Kevin G. Karpiak  
*Eastern Michigan University*

**Of Heroes and Polemics: “The Policeman” in Urban Ethnography**

Cities have long been characterized as lonely, alienating places in literature and the social sciences. This article tracks the theme of urban alienation through both detective fiction and urban ethnography, demonstrating that these literatures also share a focus on two key figures: the Hero and the Policeman. Within an important variant of the genre, the Policeman performs a crucial role, becoming the mechanism through which alienation is enforced. In this regard the Policeman stands in contrast to the Hero, battling over the very soul of modernity. On the other hand, there is a variant of the genre of police fiction which is known as noir. Within this genre, the ethical stakes are configured somewhat differently. I will argue that this is the location in which we find the potential for reconceptualizing anthropology’s ethical stakes vis-à-vis questions of power and violence in the contemporary world. [Urban anthropology; police; politics of ethnography; heroic narrative]

**Figures of Urban Anomie**

The idea that cities are lonely, alienating places has a long history in literature and the social sciences. Without constituting a comprehensive history, this article will attempt to show not only that the theme of urban alienation runs through such diverse literatures as detective fiction and urban ethnography but also that within this literature certain key figures emerge: the Hero, whether he be the singular detective in crime fiction or the figure of the anthropologist in urban ethnography, and the Policeman. Within an important variety of the genre, the figure of the Policeman performs a particular role: that of the mechanism through which such alienation is enforced. This function lies over and against that of the Hero, the two figures ultimately in battle with each other over the very soul of modernity. However, these ethical stakes are reconfigured in the slightly different variant of the genre of police fiction known as *noir*. It is within this genre, I will argue, that we can find the potential for reconfiguring anthropology’s ethical stakes vis-à-vis questions of power and violence in the contemporary world.

Before elaborating upon that argument, however, I will briefly sketch the ethnographic predicament which first drew my attention to the issues of power manifest in the recurrent theme of “The Policeman” in urban ethnography – a predicament that made the analysis which follows seem necessary. I had arrived in Paris during the summer of 2003 to conduct my dissertation research, which would investigate the broad reforms of the French national police which were being overseen by Minister of the Interior Nicolas Sarkozy. I hoped to document the practical content of the reforms on the level...
of quotidian street-level policing. Perhaps not surprisingly, I had conjured images of myself sitting in the back of French patrol cars uncovering the secret rites of French urban policing.

By the time I was a year and a half in to my ethnographic research, however, I felt I was in very dire straits. Rather than achieving an unquestioned “in” to my chosen site, my research had gone through a series of stops and starts. There had been more unanswered or unfavorable letters in response to research requests than I then cared to count. Even worse, no one seemed in either a position to, or have the will to, offer much aid in moving forward. I had made several contacts among the police themselves, but none seemed capable of developing into something like the deep, intimate, and personal relationship I believed (and still believe) ethnographic work requires.

To make matters even more confusing, this lack of intimacy with police was occurring despite the fact that I had developed exactly these kinds of intimate relationships, in my “personal life” in Paris, with a depth and cross-cutting breadth that I had not previously imagined myself as capable of doing. By this time there were whole neighborhoods of the city in which I could scarcely walk down the street without running in to a friend, who would invariably pop out of a store front or café and cajole me into having a coffee, or beer, and also invariably, a conversation. I spent my days, blocked in my pursuits of studying police in the way that I had wanted, instead playing backgammon, sipping espresso or pastis (depending on the season), reading the daily papers, and engaging in the pleasurable – if sometimes consciously absurd – arguments with which one finds oneself getting entangled at the comptoir of Parisian cafés.

The chief topic of discussion was the very subject of my own research: Nicolas Sarkozy and the promise of governmental reform he offered, whether in terms of the police or in terms of a more widespread “neoliberal,” “conservative,” or “American-style” orientation to political life. Concerns at the very heart of how the people around me understood themselves and their lives together were debated as the future President of the Republic graced the front pages of Le Monde, La Libération, and (most importantly) Le Parisien on a daily basis. Paradoxically, I was enmeshed in a series of deep conversations about the nature of police work, politics, and French social life while at the same time I felt alienated from my chosen object of research – the police themselves.

This alienation, I came to realize, has been par for the course in anthropological work on policing. Although he was not the first to note the particular form of anomie found in the City, Louis Wirth – especially in his essay “Urbanism as a Way of Life” – can perhaps be understood as laying out most clearly the relationship between the city as a social form and the characteristic social relations it produces. For Wirth, the interactions of city dwellers were characterized by “secondary” rather than “primary” contacts. By this he meant not that urbanites are less dependent on people in their attempt to fulfill their basic needs, but that these interactions tend to be shallow and temporary. Following Simmel, Wirth argued that urban dwellers develop these types of relations in response to the sheer amount of social demand and sensory stimuli that
occur in the city. The urbanite thus becomes a sophisticate, relying more on rational and logical processes than on emotion or compassion. The loss of a sense of close participation with others is replaced, Wirth (1938) argues (borrowing a term from Durkheim), by a sense of anomie, a social void.

One of the major factors contributing to this particularly urban lifestyle was an increasing division of labor, which became the main mode of social interaction (as opposed to traditional modes such as kinship and caste). The city was thus peopled by a variety of professional characters each of which it was necessary to study if one were to make sense of the urban environment. In fact, for Park, Wirth’s mentor, this vocational segregation was the very basis of urban individuality:

The shopgirl, the policeman, the peddler, the cabman, the nightwatchman, the clairvoyant, the vaudeville performer, the quack doctor, the bartender, the ward boss, the strikebreaker, the labor agitator, the school teacher, the reporter, the stockbroker, the pawnbroker; all of these are characteristic products of the conditions of city life; each, with its special expression, insight, and point of view determines for each vocational group and for the city as a whole its individuality. [Park 1952:14]

The fact of division of labor that is the Policeman, and especially the fact that one could find in this division a vocation – that is a higher calling, a sense of meaning, through work – thus signified the process of anomie of which the living conditions found in the City were the engine. Echoing its prominent placing in Park’s list of urban professions, the Policeman appears in many (if not most) urban ethnographies as both literary figure and social type. However, despite this textual ubiquity, full-length studies of police and policing are extremely rare in the anthropological literature. How to make sense of this paradox? I argue that the paradox can be explained by paying close attention to the function of the figure of the police in urban ethnographies, especially as it is used to create a particular ethical ego in relation to the narrative of urban anomie. I doing so, I will show how the Policeman is construed as one of the mechanisms through which this alienation is enforced. Moreover, precisely this use of the figure allows for the textual construction of a certain hero-ethnographer.

**The Anthropologist as Hero**

To be an anthropologist is thus to adopt a very ingenious stance vis-à-vis one’s own doubts, one’s own intellectual uncertainties. . . . At the same time, anthropology reconciles a number of divergent personal claims. It is one of the rare intellectual vocations which do not demand a sacrifice of one’s manhood. Courage, love of adventure, and physical hardiness – as well as brains – are called upon. It is also a solution to that distressing by-product of intelligence, alienation. [Sontag 2001: 74]

In his essay “The Uses of Complicity in the Changing Mis-en-scène of Anthropological Fieldwork,” George Marcus (1998) offers the notion of complicity as an alternative to both the rapport model of anthropological fieldwork and the collaboration/treason (or what he calls, following Renato Rosaldo, 1993, “imperialist nostalgia”) model.
He suggests that, like the “imperialist nostalgia” model, “complicity” avoids the troubling ethical implications of a naïve “rapport” model. However “complicity” goes beyond the “imperialist nostalgia” model in that cognitive as well as ethical implications are considered. The co-production of (an ethically dangerous, yet ambiguous) knowledge is opened up as a dimension of the ethnographic encounter.

Marcus’ approach has been taken up by many anthropologists, mostly through a concomitant focus on “para-sites” (Marcus 2000) in which various knowledge workers engage in “para-ethnography” (Holmes 2000; Holmes and Marcus 2005) – modes of practice similar to (or “parallel” to) anthropological ethnography (Maurer 2005). However, there has been relatively little attention to a specific dimension of the example Marcus uses to illustrate his point. Famously, Marcus has contrasted Clifford Geertz’s (1973) depiction of anthropological rapport with the form of complicity he himself offers. What is less well noted, however, is that the figure that enables Geertz’s idealization of rapport is that of the Policeman – or rather, a certain relation between the ethnographer and the policeman.

Geertz is, upon arrival, both a social outcast in his chosen village and a failure as an ethnographer. He and his wife are treated, in his own description, as literally non-persons until a police raid on the village cockfight enables him to position himself against the police and therefore with the villagers:

In the midst of the third match, with hundreds of people, including, still transparent, myself and my wife, fused into a single body around the ring, a superorganism in the literal sense, a truck full of policemen armed with machine guns roared up. Amid great screeching cried of “pulisi! pulisi!” from the crowd, the policemen jumped out, and springing into the center of the ring, began to swing their guns around like gangsters in a motion picture, though not going as far as actually to fire them. The superorganism came instantly apart as its components scattered in all directions. [Geertz 1973:414]

The Geertzes react spontaneously with the Balinese and duck into a courtyard, following what happens to be the home’s owner. Quickly, and without words, the man’s wife sets the table and serves tea. The whole group, automatically and with unspoken understanding, take their places – as if on the stage of a farcical pièce – and wait for the police officers to arrive. One soon does:

A few moments later, one of the policeman marched importantly into the yard, looking for the village chief. (The chief had not only been at the fight, he had arranged it. . . .) Seeing me and my wife, “White Men,” there in the yard, the policeman performed the classic double take. When he found his voice again he asked, approximately, what in the devil did we think we were doing there. Our host of five minutes leaped instantly to our defense, producing an impassioned description of who and what we were, so detailed and so accurate that it was my turn, having barely communicated with a living human being save my landlord and the village chief for more than a week, to be astonished. [Geertz 1973:415]
Now this would be remarkable enough, for our purposes, for its ironic portrayal of Balinese police officers ("the classic double take," etc.), but the full importance of the episode only becomes obvious the following day:

The next morning the village was a completely different world for us. Not only were we no longer invisible, we were suddenly the center of attention, the object of a great outpouring of warmth, interest, and most especially, amusement. [Geertz 1973:416]

This amusement is not the same as Geertz’s comical, ironic portrayal of the police. It in fact, has exactly the opposite effect of alienation:

In Bali, to be teased is to be accepted. It was the turning point so far as our relationship to the community was concerned, and we were quite literally “in.” The whole village opened up to us, probably more than it ever would have otherwise. . . . Getting caught, or almost caught, in a vice raid is perhaps not a very generalizable recipe for achieving that mysterious necessity of anthropological field work, rapport, but for me it worked very well. It led to a sudden and unusually complete acceptance into a society extremely difficult for outsiders to penetrate. [Geertz 1973:416]

The episode with the police has allowed Geertz, in his particular masculinist imagery, “in.” It is the pivot through which he is able to establish what, for him, is the necessary component of fieldwork – “rapport.” It is this location “inside,” due to the “rapport” established during the episode with the police in which the contrast between the police and Geertz as an anthropologist is drawn, that allows the ensuing – and oft-critiqued – textual reading of the Balinese cockfight. There is by now a substantial critique of Geertz’s method – both in terms of his “textual” approach and his naïve endorsement of “rapport” (cf. below and Marcus 1998; this is exactly the moment of complicity that Marcus notes in Geertz’s text). However, what is often overlooked is precisely the figure of the policeman that allows Geertz to establish this idealized form of relation. This is important for our purposes in that it makes clear that the idealization of the anthropological mode of “rapport” is made possible through a contrast with the figure of the policeman. In other words, the ideal Geertzian mode of relation with the Balinese lies in stark contrast to the mode of relation he takes up with the police. In fact, this latter mode might be accurately labeled “polemic” and, as a central affect, itself remains an under-remarked dimension of Geertz’s ethnographic mode.

Both modes of relation – both “moves” – characterize the preponderance of anthropological engagement with police and policing, a fact that – as we will see – creates specific problems for ethnographic investigations into contemporary policing. Before I explore this particular impasse, however, and in order to outline the figure of the policeman as it continues to be manifest in ethnographic texts, I must first turn to the genre of the detective novel where it was originally formed and perhaps most convincingly elaborated upon. From there we will trace the figure of the Policeman vis-à-vis the anthropologist/detective/hero into the genre of writing known as urban ethnography.
The Policeman as Foil

Most histories of the modern detective novel start with Poe’s short story “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (Poe 1983a). This origin story works as well as any, not only because of the particularly “anthropological” bent the story takes but also because it offers a perfect example of what Tzvetan Todorov calls a “whodunit” type narrative (1977). In the story, Poe introduces us to the melancholic Parisian M. Dupin. Dupin, an amateur who has a reputation for clear and precise thinking, finds himself called to solve the case of a particularly gruesome double murder which has occurred at the above address. The Prefect of Police himself is confounded by the circumstances: two bodies have been found in a locked room, a boudoir, leaving no possible means of regress for the perpetrator. Where, and by what means, has the killer escaped? Having so outwitted the finest police force in the world, all agree that the crime must be the work of a diabolical criminal genius. All except Dupin, that is. Based on nothing more than a few strands of inhumanly red hair and a series of straightforward deductions supported through careful observation, Dupin shows that the crime is not the result of an intelligence at all – it is the deed of an escaped orangutan from a traveling circus. Rather than being the product of an ingenious Subject, crimes, and more importantly criminals themselves, are immanently knowable through the various physical cues and bodily remnants they display.

The task of the detective therefore is to be able to notice and read these signs. Apparently, however, this is not so easily achieved. Dupin, like the other Detectives who will follow him, is resolutely an outsider to the police force. In fact, in all three stories in which Dupin appears (Poe 1983a, Poe 1983b, Poe 1983c), his methods are continually contrasted to that of the Parisian police force. That is, to their lack of method. As Dupin himself explains:

The Parisian police, so much extolled for acumen, are cunning, but no more. There is no method in their proceedings, beyond the method of the moment. They make a vast parade of measures; but, not unfrequently, these are ... illy adapted to the objects proposed. . . . [Poe 1983a: 668]

This is in sharp contrast to our hero, M. Dupin. For example, in another story, “The Purloined Letter” (Poe 1983c), Dupin need only pay a short visit to the apartment of the blackmailer in order to locate an incriminating letter. The Prefect himself had been carefully searching the apartment each night for months, using the latest in technical wizardry, to no avail:

“The Parisian police,” [Dupin] said, “are exceedingly able in their way. They are persevering, ingenious, cunning, and thoroughly versed in the knowledge which their duties seem chiefly to demand” . . . “The measures, then,” he continued, “were good in their kind, and well executed; their defect lay in their being applicable to the case, and to the man. A certain set of highly ingenious resources are with the Prefect, a sort of Procrustean bed, to which he forcibly adapts his designs. But he perpetually errs by being too deep or too shallow, for the matter in hand; and many a schoolboy is a better reasoner than he.” [Poe 1983c: 924]
It is the policemen’s particular pathos to have knowledge without Reason, praxis without a point. Conversely, M. Dupin is able to perform such an act. In “The Purloined Letter” as in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” the policeman is used as a foil against whom the detective himself is drawn in sharp contrast. It is precisely inasmuch as Dupin is the Prefect’s opposite that he is able to solve each of these crimes. The policeman therefore outlines the contours of the singular detective through a process of polemical contrast – they are inherently opposites. Dupin continues:

They consider only their own ideas of ingenuity; and in searching for anything hidden, advert only to the modes in which they would have hidden it. They are right in this much – that their own ingenuity is a faithful representative of that of the mass; but when the cunning of the individual felon is diverse in character from their own, the felon foils them, of course. This always happens when it is above their own, and very usually when it is below. . . Do you not see he has taken it for granted that all men proceed to conceal a letter, – not exactly in a gimlet-hole bored in a chair-leg – but, at least, in some out-of-the-way hole or corner suggested by the same tenor of thought which would urge a man to secrete a letter in a gimlet-hole bored in a chair-leg? [Poe 1983c: 926]

It is precisely this radical and singular alterity – this being beyond and above the alienated masses of the city as described by Simmel, Wirth, and Park – that allows the detective to bring together the unusual, disassembled, and fractured strands of the mystery. It is this alterity, therefore, that allows Dupin to function as the hero in each story. By his very singularity he transcends the alienation – the anomie – of the urban environment. As such, the detective-hero functions as a critique of urban modernity itself.

Police in Urban Ethnography

I argue that the figure of the policeman functions as a critique of urban modernity in a slightly different genre as well, that of urban ethnography. In order to show this I will look briefly at three urban ethnographies: The Taxi-Dance Hall (1968) by Paul G. Cressey, a 1920s’-era Chicago School ethnography of a pay-per-dance dance hall; Soulside (1969) by Ulf Hannerz, an ethnography conducted in the Black “ghettoes” of Washington, D.C.; and In Search of Respect (1995) by Phillipe Bourgois, an ethnography of Puerto Rican crack dealers in the East Harlem neighborhood of New York. In each of these ethnographies I will trace the theme of urban alienation, specifically in relation to the figure of the policeman, in order to draw out the way in which this figure is used to develop an antiurban (antialienated) politics embodied in the figure of the anthropologist himself. It is precisely through this transgression, over and against urban alienation as represented by the Policeman, that the ethnographer is able to construct himself as hero – as the embodied hope for the possibility of overcoming alienation – and it is in this transgression that the ethical project of these urban ethnographies are laid most bare.
These three ethnographies have been chosen not only because they offer clear examples of the type of figuration discussed above but also because of the substantial and deserving regard their insights enjoy in the cannon of anthropological thought. In choosing these specific texts, I do not intend to belittle similar approaches to urban studies of police work and its effects. It is rather my hope here to emphasize the way in which the specific nexus of ethical, methodological, and narrative practices these studies engender also serve to hinder other, perhaps equally valuable, inquiries.

“Go on home! All the girls has went!”: Paul Cressey’s *Taxi-Dance Hall*

Paul Cressey’s *The Taxi-Dance Hall* (1968), an ethnography of a 1920s’-era pay-per-dance dance hall, can be understood as one of the first Chicago School urban ethnographies. As such, it clearly is influenced by the “urban mentality” theories of Robert Park and Louis Wirth. In fact, in the original introduction to the volume, Wirth makes explicit the connection between his theory of urban modernity and the empirical case material gathered by Cressey and his research assistants:

> Promiscuity naturally arises under conditions making for casual acquaintance in city life. Conventional avenues for forming friendships are notoriously deficient in the city... The taxi-dance hall and all public dance halls are organized to exploit for profit a situation of promiscuity. This basic fact explains the essential problem of control in the public dance.

[Cressey 1968: n.p.]

As we have seen, Park and Wirth believed that urban anomie emerges not from a lack of human contact but from a general superficiality that characterizes urban relations. Here *promiscuity* is used to describe the temporary and noncommittal tenor this urban superficiality lends to sexual and romantic relations. However, in the dance hall, this anomie does not mean that relations are unordered. Conversely, Cressey argues that the possibility (or rather impossibility) of intimate relations is organized precisely around the profit motives of the dance hall owners. It is not long before policemen begin to appear in Cressey’s description:

> They jostle each other for room along the side line and gradually, involuntarily, they encroach upon the dance space. “Back in line, boys, back to the line!” An Irish policeman in uniform walks along the side lines pushing back the overzealous with vigorous, persistent shoves.

[Cressey 1968: 7]

The figure of the Policeman emerges. He is exactly a barrier to the types of meaningful relations that dance hall patrons seek in the dance hall, and therefore he is the mechanism through which their desires are continually frustrated in favor of the capitalist profit motive of the dance hall owners:

> Overhead in conspicuous places along the walls large black-lettered signs bear the injunction, “No Improper Dancing Permitted,” while up and down the line of spectators stroll three uniformed officers of the law, “supervising” activities.

[Cressey 1968: 13]
Furthermore the efforts of the Policeman are tinged with more than a little irony, reminding us of their function as narrative foil as discussed in the detective novels above:

Flourishing their clubs, the uniformed officers pace up and down the hall, urging the stragglers toward the door. “All out now! All out for tonight!”... And so it goes, the sidewalk board of review dwindling until finally a blue-coated policeman locks the door and ungrammatically advises those remaining to “Go on home! All the girls has went!” [Cressey 1968: 14]

It is in the sense that they serve as ironic narrative foils that the police are unable to be understood as producing forms of urban intimacies. As opposed to politicians and business entrepreneurs, policemen are particularly averse to fostering friendly relations:

The police, as a whole, do not appear always to have been regarded as “friends” in the same sense as the politicians or to have enjoyed the same confidence which proprietors placed in their political friends. But it was recognized that the police were persons in authority with whom proprietors had to have dealings, and friendly overtures were often made to them. [Cressey 1968: 203]

Even these “friendly overtures” (i.e., misleading, untrue, or duplicitous semblances of the practice of friendship) are in the form of “grift,” or illegal bribes, and so are therefore – within the poetics of the text – superficial, alienating, and unlawful. For Cressey, therefore, the police are necessarily the mechanism through which urban anomie, the source of modern unhappiness and loneliness, is enforced, through a type of segregation of intimacies (which does not take the form of lack of contact, per se). As we will see, it is precisely urban segregation in this sense which provides the foil against which most urban ethnographies are written. In adopting this frame, these ethnographies present the ethnographer himself as possessing the promise of transgressing urban alienation, over and against the figure of the policeman, who is the mechanism of its reproduction.

“Yeah, you’re on your way home, ‘cause you’re coming with us”:
**Hannerz’s **Soulside

The work of Ulf Hannerz, postdating the heyday of the Chicago School, stands in juxtaposition to the work of Wirth, Park, and Cressey – at the same time that Hannerz takes such scholars as his intellectual precursors (cf. Hannerz 1980). It is therefore interesting to trace the figure of the Policeman through his work in order to show that it is a central element in the description of urban modernity for even those ethnographers who have offered careful and insightful critiques of the Chicago School. Hannerz’s ethnography of the Black “ghettos” of Washington, D.C. in the late 1960s, *Soulside* (1969), can serve as an illustrative example of his work.
Though providing several cogent critiques of the work of the Chicago School, Hannerz’s own work is steeped in the tradition of such works as William Foote Whyte’s *Street Corner Society* (1955) and Elliot Liebow’s *Tally’s Corner* (1967) which focus on the street-corner public sociality of African American men. As in these ethnographies, Hannerz portrays the police as playing a pivotal, if negative, role in the possibility of such a public sphere:

“Did you see Jimmy is back?” Sonny asks. “I saw him today at the corner. I guess his daddy bailed him out. That’s a good precinct anyway, don’t treat you too bad. Nothing like Eighteenth Precinct, they start hitting you over the head in no time. That’s the meanest precinct in town, I tell you.”

“Shi-it, Nineteenth is much worse. You don’t have to be drunk for them to take you in, you just have to smell alcohol.”

“Yeah, and they don’t pay no mind if you’re on your way home or not. I was in that area once and I was drunk, but not too drunk, and I was trying to go home when they came, and I told them, ‘Look, I’m on my way home.’ And they said, ‘Yeah, you’re on your way home, ‘cause you’re coming with us.’ And then they took me to the judge, and he said, ‘How many times have you been arrested this year?’ And I really didn’t know, so I said, ‘Twice.’ But they checked my record, and it said seven. But the record was wrong, ‘cause I know it was more than that.” [Hannerz 1969: 107]

Here, as in Cressey, the humor is an instance of irony. At the end of Sonny’s/Ulf’s account is an instance of the failure of the police’s record-keeping. Such an irony offers the Policeman as a foil against which to proffer a more coherent logic of relations – that of the street corner itself. What is at stake, then, is precisely a kind of sociability:

The men who are drinking at the corner or in the back alley are constantly on guard against policemen and patrol cars; since they consider their drinking quite harmless to everybody else, they do not consider it any business of the police. It may indeed be impossible for them to find more privacy for their sociability than they do at their hangouts in public places. [Hannerz 1969: 163]

Community building is therefore seen as a weapon to be used against the police at least in part because the police’s intent is to fragment it. For this reason Hannerz suggests a form of policing, known as “community policing,” the idea of which would eventually become quite popular in U.S. cities. However in offering it as a political remedy, a cure for a social ill, he implicitly argues that such a function is lacking in the work of the police as he observes it:

As far as the police is concerned...its relationship to the community continued to deteriorate in the months following the April rising. A number of incidents were quite widely talked about, and black power groups emphasized the demand for some kind of community control of
the police. Undoubtedly it would help to have more black policemen, recruited from the ghetto. After all, policemen’s role is to a great extent that of an officer of the peace; if the goal of keeping the peace is best pursued by his staying off the streets, as it seems to have been in many critical ghetto situations, he is obviously a failure. Black officers might be better able to calm feelings in the community by virtue of their skill in the interaction idiom of ghetto dwellers, even if it true that they are no less harsh than others if violence does erupt. [Hannerz 1969: 176]

This critique should be contrasted with actual developments in policing concurrent with Hannerz’s research – developments which were in large part a response to the same problem. For example, the celebrated Kerner Report (United States National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders and Kerner Commission 1968), published the year before Hannerz’s monograph, argued that not only were a full half of the race riots of the 1960s sparked specifically by abusive incidents between police officers and African Americans, but that tensions between the police and the African American community were high in the preceding months for every riot city studied. The results of this study led directly to the development of “community-policing” programs in many U.S. cities (Skogan and Hartnett 1997).

Approaches such as Hannerz’s serve, therefore, to obfuscate decades of technical consideration by police administrations regarding the possibilities of and potential for exactly the kind of “friendlier” more “community-oriented” policing for which Hannerz called. As in Cressey’s work, the ultimate irony for Hannerz is in the contrast between his own methods and those of the policeman’s. It is this ironical disjunct that creates the very possibility of ethnography. The ethnographer is imagined as transgressing the social and cultural barriers of an urban modernity saturated with alienation and anomie and therefore, in contrast to the police, offers the promise of meaningful relations. It is in this sense that the ethnographer serves as the hero of the text, for he embodies the promise of overcoming the root of all our modern urban ills. In order to be such a hero, however, one needs the contrast of the Policeman:

With a more formal researcher role I suspect that I would have ranged more easily among the white persons of authority who dominate ghetto dwellers and, in their view, disrupt their lives: social workers, police investigators, and others. These are not usually the kind of people one talks to spontaneously or in front of whom one behaves normally, nor are they people one cares to have around much. At the beginning of my presence in the neighborhood some people asked me if I had anything to do with such categories and made it quite clear that they disliked their kind of prying. [Hannerz 1969: 205]

Figuring the anthropologist as representing the political promise against an alienating City suggests a very particular political project: one must necessarily oppose the work of the police, who are a priori considered to be the engine through which alienation is produced. Furthermore, this alienation is considered the very essence of an urban modernity as opposed to forms of community building. The political task of the anthropologist is therefore to aid in the creation and nurturance, of community,
understood as an inherent good, and to denounce and resist those elements (such as the police) that stand as obstacles to community-building efforts. We turn to a final, more contemporary, work – Phillipe Bourgois’ *In Search of Respect* (1995) – in order to illustrate this final function of the figure of the Policeman.

“People think you’re a fed . . . it makes them stay away from you”: Bourgois’ *In Search of Respect*

Bourgois’ ethnographic work occurs in the Puerto Rican *barrio* of East Harlem, New York City. A tension is established when Phillipe mentions that he, too, was raised in New York City. Quantitative spatial distance is therefore not an index of cultural distance. It is precisely this paradox that Bourgois hopes to explore: segregation and marginalization within the same city. Initially, this distance is clearly marked:

The first time I walked home from the subway station I went down a side street that happened to be a heroin “coping corner” where half a dozen “companies” competed with each other. . . I was greeted with a hail of whistles and echoing shouts of “bajando [coming down]” – the coded alarms that lookouts posted on dealing corners use to announce the approach of a potential undercover agent to the “pitchers” who make the actual hand-to-hand sales. [Bourgois 1995: 29]

Socially, then, Bourgois is a policeman, and it is the possibility of overcoming this identity, his transcendence, laced as it is with the air of impossibility, that is the very precondition for his ethnographic project. The success of that project – and thus of overcoming the urban segregation, marginalization, and apartheid he sees as the central problem of postindustrial capitalist society – depends precisely on his ability to set himself against the Policeman.

As Caesar, one of the lookouts to the Game Room explains to him:

Felipe, people think you’re a fed [federal agent] if anything. But that’s good; it makes them stay away from you.

Think about it: If you was selling shit on the street and you see a white guy coming by, you wouldn’t really want to bother him.

But then again, some people also think, “he’s white and he’s in the neighborhood, so he must be crazy.” If they didn’t, they’d just come up to you and crack you in the face and take your wallet. [Bourgois 1995: 33]

This fact perhaps bodes well for Phillip’s personal safety in East Harlem but offers a significant hurdle in his project as an anthropologist – a project that stands in sharp contrast to the urban disintegration of a viable public community that the police both represent and perpetuate:

The invulnerability of Ray’s crackhouses to police control was largely owing to the generalized public sector breakdown of the neighborhood. Inner-city police forces are so demoralized and incompetent that for
the most part they do not have to be systematically corrupt – although they often are – in order for street-level drug dealing to flourish in their precincts. The attitude of honest officers is too hostile toward the local community for them to be able to build networks that would allow them to document the operations of the numerous drug-dealing spots in the neighborhoods they patrol. For example, after five and a half years of being practically the only white person out on the street after dark on a regular basis on my block, which hosted almost a half-dozen drug-selling spots, the police never learned to recognize me. Even after I began attending their community outreach meetings for combating drugs, they continued to fail to recognize me on the street. [Bourgois 1995: 109]

It is the lack of a viable Public, an alienation from forms of community, and most importantly a lack of personal recognition that fosters urban blight and the failure of shared norms and customs (or nomos):

Following his second arrest for a hand-to-hand sale of ten dollars’ worth of crack to an undercover officer, once again the mayhem of New York’s drug enforcement strategy in the early 1990s saved Primo from becoming a predicate felon and having to serve four to six years in jail. In their disorganized haste to boost arrest statistics, the Tactical Narcotics Team officers who engineered the buy-and-bust operation on the Game Room confused the identities of Primo and Caesar in the courtroom. [Bourgois 1995: 113]

This periodic, if not perpetual, alienation in the guise of the police becomes the very rhythm of urban life, fading into the background as it becomes ever more ubiquitous:

We would crouch by the jungle gyms sheltered from the gusts of wind and occasional police floodlights in order to lay out ten-dollar packets of cocaine and heroin side by side on the fat logs originally built for elementary school children. [Bourgois 1995: 125]

Finally, dramatically, victoriously he has achieved ethnographic intimacy. However this intimacy constitutes the police themselves as necessarily outside if not superficial and irrelevant to itself. Ethnographer and informants remain hidden from the police floodlights, which pass over the drug use the police purport to be preventing. Ironically, it is this drug use that perpetuates the marginalization of the barrio, and thus of urban anomie itself.

**Toward A Contemporary Configuration, or, Do We Need Another Hero?**

“What’s the problem with heroes?” one might ask. However, whatever its positive benefits in the work discussed above, such an ethnographic method poses problems for an urban ethnography that hopes to take the police themselves as its object without relegating the ethnography to an ironic narrative.

In a parallel fashion, Susan Sontag (2001) famously eulogized Lévi-Strauss as representing the apotheosis of modern heroism in his genre-bending work *Tristes Tropiques*
(Lévi-Strauss 1961). Since then, however, the role of the “heroic” in anthropological works has come under much scrutiny. For example, Laurent Dubois (1995) has remarked upon the particular forms of maleness, and indeed colonial whiteness, that makes such intrepid voyages possible in the first place. On the other hand, Tod Hartman (2007) has argued that such “hard-won impassivity” may no longer be the order of the day, and indeed makes little sense in an anthropological milieu in which various calls to “activist anthropology” hold sway next to attempts to deexoticize fieldwork through studying “home” – and in which there exists a growing consensus that ethnographic knowledge should be situated so as to show the ways in which it is itself implicated in its own object. One of the reasons for the uneasiness with heroic pretension may be that such approaches are less suited to studying the mechanisms of power itself. Hannah Arendt makes note of this possibility in her reflections on privation and politics (Arendt 1958). In fact, I argue that such a heroic approach necessarily obfuscates the study of policing itself: in their reliance on the “rapport” model of ethnographic field practice, the three ethnographers discussed above are ultimately unable – and unwilling – to attend to the practices, and practitioners, of policing. This is in large part a result of the way they position themselves in relation to configurations of power as they imagine them.

There are other modes of heroism available, however. For example, many literary scholars have argued that Flaubert ushered in the modern novel with *L’éducation sentimentale* when he refigured the constitutive parts of what was, at the time, the classic novelistic form (Addison 1996; Balassa 1999; Flaubert and Maynial 1954). In his novel, the central character – the semiautobiographical figure Frédéric Moreau – is not functionally the hero. Rather Péter Balassa (1999), a student of the literary critic György Lukács, has argued that the narrator is displaced as the hero in the novel such that the protagonist becomes Time itself, ceaselessly moving forward (if not exactly progressing) despite the individual lives of insignificant men. This refiguration had the effect of shedding a different moral light on the characters involved, without displacing the question of morality; it enables a new form of ethical exploration. There are no true “heroes” in *L’éducation sentimentale*, but this displacement allows for an exploration of what Flaubert called the “moral history” of his generation (Baldick 1964: 7). A reconfiguration of the heroic narrative offers up a space for exploration in ethics itself.12

Similarly, the Franco-Bulgarian philosopher and anthropologist Tzvetan Todorov (1977) has remarked that there are at least two types of detective fiction. The first, what he calls the “whodunit,” involves a detective who, arriving only after a crime has been committed and the area secured, organizes the empirical data available in a logical manner so as to identify the cause or the perpetrator of the crime. (Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes and Edgar Allen Poe’s M. Dupin are the archtypical examples.) The second detective genre emerges later, mainly in the U.S. between the two world wars. Oriented toward the future through the device of a graduated denouement, the protagonist in these novels is himself implicated in the drama – his virtue, and oftentimes his very life, are at stake. This second genre Todorov calls “the suspense novel,” but is perhaps better recognized under the French moniker of noir. What is important for our purposes in this second genre is that violence is external to...
neither the narrative nor the protagonist himself; in fact, it is precisely as a function of its relationship to violence that the drama is able to unfold – to move.

This kind of narrative has a different set of goals, pushing us to see familiar worlds in different ethical lights, and to see the contemporary moment as having heroic possibilities precisely because it contains the possibility of a new politics. Finally, in order to bring these possibilities to fruition, the noir narrative also takes a different tack toward the protagonist himself. As a mode of inquiry, this approach has much in common with what Paul Rabinow and others have called “the anthropology of the contemporary.”13 The anthropology of the contemporary, as a method of inquiry, diverges from Foucault’s method of conducting a “history of the present” (Foucault 1977), which takes up the seemingly concrete, universal, and timeless elements of social life found in the present in order to show their ultimately contingent nature. Rather than focusing on an already “concrete” object in order to show that it was not always so, ethnographies conducted in the contemporary mode are located at moments when the dimensions of its object are anything but settled, attending to how the various interested parties are actively reshaping its contours as an ethical project.

An example of this process can be seen in my work on police reform in France. In the late 1990s a mode of policing that became known as the police de proximité gained prominence among police administrators, officials, and educators in France. This model of policing, quite similar to the American “community-policing” strategies mentioned above, was to be “preventative” in nature at the same time that it relied on social scientific knowledge and methods in order to direct police practice (Institut des Hautes Études de la Sécurité Intérieure 2000; Maillard and Roché 2004; Roché 2005). However, by the time Nicolas Sarkozy took over as Minister of the Interior (and therefore as head of the French national police force) in 2003, he was able to dismiss this approach for being too expansive, taking the police onto terrains not properly considered to be their legitimate domain. Sarkozy’s view was that this expansiveness diverted the police’s focus from their central duty – arrests and interpolations. This, he argued, created a situation that was not conducive to French democracy or civility. To restore proper focus to police work, a logic of economic efficiency and accountability of action – a “culture of results” – was needed (Besset 2003; LeClerc 2003; MairieInfo.com 2003).

There are at least two ways to understand the above juxtaposition. The first would see the “culture of results” as a more or less successful epochal shift in the way policing is organized, oriented, and practiced in France. This interpretation could certainly be justified through an analysis of the public discourse of political commentators, French politicians, and police administrators – both those for and those against Sarkozy’s proposed reforms – who often speak in terms of “neoliberal revolution” or “liberal regressions.” In all of these cases, the two modes of policing are understood to be in radical opposition to each other. The mode of engagement between the two camps is overwhelmingly polemic in nature, contributing to a certain inability – on all sides, including those less immediately invested in its stakes – to portray the creative, fluid nature of police programmatic reformulation (cf. Wacquant 1999, Wacquant 2002, Wacquant 2009a, Wacuant 2009b).
Another way to understand this debate would be in a manner appropriate to the anthropology of the contemporary. That is, one could attend to the specific emergent equipmental assemblages (Rabinow and Bennett 2007) – the practical, ethical, cognitive, and affective “toolkits” or “repertoire of moves” whose ultimate assembled form is underdetermined – such that the process of configuration – of putting this toolkit together – is highlighted. Taking the matter up in this way has allowed me to see that, despite a certain formal symmetry that serves as an aid to ethical orientation in French political discourse, neither the police de proximité nor the “culture of results” is experienced as entirely adequate to the task of policing in contemporary France. Neither is an acceptable or coherent toolkit in and of itself. Rather, what one sees as emerging in the practice of police officers throughout the diversity of institutional locations in the Police Nationale is an as-yet poorly defined (and unnamed) third figure that consists of a recombination and remediatization of elements of both the police de proximité and the culture of results.

Seen in this way, the culture of results is not the inherent opposite of the police de proximité, nor is their relation entirely negative. From this vantage we learn, importantly, that the police themselves are engaged in, not merely obstacles to, ethical exploration; they also are invested in the question of justice as a question. Thus the ultimate effect of Sarkozy’s intervention is to put French policing, like Flaubert’s Time, into motion. The point that I have tried to make here is that this insight – seeing this ethical work as a constitutive element of police work in France today – is itself intricately tied to a certain narrative form; heroic framing is itself part of the issue. The challenge is to find an ethnography more noir.

An Ethnographer chez la police

As I mentioned earlier, by the time I was well into my second year of fieldwork I had hit a kind of impasse, or doldrums, in my research project. In general, I accepted this state of affairs with what might have seemed unwarranted good cheer – even accepting it as a guilty pleasure, in that it gave me cause to immerse myself in the leisurely social life around me. However, despite the many pleasure of this life, I could never quite shake a sense of guilt – I couldn’t quite get rid of the feeling that I was not doing what I had come to do, to study the police. Then one evening, as I was passing the time in conversation and ginger rum punch at one of my familiar haunts, listening to one of the semiregular poetry slams for which it served as home, the Senegalese proprietor burst out of the kitchen, exuding the raw nervous energy for which he was known, and made his way directly towards me.

“AMERICANMAN! AMERICANMAN COME HERE!” I hear him yell as he waved me over towards him – and the beer tap. I smiled and hurried over, knowing his penchant for offering free drinks when in a good mood.

“Americanman, let me present you with my friends, the cops!” he announced, to my surprise, performing a flamboyant chivalrous bow toward two men sitting at the end of the bar. He quickly snatched up, then filled with beer, the glass nearest to him – which happened to be a wine glass – and ceremoniously placed it in front of me as he again presented the three of us to each other with a wave of his arm.
“This is an American who’s writing his thesis on the police,” he explained to the cautious looking men before bouncing off. Recognizing an anthropological opportunity, I moved into “ethnographic mode,” slowly attempting to establish rapport, and the three of us began an awkward – if not altogether fruitless – conversation. After some time, Cristo, one of the poets who had finished performing a piece (which just happened to be on the absurdities of police bureaucracy, containing the call-and-response refrain “it’s the processure”16) approached us.

“Excuse me, but I have a few questions I’d like to ask,” Cristo interjected, polite yet firm. He had been eavesdropping enough on our conversation to know who they were, and he was seizing upon a golden opportunity. Without hesitation both officers accept his request. “Don’t you think that the way the police handle the drug problem is absurd? I mean, either legalize it or decide to do something about it.” One by one, a crowd began to circle around us. What ensued was a long, passionate, yet civil discussion. Individuals would move in and out, side conversations would develop and splinter groups would spin off, only to later join the main group.

Although Cristo’s question may have been the initial impetus, the scope of that evening became something much more expansive. To be sure, I used the opportunity to develop what became quite useful contacts with the préfecture. But what I find important about that evening, as compared with the representations of policing in the urban ethnographies discussed above, is that, rather than standing apart from and opposed to a public discourse which constituted a community, the police were already there, among us, already themselves implicit and enmeshed in the situation. They were part of, offering opinions on, and blending in to the more pervasive discourse of the milieu: how was policing changing? Was it a good thing? What should police be doing? Was it a just an institution? What were the possibilities of political action? What were the dangers? In other words, we were all imbricated in much more general questions of French sociability and justice.

Rather than standing outside of the creative political discourse, we were all – police, citizen, and concerned foreigner – confronted by the same existential questions and were forced to develop stances vis-à-vis them. We were all, in that sense, implicated in the police, and the form of sociality it constituted. On the one hand, this corresponded not only with what I already had come to understand as the concerns of French citizens, but also with what I observed occupying much of the intellectual and emotional work of police officers, administrators, and educators themselves.17 On the other hand, this stood in contrast to the traditional narrative of police and urban anomic and it allowed me to see that rather than a question of police versus sociality, the political question at the nexus of state and society in France was exactly the question I had already noticed occupying a large part of the resources of police officers and administrators, including the debates concerning the police de proximité and the culture of results.

Tracking this problematic became the focus of my ethnographic project which, formulated in this way, led me to attend to and investigate dimensions of French social life missed by the alienation model. I began to see “the police” as not only an identifiable and distinguishable governing institution, but also as a more general problem – or tool – of sociability. How should we all think through life together when the
key terms for thinking through this problem seem less than adequate? This question remains, in large part, unanswered in France today. What became clear through my research, however, was that whatever solutions might possibly be devised, they will implicate policing as a form of social, ethical, and cognitive problem in a way that traditional ethnographic approaches have not been able to capture. A new framework is needed, one that takes the relationship of police and others in the urban social environment as contingent and emergent, rather than automatically casting police as the antiheroes, as the agents of urban anomie.

**Notes**

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1. According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, the word *anomie* is defined as: “social instability caused by erosion of standards and values” and “alienation and purposelessness experienced by a person or a class as a result of a lack of standards, values, or ideals.” The word is etymologically derived from the Greek word nomos (shared custom, law). Anomie therefore literally means a-nomos, a state which is without a unified (and unifying) custom or law. Of course this definition does not capture the immense importance the concept has had for the twin development of urban studies and cultural anthropology. For an extended exploration of this triad, see (Herbert 1991) as well as (Smith and Bohm 2008).

2. Some key exceptions to this rule include the writings of Andreas Glaeser (2000), Peter Manning (1977, 1988; Manning and Van Maanen 1978) and John Van Maanen (1972, 1976, 1988). I would argue, however, that the disciplinary boundary work which envelops these studies show them to be the proverbial exceptions that prove the rule in that they remain relatively marginal – with the possible exception of Van Maanen’s *Tales of the Field* – to the larger ongoing debates concerning the problems of relationality and violence in anthropological fieldwork.

3. Both Marcus’ and Rosaldo’s formulations are examples of the larger impetus toward rethinking the nature of anthropological fieldwork that has occurred in the wake of, among other works, the volume edited by both James Clifford and George Marcus *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986). Rosaldo (1993) emphasizes the ways that traditional modes of ethnographic representation ignore or are unable to capture the complex set of power relations in which anthropologists find themselves enmeshed as they conduct their research.
in colonial and postcolonial situations. In the place of these “classic norms” of representation Rosaldo hopes to find a mode of ethnographic writing which will highlight the shared political stakes of anthropology and colonial regimes. For his part, Marcus (1998) hopes to build on Rosaldo’s insight by expanding its purview beyond it merely political dimension to include a cognitive, or intellectual, facet as well. This expansion raises questions not only for the political allegiances of anthropological projects with colonial governments, but also for the very nature of ethnographic knowledge.

4. One of the ways in which Marcus’ emphasis on the wider cognitive imbrications of anthropological knowledge and knowledge making (e.g., participant-observation, fieldwork, and similar methods traditionally associated with anthropology and which usually fall under the label “ethnography”) has been taken up is by paying attention to the proliferation of professional sites in which these techniques have been either “borrowed” from the anthropological tradition or developed in a parallel fashion in so-called para-sites. For Marcus and those who make use of his work, such parallel developments point to the complicated cognitive imbrications of anthropological knowledge today.

5. I will develop this argument in the last section of this article, however a brief note on the direction of the argument seems necessary here. At first glance, one might suppose that the words police and polemic have similar etymological roots, and are therefore necessarily closely linked concepts. However this is not in fact so: according to Le Robert Dictionnaire Étymologique du Française and the Liddell-Scott Greek-English Lexicon, the French and English word police comes from the Greek word politeia meaning “the art of governing the city.” The English word polemic (in French, polemique), in contrast, comes from the Greek word polemikos, “of or for war; to be under the banner of war.” What kinds of actors exist in a polemical milieu; what kinds of things can they do, and conversely, what kinds of things are impossible in a state of warfare? It would seem, at least, that such a situation would not favor intellectual exchange of the kind proffered by Marcus. Searching the Liddell-Scott English-Greek Lexicon further, we find that polemikos is almost never associated with poetic texts. It is therefore, literally, not poesis; not a creative word. As we will see, however, this form dominates the anthropological literature. Here I am searching for an alternative form in which to account for the police (see also Foucault 1997).

6. For a further discussion of Todorov’s typology, see below. For the traditional attribution of Poe’s writing as foundational for detective fiction, see the work of Anderson (2007) and Panek (2006; Panek and Bendel-Simso 2008). On the other hand, Heather Worthington (2005) and Jacques Dubois (1992) both offer counter-narratives to this account. In Worthington’s case this is in favor of an older, if less academically recognized, tradition of crime writing in popular literature periodicals such as the Newgate Calandars; in Dubois’ case, it is an attempt to disrupt “the idea of a unique and circumscribed origin” of the genre in order to resituate it within the cultural context he understands as “modernity.” If I favor the former literature here it is not because I lack sympathy with the latter, but that, precisely because of Poe’s emblematic status, I find it to be useful in creating a sort of ideal type of Hero/Policeman relations in urban writing.
7. Note the particularly sexual tone of the scene, given dramatic resonance by the racialized reading made possible through the categorical interchangibility of the orangutan and the Hottentot at the time of Poe’s writing. One is left to wonder: through what line of reasoning do the alarmed bystanders and gendarme interpret the screams and moans (for this is all they are – no coherent words are intelligible) emanating from the room in the middle of the night as an imminent threat, sight and situation unseen?

8. To transpose the matter into Foucaultian language, there is a disjunct of the common policeman’s logos and ethos, which produces a flawed askēsis (Foucault and Pearson 2001; Rabinow 2003).

9. Canguilhem (1989) offers a particularly enlightening discussion of the relationship between the Greek orthos, or grammar, and the Latin norma, the root of such words as “normal,” “abnormal,” and “normalization.”

10. This is a recognition that Bourgois suggests is particularly due to him in the above case because of his whiteness, an element of his identity that is continually (though merely) asserted in the text. He “should” stand out because, we are continually told, he is white. Perhaps one could ask the question: why should he stand out, anyway? It is only the uniqueness of his own whiteness, impossibly surrounded by and in contrast to so much brown/blackness, that highlights Bourgois’ singularity and ultimately the heroic quality of his character. Without whiteness there could be no transcendence in the text.

11. Which, I must reemphasize, are many. In other words, I am not attempting to displace the form of ethnographic writing about police that I call “polemic” with a “polemic against polemics.” The polemic mode of writing is, and will continue to be, quite effective and necessary, especially vis-à-vis the most despicable forms of injustice. Sometimes anger is the most appropriate political affect (Rabinow 2007). My argument in the following section is merely that this mode of writing has particular blind spots – as do all modes; it cannot account for the ways in which the object of anger might actually be a mutually shared problem.

12. Flaubert would of course not be the last to deploy a refiguration of temporality in the narrative structure in order to enable a particular ethical exploration. Beyond the obvious bridge this provides to the work of Marcel Proust (1919), many American writers writing from France have made use of the same technique. For example, Richard Godden (1998) has shown how F. Scott Fitzgerald experimented with many different drafts of the manuscript that became Tender is the Night, ultimately settling on a telling of Dick Diver’s story that did not unfold chronologically in order to offer an ethical parable which he felt more appropriate to the post-1929 world (see Fitzgerald 1998).

13. For further discussion of “the anthropology of the contemporary” as a mode of inquiry, see the work of Paul Rabinow (1999, 2003, 2007), as well as the various working papers of the Anthropology of the Contemporary Research Collaboratory (ARC) http://anthropos-lab.net/news/.

14. Hugo Frey and Benjamin Noys (2007), drawing on Thompson’s (2000) structural analysis of political scandal, have argued that such accusations, although perhaps accurately capturing a certain “political mood,” have become “the dominant framing device for public intellectual debates in France today” despite their
tendency of such toward simplistic and anachronistic generalizations of the political field and the projects found wherein. They go on to suggest that such calls to vigilance in fact represent an “anxiety over the security of Republicanism and liberalism” excited by the migration of previously extreme right-wing values and perceptions into other cultural-political domains.

15. This is an homage, of sorts, to the important ethnographic study of French police by Marc Jeanjean, *Un ethnologue chez les policiers* (Jeanjean 1990), which unfortunately remains unavailable in English. The dimension of Jeanjean’s work which this article takes as particular inspiration is his use of the preposition *chez* – as opposed to the equally available *parmi* (surrounded by) or *sur* (on, or about) – which suggests a certain relationality between himself and his objects of study which is indeed difficult to translate. Where I will differ from Jeanjean is in the object vis-à-vis which the ethnographer nurtures that relationship: Jeanjean’s *policiers* suggests individual representatives of an identifiable institution, while I, for reasons that will be made clear, prefer *la police* in order to suggest a more generalized set of existential questioning, which I call “the problem of a postsocial police.”

16. Playing with the last syllable “-dure,” which sounds like the French *dur* (hard/difficult).

17. Detailing an exhaustive account of the variety, scope, and context of these instances would exceed both the mandates of space and topic for this article. However, I would like to emphasize that everyone from ethics professors at the police academy to physical education instructors, police psychological counselors to curriculum reformers, high *commissaires* to lowly *adjoints* at some point framed their own police work in terms of a desire to do good – to make sure that their actions were just and contributed to a larger well-being.

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