites

Considered as a social form of violence, street fighting between adolescent groups shares several features with homicide committed in the passionate spirit of righteous slaughter: the irrelevance of utilitarian calculations, a provocative vocabulary of cursing, and a semiotics of violence in which injuries inflicted on victims attest retrospectively to the profundity of the attacker's offended dignity. But there is no evidence of a special delight among violent spouses for the militaristic weapons that group fighters in the ghetto have found charming, such as garrison belts, sawed-off shotguns, flare guns, Ninja stars, switchblades, and rope knives. Unlike the typical impassioned killer, violent youth groups often make elaborate, detailed plans; indeed, they plan and discuss battle tactics far more often than they attack. Perhaps weeks after an insult has been registered, a youth group may surprise its enemies in a moment of domestic calm, as when shots are fired into a family living room by a passing car.¹

Fights are conducted for distinctive symbolic rewards. When the reputation of a militant youth group has been offended, satisfactory vengeance sometimes can be accomplished by harming any member of the rival group, or even any young person from the offending neighborhood. At times the Vice Lords of Chicago's West Side in the early 1960s, one of the most fearsome groups documented by modern ethnography, were satisfied if their enemy ran away: "The first who runs, that's it right there."²

The practice of peer violence by adolescent groups is also distinguished by an egocentric, at times masochistic, focus. In contrast to impassioned violence among spouses and friends, adolescent attackers of other adolescents may never get close enough or stay around long enough to witness their victims' destruction. But their own "battle scars" are sure to be reviewed repeatedly in intimate collective settings. In an hour-long documentary film on Mexican-American barrio fighters in Oakland, California, the young men are shown on two occasions collectively reviewing the holes and scars they carry from enemy attacks, tracking, in detail, the paths the bullets and knives traveled through their bodies.³ Short-lived battles

can be eternally resurrected by fascinated commentaries such as: "See, it went in here and then came out there." "If you hadn't been wearing your pants high (as a Homeboy should), your belt wouldn't have slowed down the entry and you'd be dead." "Oooh, can I touch it?" The animating concern is less a sadistic consumption of the suffering of others than the construction within one's circle of proof of a heroic commitment to the group's grandiose stature.

In short, the phenomena of gang violence are unique and thus call for their own explanation. But before launching a causal inquiry, I should note that something about the "gang" rubric is itself a bit off the mark.

Ever since Frederic Thrasher's study appeared in 1927, students of juvenile delinquency have had a special fascination with gangs.⁴ Since that time, sociologists of various theoretical perspectives have continued to assume that it makes sense to address the problem of "the gang." Meanwhile, the subjects' have been stubbornly recalcitrant about accepting this definition of the phenomenon. An inside joke that has been shared by field investigators over several decades is that subjects freely refer to their enemies as members of gangs but instruct an observing sociologist that their collective commitment is to a "club," an "organization," a "clique," a "barrio," a "mob," a "brotherhood," a "family," an ethnic "nation," a "team," or a "crew."⁵ Often, they expressly deny membership in a "gang."

Although it has sometimes been suggested that "gang" members resist being so labeled because they are uncomfortable with the negative connotations,⁶ this resistance is common even in groups with names like the Vice Lords, Savage Nomads, Devil's Disciples, Reapers, Tongs, as well as among "homeboys" from Los Angeles barrios who proudly dress like the 1940s gangsters and occasionally blast shotguns at enemies in imitation of scenes from movies set in the days of Prohibition. "Gang" is a troublesome term not because it conveys an impression of evil but because the evil implied by an admission of gang membership is not sufficiently grand. Real, adult, serious "gangsters" do not call their groups "gangs." The media tells us that adult gangsters use euphemisms: Cosa Nostra or This Thing We Got, the syndicate, the organization, the Family or La Familia, and the Black Hand. These terms are more serious, more cool, more adult; "gangs" are for kids. Furthermore, loyal members do not confess the deviant status of their groups to outsiders. Since "gangs" are units of deviance that have already come under the cognitive powers of social researchers and other agents of social control, however, "gang" members have no hesitation about designating rival groups as gangs because the label is a relative minimization, a combative depreciation.

This pride in displaying the symbols of terrifying evil may be used to delineate a particular form of deviance. The distinctive features of violence already noted—strategic calculation, militaristic delight, symbolic representation of enemies, and melodramatic self-absorption—indicate a pride in ruling the streets by terror. Accordingly, I will take as the problem to