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Introduction

Recreational trespass, or as it has become known in recent years, "urban exploration" (often abbreviated as UrbEx or UE) is the practice of researching, gaining access to, and documenting forbidden, forgotten or otherwise off-limits places, including abandoned buildings, high-rise construction sites and infrastructure systems. In the past two decades, an emergent global subculture has coalesced around this activity, facilitated by the Internet. Having temporarily crystallised into a relatively coherent and defined practice, "urban exploration" has begun to 'splinter under the weight of relentless media attention, crackdowns by authorities and attempts at marketing exploitation', and is now 'reforming along divergent lines' (Garrett, 2015). Increasingly, for instance, recreational trespassers are turning their attention to "infiltrating" active or "live" construction and infrastructure sites, with a host of attendant legal and subcultural implications (Garrett, 2013). In the UK, trespass in active infrastructure sites such as the non-public parts of the underground ("tube") and rail network is a criminal offence. Already, the practices of urban *exploration* (of temporary, obsolete, abandoned or derelict spaces) and *infiltration* (of "live" infrastructure and construction sites), along with their respective (although overlapping) practitioners, ethics and aesthetics are becoming increasingly distinct from one another. In addition to this split, recent years have seen both the emergence of increasingly spectacular manifestations of urban exploration, such as "rooftopping", as well as more experimental variants, as this 'social formation' (Daskalaki and Mould, 2013) continues to mutate and hybridise with parkour[1] and urban free climbing, graffiti writing, interventionist art practices, squatting, and a host of other alternative urban practices (see, for example, Boyd, 2016 forthcoming; Sinclair, 2015).

Of particular relevance to criminology, the construction of urban exploration (hereafter UE) as an emergent crime threat is already well underway.[2] An advisory circulated by the US government's National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC, 2012) warns that photographs and video footage posted online by urban explorers 'could be used by terrorists to remotely identify and surveil potential targets'. The document advises that any 'suspicious UE activity should be reported to the nearest State and Major Area Fusion Center and to the local FBI Joint

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[1] Parkour is a kind of informal urban acrobatics (see Raymen, 2014).

[2] In this article I use both "urban exploration" and "recreational trespass" as catch-all designations to refer to all variants of the practice.

Terrorism Task Force'. A presentation given the following year by Transport for London's then head of crime prevention, John Strutton (2013), provides insight into a similar process of criminalisation of UE in the UK. Strutton describes UE as a developing "threat", likening images and accounts of trespass to 'readymade 'hostile reconnaissance' documents', and alluding to 'links with domestic extremist groups'. He also mentions that SO15, the Metropolitan Police Counter Terrorism Command, 'consider UrbEx a genuine risk'. Most recently, in 2014, eleven members of the London Consolidation Crew (LCC), a UE collective, were tried on charges brought by the British Transport Police, including conspiracy to commit criminal damage – a charge that carries a maximum prison sentence of ten years – following the group's infiltration of disused sections of the London Underground network (see Garrett, 2013; Self, 2014).

Despite the proliferation of UE within recent years, and these activities' ongoing criminalisation, they have received almost no attention whatsoever within criminology (with the recent exception of Kindynis and Garrett, 2015). The present article is based on autoethnographic fieldwork, conducted over the course of three years, into the practice(s) of recreational trespass in London. During this time I participated in numerous trespass events – illicitly accessing sites including, but not limited to: many of London's most notable highrise construction developments; under-construction Crossrail tunnels and stations; the under-construction Lee Tunnel "super sewer"; the under-redevelopment Battersea Power Station; the London Olympic Stadium; and countless other rooftops, utility tunnels, infrastructure and construction sites. [3]

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[3] Whilst this research was approved by my university's Research Ethics Committee, I anticipate that some readers may call into question it's ethical basis. During the course of this research I regularly and intentionally made the decision to commit the (albeit relatively trivial) legal infraction of trespass. Putting aside the fact that, had I not been willing to do so, researching recreational trespass would have been all but impossible – since 'passive "observers" are swiftly identified, censured and disregarded' (Garrett, 2014b) – I contend that my decision to commit these minor illegal acts was not an unethical one. Proceeding from a methodological orientation inspired by the notion of 'criminological *verstehen*' (Ferrell, 1997) I was cognisant from the outset that my research would necessitate that I occupy, at the very least, a position of legal ambiguity. Indeed, for adherents of criminological *verstehen*, the choice to transgress legal or social codes is not some kind of methodological lapse, but rather an attempt to autoethnographically apprehend and appreciate the emotional and embodied experience of the criminal event. Clearly, such an approach moves beyond conventional canons of objectivity, neutrality and analytical detachment, and towards an understanding of research as an inherently subjective and reflexive endeavour, calling the researcher's personal and political orientations into play (Ferrell, 1997). As a critical criminologist I understand the law as an imperfect social construct that often reflects, incorporates and perpetuates social (and spatial) privileges and injustices, and so breaking trespass laws designed to protect private property does not, in itself, present any ethical or moral dilemma. It seems far more problematic to suggest that, because certain groups or practices occupy positions close to legal

The aims of the present article are threefold: first, to bring to the attention of a criminological audience (ongoing shifts in) the practice(s) of UE, as well as the emergent academic literature around the activity; second, to interrogate the increasingly spectacular visual representation of UE and attendant processes of commodification; and third, to introduce the rhizome as a way of thinking about urban social formations, their development and appropriation. The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. First, I suggest that recreational trespass is best understood as a form of distinctively embodied spatial practice. The bodily sensations, affective atmospheres and physical challenges engendered by UE are, I contend, central to trespassers' motivations for and experiences of engaging in the practice. UE's foreground – the intersection of embodiment and materiality in off-limits urban spaces – can be situated and contextualised within our late modern conjuncture with reference to Lyng's (1999, 2004) notion of "edgework". Second, I draw attention to a dominant narrative that has emerged within the research literature on UE, which claims that the practice is an inherently subversive one. I argue that we should avoid uncritically celebrating UE, and that its normative, privileged and potentially exclusionary aspects should be problematised. Third, I call attention to an emerging tension between the firsthand embodied experience of recreational trespass, and its photographic representation, as competing motivations and focuses of the practice. In recent years, increasingly spectacular and image-centric variants of UE have come to the fore. I suggest that these emergent offshoots have aligned themselves with hegemonic modes of spectacular visuality and mediated identity construction, and that the practice is being assimilated into a dominant culture of consumption. Finally, I introduce Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of the rhizome – via Daskalaki and Mould's (2013) treatment of urban "subcultures" as 'rhizomatic social formations' – as an instructive conceptual model with which to comprehend UE's development along divergent, and sometimes, contradictory lines.

Embodied spatial practice and edgework

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boundaries, that researchers should not work with them (Garrett, 2014). To the contrary, researchers have a responsibility – perhaps, even, an ethical and moral obligation – to 'engage with people and places that society as a whole might find perturbing' (ibid.).

For Garrett, the 'central' (if unarticulated) motivation behind UE is the assertion of the 'right to spatial freedom in reaction to [the] escalating securitisation of everyday life [and] perceived subjugation' (2012: 6; see below) – Lefebvre's (1991) "right to the city". By contrast, I have found the motivations behind recreational trespass to be multiple and diverse (although, perhaps less righteous): the curious desire to experience illicit sights, sound- and smellscapes for oneself; photographic interest; architectural, infrastructural and historical geekery; and one-upmanship, to name a few. Of particular relevance for criminology, embodied experience, edgework, 'sneaky thrills' (Katz, 1988), and the physical and mental challenges involved in both circumventing physical security measures and evading and outwitting security guards and the police, are all fundamental to the motivations for and experiences of UE.[4] As I go on to consider in further detail below, several commentators have suggested that the meanings and motivations of recreational trespass have primarily do with visual representation (see, for instance, High and Lewis, 2007; Bennett, 2011). I certainly wish to recognise the increasing centrality of the visual within the practice: indeed, I want to suggest that a tension has emerged that runs through this diverging urban social formation as well as through individual participants, between the embodied experience and spatial practice of UE, and its photographic representation, as competing motivations and emphases. However, my own autoethnographic research suggests that *embodied experience* – the search for unmediated, proximal, and tactile bodily encounters (see Garrett, 2012: 262) – remains central to many practitioners' motivations for trespassing.

It is curious that, with a handful of exceptions (see for example, Katz, 1988; Lyng, 2004; Halsey and Young, 2006), and despite cultural criminologists' calls for a 'criminology of the skin' (Ferrell and Sanders, 1995), embodiment has been largely neglected within contemporary mainstream criminology. As Lyng notes, there has been something of a 'prohibition' against studying the body's role in criminality: for many criminologists, and particularly for those on the liberal left, any suggestion that the body should be a prominent concern in analysing criminal behaviour would be discredited as a return to a reactionary biological positivism (2004: 360; cf. Hall, 2012; Hall and Winlow, 2015). Thus, although criminologists have historically been concerned with both disciplining and pathologising the criminal body, criminological theorisations of *embodiment* – both how social relations are literally *incorporated*,

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[4] Recreational trespass, much like graffiti writing, 'occurs, then, in a context which challenges, defies, and even celebrates the illegality of the act – a context which', ironically, 'can only be exacerbated' by increased security measures and harsher legal penalties (Ferrell, 1996: 148).

and the role played by our own bodily materiality in our experience of the world – remain somewhat underdeveloped. That embodiment has been largely ignored by criminologists is all the more surprising when one considers that contemporary theories of the body have identified it as 'a space of social control and social order as well as a site of social stratification in relation to class gender, sexuality, and race' (Pitts, 2015: 123).

The corporeal sensations, physical challenges and affective-atmospheric impressions (Anderson, 2009) encountered within off-limits spaces are central to practitioners' experiences of, and reasons for engaging in, recreational trespass. Immersion in the city's secret and surreal sensescapes; revering and revelling in the uncanny ambience and awe evoked by cavernous subterranean chambers; and relishing the giddy "fluttery" feeling in one's stomach that comes with standing on the edge of a skyscraper: these experiences emerge at the intersection of bodies and spaces – or, more precisely, bodies "out of place" (Douglas, 1966). In my own experience, the visceral thrill of a night of trespassing would reverberate for days afterwards: the following morning I could sometimes still feel the residual sensation of my skin tingling from the previous nights' rushing adrenaline.

Furthermore, for many recreational trespassers, the 'physical challenges presented by… features of urban architecture' – for instance, the requirement to contort one's body in order to squeeze through a gap in a fence or through a broken window – are equally as important as the spaces accessed (Garrett and Hawkins, 2014: 7). Exploring parts of the city either never intended or no longer considered suitable for human use offers participants the opportunity to engage with urban space in novel, creative and intimate ways. Of central importance here is that the meaning created by trespassers in forbidden spaces is generated neither 'by… subject or object but in the space between them' (Hetherington, 2003: 1938). It is perhaps for this reason that in occupying those junctures at which body and city temporarily converge, trespassers sometimes feel a profound connection – an almost metaphysical sense of oneness – with the city.

Considered from the perspective of human and cultural geography, the places temporarily inhabited by urban explorers are *produced* as much through the embodied spatial practice of trespass – both the 'bodywork' of climbing, crawling and running, and the corporeal experience of fear, excitement and desire – as by the physical constitution of abandoned buildings, construction sites or infrastructural spaces (see, for instance, Lefebvre, 1991).

Recreational trespass can thus be understood as a 'deeply haptic placemaking process' (Garett, 2012: 236). Accordingly, the meaning that recreational trespassers ascribe to the places they seek out is 'composed at the confluence of embodied experience, imagination and memory through unsanctioned exploration' (ibid.: 79). The attraction to such places cannot be separated from the risky – and, it goes without saying, *embodied* – practice of accessing them illicitly and illegally: an intoxicating cocktail of materiality, corporeality, atmosphere, and affect; sweat, pigeon shit and concrete dust, the rushing lights of passing trains, echoes reverberating through subterranean tunnel networks and the imminent threat of arrest, injury or death. Only through their physical, embodied occupation are forgotten and forbidden spaces recoded as realms of adventure and imagination.

In order to understand how UE's 'foreground' of materiality and corporeality can be situated and contextualised against a 'background of law, power, and economy' (Ferrell *et al.*, 2008: 72), Lyng's notion of edgework proves instructive (1990, 2004). For Lyng, in a social conjuncture characterised both by a burgeoning 'culture of control' (Garland, 2001) concerned with rationalisation and surveillance, as well as an increasingly risk-averse, health and safety conscious 'precautionary culture' (Furedi, 2009) there is a 'dearth of possibilities for spontaneous and self-realizing action' available to the late modern subject (Lyng, 1990: 858). At the same time, late modern society is characterised by a pervasive sense of insecurity and disembeddedness; both in the economic and industrial realms, but also – importantly – at the level of individual consciousness and (self) identity (Hayward, 2002). Within criminology, Jock Young (2007) has referred to this existential uncertainty as the 'vertigo of late modernity'. It is thus:

> one of the strange paradoxes of contemporary society… [that], in the same moment, an individual can feel both ontologically insecure *and* – as a result of the increasing drive within everyday life towards the 'hyper-banalization' of society – over controlled (Hayward, 2002: 85, emphasis in original).

Lyng, Hayward and others suggest that one form of response to such a predicament – an attempt to escape this conflicting situation – has been for individuals to exert a sense of control and self-actualisation through engaging in acts of voluntary risk-taking or what Lyng terms 'edgework', in order to experience a '*controlled loss of control*' (ibid.: 81, emphasis added).

Importantly, the ostensibly reckless and irrational activities of recreational trespassers – hanging from crane jibs, running down metro tunnels, exploring storm relief drains – can, according to this framework, be understood as 'an attempt to achieve a semblance of control within ontologically insecure social worlds' (Hayward, 2002: 86). Certainly, for myself and many of those who I have trespassed with, a significant part of the attraction to this form of voluntary risk-taking is that our experiences in off-limits spaces often feel 'much more real than everyday existence' (Lyng, 1990: 861). Climbing over a construction site hoarding, past CCTV cameras, motion sensors, security guard gatehouses; or descending into a transit tunnel – breathing the thick, warm, stale air – tramping through decades of undisturbed dirt, and bracing oneself as trains hurtle past is, in a sense, to venture into the unknown: how such illicit expeditions will ultimately unfold is radically unpredictable. In these otherworldly realms, outside of the regulated, 'ordered planner's fold of the modernist grid' (Hayward, 2012: 453) and the carefully choreographed mobilities therein, seconds and inches can make the difference between life and death, apprehension, arrest, and escaping undetected. Such moments – raw and 'intensely authentic' experiences (Lyng, 2004: 361) – are increasingly rare in the securitised and hyper-regulated late modern city, and are all the more exhilarating for it.

Recreational Trespass as "Resistance"

Cultural criminology in particular has long been criticised for 'romanticising' deviant and criminal practices as forms of political resistance, and over-emphasising their ostensibly "subversive" aspects (Hayward, 2015; see, for example, Matthews, 2010).[5] Ferrell and Sanders have for instance suggested that, 'criminal pleasures also incorporate… political resistance', and that the activities of groups such as graffiti writers and motorcycle gangs constitute 'a move against the spatial and cultural controls that limit their lives in contemporary urban environments' (1995: 314). Likewise, for Lyng, 'criminal edgework represents a form of escape and resistance to the prevailing structures of political and economic power' (2004: 359). Time and again, 'rather than being theorized, different examples of… youthful subcultural

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[5] Hayward (2015) has recently challenged this critique, which he claims is often employed with little scholarly or empirical substantiation. Moreover, he suggests cultural criminology 'has always considered a diverse range of emotions that are often the very antithesis of romanticism' (2015: 8). Furthermore, more critical and rigorous theorisations of "resistance" are now underway within cultural criminology (see Hayward and Schuilenburg, 2014; Hayward, 2015).

practices, and social movements are… simply lauded as forms or repertoires of resistance' (Hayward and Schuilenburg, 2014: 23). As Hayward and Schuilenburg go on to note, gang membership, night clubbing and video-gaming have all, at some point or other, been positioned as vaguely "resistant".

Set against a backdrop of constricting urban social control, the privatisation of public space, and the disembodied imperatives of late capitalism, one might be tempted to frame UE in similar terms: as a form of political resistance against the forces of capitalist urbanism. Indeed, the idea that UE is somehow an inherently transgressive or subversive practice – one that challenges authoritative representations of the city, and that is even capable of producing radical subjectivities – is already emerging as a dominant narrative within the research literature. Front and centre of Bradley Garrett's various writings on the subject – the most comprehensive suite of analyses of the practice to date (see Garrett, 2011a, 2011b, 2012, 2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2015; Garrett and Hawkins, 2014) – is his positioning of UE as an intrinsically transgressive and deeply (albeit often latently) political act. Though Garrett is reluctant to attribute any overarching ethos (political or otherwise) to the UE community, a major thread running through his work is the notion that UE is ultimately about 'taking back rights to the city from which we have been wrongfully restricted through subversions that erode security and threaten clean narratives about what we can and can't do' (2013: 24). Whilst he acknowledges that few other recreational trespassers would make such claims, it is apparent that Garrett came to see his own participation in the subculture as an explicitly political project, even going so far as to suggest that UE, through breaking social conventions and drawing up 'new social templates… from desire and the recognition and transcendence of fear' is capable of rewriting 'the underlying code for our entire mental operating system' (2012: 172, 323).

Most recently, this analysis has been echoed by Oli Mould (2015), for whom recreational trespass is an instance of what he terms 'urban subversion'. UE, for Mould, can be read as a means of undermining hegemonic urban control (ibid.: 114). Those 'who infiltrate a building site or go into a sewer', Mould suggests, 'are eschewing the capitalistic functionality of those objects and realising an alternative function' (ibid.: 128). In doing so, Mould argues, recreational trespassers express a 'desire to create a new way of thinking, new histories and alternative subjectivities' (ibid.). Such accounts are at times palpably eager to politicise UE. In doing so, they run the risk of uncritically celebrating the practice's apparent liberatory potential. Largely absent from these analyses, meanwhile, is any discussion of the potentially

exclusionary nature of the (predominantly white, male, and able-bodied) practice, critical considerations of UE photography, or the subculture's commodification.

Several other commentators have offered more tempered analyses of recreational trespass, and have sought to problematise various aspects of the practice. *Contra* Garrett, Mould and others, Bennett suggests that 'there is little evidence that... [UE] is actually motivated by... transgressive, or alternative readings' of urban space (2011: 40). Likewise, for Mott and Roberts, recreational trespass has little in common with those previous practices – such as the Situationists' psychogeography or radical geographer William Bunge's call for urban "expeditions" – which exhibit 'explicit concerns for a socially just city' (2013: 232). Rather, they contend that both practitioners and analysts of recreational trespass emphasise individual (embodied) experience to the exclusion of 'any broader social analysis and critique, and away from any politics of urban social justice' (ibid.: 233).

Mould cautions that once established, subcultures set up their own 'systems, signs, rules, communities, frameworks and guidelines' and thereby 'have as much exclusionary potential as they do inclusionary and emancipatory powers' (2015: 232). Accordingly, some commentators have suggested that the practice of UE – by now a coherent, defined and defended 'community', with its own argot and etiquette, and which prescribes its own 'code of ethics' (Garrett, 2012: 16) – is an exclusionary, even reactionary one. In contrast to Garrett, who sees the practice as opening 'the potential for radical subjectivity' (ibid.: 17), Mott and Roberts argue that there is nothing particularly transgressive about the spaces or body-subjects of recreational trespass which are, by and large, those of able-bodied, heteronormative, and typically white Western masculinity (2013: 234). The celebratory understanding of UE outlined above that positions the practice as a liberatory venture that everyone should participate in 'raises important questions about the politics of difference and inequality inherent within urbex and in terms of rights to the city' (ibid., 2013: 236-7). Consider for instance, that for:

> many women, dark, derelict urban environs signal the dangers of sexual harassment or assault. Urban space, perhaps most especially the type of space favored by urban explorers, simply is not open or accessible in the same ways to all. Wandering in drains and sewers and trespassing on construction sites at night are activities that do not have the same meanings and risks for everyone (ibid.: 236).

Furthermore, whilst '[e]luding security guards and police may prove an entertaining game for some… for others the risks of such practices are far too great': those 'subject to racial or other forms of profiling by security agencies' face a far greater 'risk of harassment and detention than the typical white [Western, middle class, male] urban explorer' (ibid.: 237). Even *within* the white male demographic, which in my experience comprises the overwhelming majority of urban explorers, the subculture arguably mirrors the hedonism, egotism and competitive individualism of a late capitalist culture of narcissism (see Lasch, 1991; Hayward, 2004). To his credit, Garrett concedes that there are 'obvious openings for critique' and that contrary to what one might expect, the 'community atmosphere is almost nightmarish in its competitiveness' (2012: 318, 20). Nevertheless, it is clear that the normative, privileged and exclusionary facets of recreational trespass should be challenged.

Recreational Trespass as Spectacle and Commodity

In this part of the article I want to interrogate two interrelated aspects of recreational trespass that are becoming increasingly prominent (and, I suggest, problematic) features: the practice's photographic representation and, relatedly, it's ongoing commodification. It is my contention that the insights of recent critical realist criminology can provide a useful corrective to the kind of romantic theoretical flights of fancy mentioned above, and that recreational trespass is perhaps best situated alongside other instances of what has been termed *deviant leisure* (Williams and Walker, 2006).

It would appear that a tension is emerging between the firsthand embodied experience of recreational trespass and its photographic representation as competing motivations and focuses of the practice. A particularly prominent development in recent years has been the emergence of increasingly spectacular and image-centric varieties of recreational trespass in line with the proliferation of social media such as Flickr, Tumblr and Instagram (see Garrett, 2014c, 2015). Foremost amongst these eye-catching variants of UE are rooftopping – the practice of accessing rooftops, typically to take high-rise cityscape photography – and urban climbing or "buildering", which combines the practices of infiltration and rooftopping with free-climbing and 'displays of bravado imported from parkour' (Garrett, 2015).

Illicitly gaining access to rooftops in combination with various forms of urban free climbing or "buildering" has been practiced since at least the late 19th Century in the UK by students at Cambridge University, where "night climbing" remains a tradition (see Whipplesnaith, 2007). Since the mid-2000s, however, a new wave of more spectacular urban climbing has emerged at the intersection of UE, rooftopping and parkour which marks a radical departure from the more traditional and humble pursuits of the Cambridge night climbers.[6] Significantly, within these emergent lines of recreational trespass, any architectural, historical or political interests or motivations are, I suggest, largely subordinated to the *production and consumption of images*. There is an ongoing shift discernible whereby the focus of both the practices themselves and their representation has moved away from an emphasis on embodied experience and Garrett's 'haptic placemaking process' (2012: 236) – the forging of furtive yet intimate connections with the city – and towards an emphasis on showmanship and bravado, as well as competition for subcultural status and identity construction.

Adrian Chen (2014) has recently described a new generation of rooftoppers as "outlaw Instagrammers". This new breed of social media-savvy trespassers, well versed in the pseudo-trangsressive visual language of consumer culture (see Heath and Potter, 2005), 'distinguish themselves from… mostly older, more cerebral' urban explorers by competing to 'capture the… cityscape from unexpected – often aerial – angles while garnering as many likes and follows as possible in the process' (Chen, 2014). Importantly, whereas conventional '[u]rban explorers take photos mainly to document that they've been there' for this emergent offshoot of the practice, 'the image is the *whole* point' (ibid., emphasis in original). As a result, this nascent visual subculture has developed it's own brand of contrived urban eye-candy: an aesthetic that combines UE's fetishisation of urban decay and high-rise cityscapes; high-contrast, high-saturation digital "filter" presets popularised by the rise of iPhone photography; and meticulously staged captures featuring a range of visually attractive props, such as colourful smoke bombs, steel wool (used to create sparks for "light painting") and even scantily clad models![7]

A similar development can be observed in the rise of evermore spectacular forms of urban climbing. From around 2012 onwards, this offshoot of UE gained international attention

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[6] Following Pinder I take "spectacle" here to refer to an urban scene *presented for visual consumption* (2009: 717).

[7] On the problematic aesthetics of UE photography and "ruin porn" see High and Lewis (2007), Leary (2011), Greco (2012), and Mott and Roberts (2014).

following the publication online of a series of viral videos produced by climbers such as Russian duo Vadim Makhorov and Vitaliy Raskalov (or "On The Roofs") and self-proclaimed British "professional adventurer" James Kingston. Such representations typically depicted the protagonists scaling an under-construction skyscraper, aerial tower or construction crane before inevitably dangling their legs, or even singlehandedly hanging their entire body, without any safety equipment, from some concrete or steel precipice.[8] Consider, for instance, a video by On The Roofs, in which Makhorov and Raskalov ascend the Shanghai Tower – at the time the tallest construction site in the world – before eventually high-fiving each other whilst balancing on top of a crane arm (see www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLDYtH1RH-U). As of April 2016, this video had amassed *52 million* views on YouTube. In recent months and years, the buildings scaled have gotten taller, the stunts performed more dangerous and the production values slicker, as both urban climbers and rooftoppers have gained more and more media attention and reached ever wider, global audiences. Many practitioners feel that what used to be called "urban exploration" is now splintering, and that a kind of fundamental shift is taking place (Garrett, 2015). One former trespasser writes that:

> Something fundamentally changed when it became less about just going up and having a good time with friends and more about who can take the photo of the other person in the most precarious situation (Ta, 2014).

A second viral video produced by On The Roofs – entitled, "What's Up Hong Kong?" – in which four masked rooftoppers hijack an enormous LED display screen on top of a skyscraper in Hong Kong is also insightful (see www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJkuCzgg7fo). In this video, the protagonists splice a laptop into a control panel in order to illegally screen the previously mentioned video of themselves climbing the Shanghai Tower in Beijing. They then film themselves on top of the skyscraper watching their illicit screening using a drone. This peculiarly postmodern meta-mediated *performance* of (pseudo) transgression concludes as 'we follow the masked men as they… change clothes in the stairwell and calmly walk out of the lobby like a scene from *Mission Impossible*' (Garrett, 2015). With its quick-cut sequences, multiple angles, time-lapsed footage, swooping aerial shots of the cityscape, and professional-level editing, this production more closely resembles a big budget music video than criminals

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[8] Both urban climbers and rooftoppers assume a far more central role in their photography and videography than other recreational trespassers, although see Garrett (2013) on "hero shots" in UE photography.

filming themselves in the act. A further sense in which this production is more "MTV" than "CCTV" is that the entire sequence is patently staged – choreographed, even – with the intention of filming it. "What's Up Hong Kong?" is a *performance to camera* – a Baudrillardian (1981a) simulacrum – rather than a documentation of an independently existing event. In a final postmodern twist, the production turns out to be a guerrilla / viral marketing video for Hong-Kong based videography company Wild Bear (see www.wildbearcompany.com.hk), with Raskalov later conceding that On The Roofs had hired the roof of an adjacent building from which to film the PR stunt, further calling into question the "authenticity" of the piece (Hausen, 2014).

If we pause and take an analytical step back, it seems to me that several characteristics of these emergent variants of UE are worth noting. The first is the extent to which these nascent subcultural offshoots have aligned themselves with dominant modes of spectacular visuality and, relatedly, mediated forms of identity construction. Returning to Chen's (2014) article, he writes that for the "outlaw Instagrammers", 'photography is more performance – or competition – than visual art'. Here I wish to take Chen's suggestion seriously and propose that the performative project of (individualised) identity construction and intense competition for (subcultural) status are now primary motivations driving the practice of recreational trespass towards increasingly spectacular manifestations such as rooftopping and "extreme" urban climbing (see Hall *et al.*, 2008). Indeed the shift within UE towards representation and spectacularisation might well be read as a symptom of the practice's rapid and ongoing assimilation by, or integration with, the dominant neoliberal culture of (spectacular) consumption (see, for instance, Serazio, 2013).

Garrett's (2015) description of the "What's Up Hong Kong?" stunt as an orchestrated 'meta-selfie', though perhaps intended as dismissive, is instructive here.[9] Consumer culture has been described as an "economy of signs", wherein 'identity is constructed through consuming experiences and symbols' (Edwards, 2002: 47). Thus, for many, within a late modern culture of consumption, life comprises an ongoing project of self-definition or identity construction through the consumption of both material / symbolic goods and experiences, as well as 'strategic online self-presentation' (Marwick, 2013: 5; see, for example, Hayward, 2004). Within this context mediated performances of criminality and deviance represent nothing more

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[9] On the rise of the "selfie" and its meaning, see the special section in *International Journal of Communication*, Vol 9 (http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/issue/view/11).

than a particular type of consumer "lifestyle choice": 'transgressive enough to be cool' but one that ultimately poses no threat to the status quo (Chen, 2014; see Hayward and Fenwick, 2000).

Through their online circulation via social media, Instagrammed and Flickr'd photographs and videos become little more than tokens in a 'make-believe' economy of signs (Baudrillard, 1981b: 33), through which recreational trespassers construct their identities and compete with one another for subcultural status. Increasingly, what Garrett describes as a 'seeping virus of wonder… inspiring symptomatic mass panic and joy' (2012: 253) comes instead to resemble a narcissistic popularity contest, motivated by a desire for instant gratification; 'the obsession to gain attention, likes and faves' (Ta, 2014; see Hayward, 2004). Furthermore, the exponential exposure afforded by social media has accelerated and intensified this process, providing a fast track to Internet fame for recreational trespassers: newcomers to the scene can amass tens of thousands of "followers" in a matter of months by 'posting photos of their dirty sneakers dangling off buildings' (Garrett, 2015). Whilst to attribute such developments solely to the rise of social media would be reductive, it is clear that the 'Internet allows for, and encourages… sharing of experiences in a way that… satiates narcissism' (Garrett, 2014c: 9). Significantly, the upshot of such a situation is a peculiar kind of:

> politically conservative arms race… a notion that every experience must be 'trumped' by another, that has led to some recent forms of urban exploration that seem to be devoid of critical thrust – they're simply about shocking the viewer, entertaining rather than inviting (ibid.).

One need look no further than the popular rooftopping Instagram hashtag #createyourhype – where the slang "hype" denotes the marketing strategies typically employed by streetwear fashion companies to generate a buzz around their products – to see the extent to which emergent variants of UE have unhesitatingly aligned themselves with a hegemonic culture of spectacular consumption (see: www.instagram.com/explore/tags/createyourhype). Viewed against the late capitalist cultural-ideological backdrop of competitive individualism, lifestyle desire and consumer 'sensation-gathering' (Bauman, 1995) – in which risk-taking, excitement and transgressive "adventure" is valued – the extent to which such practices can be said to constitute any form of "resistance" becomes highly questionable.

Far from posing any kind of genuine challenge to the urban status quo, UE has, ironically, contributed to a tightening of the very spatial controls it seeks to subvert. People sneaking onto construction sites merely for the sake of doing so is now something that contractors actively seek to prevent through heightened security measures. Furthermore, there is little that is inherently "transgressive" about recreational trespassers' thrill-seeking. In fact, within our current cultural conjuncture, such practices might well be more accurately conceived of as *hyper-conformist* (see Moxon, 2011; Raymen and Smith, 2015). As Raymen (2014) notes, creative, imaginative, and risk-taking practices such as parkour, graffiti writing and UE possess and exhibit precisely the kind of:

> values and characteristics which are valued by the intense neoliberal individualistic and entrepreneurial ethic; evidenced by the rise of speculative risk-taking on the stock and housing markets, the promotion of excitement and hedonism in leisure, and the rise of the adventure and edgework industries.

The pursuit of excitement through "transgression" is now actively cultivated by consumer culture (Hayward and Fenwick, 2000: 39-40). Hall and colleagues provide further insight into this process, explaining that consumerism:

> has learnt how to create a dynamic by… cultivating… cultural processes that create preferred forms of micro-subversion, which in turn can be harnessed to its dynamic economic drive. It is thus… appropriate to say that what passes for subversion is parasitic on capitalism, but perhaps much more appropriate to say that they are symbiotic (Hall *et al.*, 2008: 152-3).

Accordingly, subcultural deviance 'becomes a leisure activity alongside shopping, going to the cinema and organised sports' (Hayward and Fenwick: 2000: 39). The desire for transgression 'can easily be recruited into the insatiable desire for new commodities and commodified experiences' (Hall *et al.*, 2008: 156). Within a carnivalesque culture of consumption that celebrates a plurality of so-called "lifestyles", ostensibly deviant spatial practices such as skateboarding, graffiti-writing and recreational trespass constitute potential 'new territories to be colonised' by marketing and advertising organisations (Daskalaki and Mould, 2013: 13).

It is interesting that Garrett considers the commodification of UE's imagery by marketeers and pop-cultural speculators such as Nike (see below) to be 'perverse' (2012: 315). By contrast, I

suggest that such "appropriation" may in fact be rather less contradictory than one might otherwise suspect. Perhaps, as Mark Fisher suggests, it is not that recreational trespass and its imagery – having previously possessed a genuinely subversive potential – is now being assimilated by the spectacle, but rather that the desires and aspirations that have driven UE from the outset (thrill-seeking, sensation-gathering, cultivating an edgy "transgressive" persona) are themselves *precorporated*: pre-emptively formatted and shaped by a late capitalist culture of consumption (2009: 15).

The increasingly conformative character of UE imagery is brought into particularly stark relief when one considers both its co-optation by the mass media and, most recently, its appropriation by corporate marketeers. Despite the efforts made by Garrett and others (for example, Self, 2014) in various publications to connect recreational trespass to issues such as constricting urban security and the privatisation of public space, in the overwhelming majority of media coverage, the practice has been positioned within a superficial narrative of masculine "daredevilry", spectacle and shock value. Garrett suggests that recreational trespassers' photographs embody a "politics of possibility", and that images of UE imply that "'you could also choose to do this'", thus extending an invitation 'for urban dwellers to become actors rather than spectators' (2012: 182, 277). However, as representations of UE are continuously positioned within a one-dimensional narrative of "adventure" and thrill-seeking, the possibilities of recreational trespass are contained, constrained, compartmentalised and co-opted. Moreover, as UE is repeatedly framed by the media in terms of *exceptionality* (of fearlessness, skill and "craziness"), one cannot help but feel that any implicit invitation to participate has been withdrawn.

Images are rarely unequivocal, and acquire meaning at least in part through the context in which they are viewed. On the website of the *Daily Mail*, the pictures and videos of the LCC's infiltration of the under-construction Shard (Andrews, 2012) is framed by links to other tabloid entertainment features: "Twitter users hit out at Jay Z and Beyonce"; "How to take the perfect selfie every time, by Kim Kardashian". Garrett (2012) acknowledges that UE photography is inevitably to some extent a *celebration* rather than a condemnation of capital and the spectacle; recreational trespassers, after all, revel in the material production of space under capitalism. He suggests, however, that UE produces an 'an anti-spectacle that runs alongside the main act, weaving a breathtaking double helix' (ibid.: 241). Yet once this apparent "anti-spectacle" is viewed in the context of the *Mail Online* website, the question must be posed: at what point

does this double helix collapse in on itself? And at what point do we concede that any sense of critique has been 'recode[d]… as part of [the] system… reproduc[ing] its hegemony' (Mould, 2015: 111)? For the answer to this question, we needn't look too far afield.

[Figure 1 here]

In my review of Garrett's (2013) book, I suggested that it was likely not long 'until the visual language of urban exploration is hijacked by advertising gurus, emblazoned on billboards, its subversive potential reduced to the exhortation to buy: 'Nike – Explore Everything'' (Kindynis, 2014: 277). Right on cue, in the same month that this review was published in December 2014, Nike launched their ACG ("All Conditions Gear") Autumn/Winter advertising campaign. The campaign blatantly appropriates the high-contrast, super-saturated cityscape photography of rooftopping and urban climbing, complete with a hooded figure poised dramatically on a roof edge (Figure 1), as well as the clichéd "feet-dangling" photo – both popular visual tropes within UE photography.

Whilst perhaps the most notable and flagrant attempt to appropriate the aesthetics of UE to date, Nike's ACG campaign is unlikely the first and by no means the last effort to cash in on the latest edgy urban marketing opportunity. Moreover, the emergent commodification of recreational trespass is not by any means a unidirectional top-down process, foisted by corporate behemoths such as Nike onto a subculture that desires to remain "underground". Visitors to urban free climber James Kingston's website are invited to buy a range of posters depicting Kingston balancing precariously in a variety of places and even t-shirts featuring his own personal "JK" logo (see www.jameskingston.co.uk). Meanwhile visitors to popular UE forum *28 Days Later* are directed to UrbanExploring.co.uk – a "one stop shop" for recreational trespassers which stocks a range of torches, boots and respirator masks. In light of these developments, Garrett's (2012: 165) claim that UE imagery issues any sort of 'challenge to those who would seek to disembody, sanitise and commodify our personal experiences' appears unconvincing to say the least.

Urban exploration as rhizomatic social formation

Recreational trespass has arrived at a juncture where we are confronted with a seemingly paradoxical situation: a formerly cohesive and relatively coherent practice is now fracturing and fragmenting along divergent lines. On the one hand, UE is putting out evermore spectacular offshoots and, in the process, rendering itself increasingly amenable to commodification. At the same time, however, the practice is splintering in numerous other directions that have received far less attention – in some cases, having actively sought to avoid it. Following the high-profile arrest and trial of the LCC in 2014, infiltration of the London Underground system has gone truly "underground": offline and all but inaccessible, a clandestine inner circle of hardcore "tube junkies". Elsewhere, the practice of recreational trespass is becoming explicitly politicised in response to the ongoing privatisation and gentrification of urban space, and merging with practices such as squatting and occupation protest movements (see, for instance, Plural, 2015; Sinclair, 2015).[10]

Daskalaki and Mould's (2013) notion of urban "subcultures" as 'rhizomatic social formations' proves useful in making sense of this situation. For Daskalaki and Mould, the reduction of practices such as UE to a discourse of *either* "resistance" *or* "appropriation", 'constitutes them as bounded entities that can only be positioned alongside, or in opposition to', dominant political, economic, social and cultural tendencies (ibid.: 1). A useful corrective, they suggest, can be found in Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) model of the rhizome, which provides an 'alternative to the dualism of capitalist versus subversive practices within cities' (Daskalaki and Mould, 2013: 7). The rhizome is a metaphor employed by Deleuze and Guattari – based on the botanical rhizome, a subterranean meshwork of roots – in order to describe organisational processes and practices that are interconnected, multiple, heterogeneous, unpredictable and unfinished.[11] Conceptualising urban social formations as rhizomes allows us to think of them as emergent, temporary and open-ended *processes* rather than rigid and coherent antipodes of capitalist urbanisation. Moreover, this analysis enables us to account for such practices' seemingly

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[10] This situation is further complicated by the use of rooftopping and urban climbing to draw attention to external political causes. In 2014 an urban climber repainted the Soviet star atop of one of Moscow's Stalinist skyscrapers in the colours of the Ukrainian flag as a protest against Russia's annexation of Crimea (Luhn, 2014). In the same year, two artists replaced the American flags on top of the Brooklyn Bridge with white flags in a seemingly ambiguous political statement, triggering a massive police response (Oltermann, 2014). Two photographers also scaled a building in Kuala Lumpur, ostensibly as a protest against the occupation of Palestine (Williams and Blades, 2014). However, other trespassers were quick to criticise the stunt as a 'false act of altruism' (Ta, 2014).

[11] Although the rhizome has been largely neglected within criminology (noteworthy exceptions include Lippens, 2000; and Hallsworth, 2013), the concept has become an influential theoretical model in fields such as cultural geography, as well as cultural studies more generally.

contradictory tendencies: rhizomatic social formations 'are forever in a state of becoming, which necessarily entails conflicting meanings, juxtaposed reasoning and internal schisms' (Mould, 2015: 126).

Daskalaki and Mould's analysis also provides further insight into the processes behind UE's commodification. In their terminology, recreational trespass is now being 'subculturalized': the practice has become formalised and ossified. What this means in lay terms is that it is now possible to 'talk of 'urbex' as a 'thing'' (Mould, 2015: 114). The crystallisation of formerly nebulous and still-emerging urban social formations 'into a coherent and self-regulated activity makes them more amenable to profiteering' (Daskalaki and Mould, 2013: 5). As soon as a practice becomes fixed, definable and intelligible – once it 'can be labelled and formalized' – 'it can be utilized for profit' (ibid.). However, the formalisation and commodification of UE is merely one outcome amongst many – a localised 'rupture' – as this particular rhizomatic social formation continues to fracture, sprawl and mutate. Accordingly, even as the more spectacular offshoots of the UE rhizome are commodified, other aspects retain their potential for experimentation, and remain in flux and unpredictable. For Daskalaki and Mould, the political promise of rhizomatic urban social formations lies in their capacity to evade fixed identities and definition, and in doing so, to continue to inspire creative forms of urban engagement, and to enable 'potentialities for future transformations into yet unimagined realms of social practice' (ibid.: 13). If rhizomatic urban social formations 'are to have a political agenda', it is thus 'one that promotes the temporary, the unexpected and the unimagined' (ibid.: 14). Likewise, the transgressive potential of recreational trespass is seen to lie in its ability to challenge pre-existing urban identities (for instance, "public" versus "private" space) and the power relations they entail, through complicating conventional conceptions of urban space.

Although Daskalaki and Mould's analysis is insightful, we should be wary of seeing the rhizomatic form as politically transformative in and of itself. Indeed, if we adopt a more critical stance, the rhizomatic nature of contemporary urban social formations might well be seen to reflect the atomising tendencies of late capitalist consumer culture, and its ideology of individualism, celebration of superficial differentiation (of consumption patterns), and attendant forms of subjectivity (see, for example, Fenwick and Hayward, 2000; Hayward, 2004; Hall *et al.*, 2008). To their credit, Daskalaki and Mould acknowledge that 'celebrating infinite differences does not guarantee emancipation, and that 'capitalism has moved beyond

totalizing standardization practices' to embrace 'distributed… forms of control' (2013: 13). Indeed, *late capitalism can in many ways be considered rhizomatic* (see Deleuze, 1992).

Whilst the rhizomatic form is by no means a straightforwardly liberatory one, it furnishes us with a conception of contemporary incorporation and resistance as (perhaps inextricably) entangled. At the same time as many urban social formations appropriate capitalist spaces or processes for their own ends, corporate and commodifying assemblages are able to colonise rhizomatic processes and social forms (Daskalaki and Mould, 2013: 13). And yet, even within formalised and 'subculturalised' social formations, new practices emerge that 'have the potential to infiltrate newly formed capitalist assemblages' (ibid.) and propagate their own ruptures – 'the potential for counterattack' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 560). Daskalaki and Mould's thinking here chimes with a cultural criminological perspective, according to which, rather than a 'dichotomized distinction between authentically illicit political resistance and commodified market posturing', a far more useful view is to see such dynamics as complex and contradictory (Ferrell *et al*., 2008: 19). 'As seductive as it is, the late capitalistic process of incorporation is not totalizing' (ibid.). Even the safest of corporate products can be… subverted by activists, artists or criminals: 'stolen away, remade… all the more dangerous for its ready familiarity' (ibid.). At other times, 'the most dangerously illegal of subversions becomes, in the hands of corporate marketers, the safest of selling schemes… precisely because of its illicit appeal' (ibid.). 'Mostly, though', Ferrell and colleagues contend, in language strikingly evocative of the rhizome, 'these processes intertwine, sprouting further ironies and contradictions, winding their way in and out of little cracks in the system, often bearing the fruits of both 'crime' and 'commodity'' (ibid.)

Conclusion

In this article, I have introduced the practice of recreational trespass and detailed some of the ongoing shifts occurring within this urban social formation. I have argued that UE is best understood as a form of distinctively embodied spatial practice, and that its corporeality and materiality are central to practitioners' motivations for, and experiences of, engaging in recreational trespass. Accordingly, I have suggested that UE can be contextualised within our late modern conjuncture with reference to Lyng's notion of "edgework". Following a critical review of some of the academic literature to have emerged around UE, I challenged the notion

that recreational trespass is an inherently transgressive or subversive practice. To the contrary, I have suggested that, despite its pretentsions to outlawry, the practice of UE is rather more conformist than it might otherwise appear, exhibiting precisely the kind of characteristics cultivated and valued within a neoliberal cultural of consumption.

Turning to consider the visual representation of UE, I argued that the practice has increasingly aligned itself with hegemonic forms of spectacular visuality and mediated identity construction and is being assimilated into a dominant neoliberal culture of consumption. The imagery produced by many urban explorers is increasingly devoid of any sense of resistance or critique. At the same time, however, UE continues to put out alternative subterranean offshoots, some of which eschew media attention and Internet fame, others of which are more explicitly political. In order to make sense of UE's development along divergent lines, I have invoked Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of the rhizome, and Daskalaki and Mould's treatment of urban "subcultures" as 'rhizomatic social formations'. The rhizome furnishes us with a conception of contemporary incorporation and resistance as complex, contradictory and intertwined.

For Deleuze and Guattari, there is always a "line of flight": a line of escape from any fixed and stable order or identity; of metamorphosis, hybridity, and of transformation. Whether and how recreational trespass will manage to "escape" or exceed the boundaries of its fixed identity as "urban exploration", to evade further appropriation and commodification, and to form new and hitherto-unseen connections, remains to be seen. Meanwhile, the processes of interrelation – connections, ruptures and encounters – between "subterranean" rhizomatic urban social formations and capitalist apparatuses of "capture" (such as, for example, strategies of subculturalisation) demand further investigation and exploration in future studies (Daskalaki and Mould, 2013: 13; see Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

FIGURES

Figure 1. Nike's 2014 ACG advertising campaign. ©2014 Alan Clarke. Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner.

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