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Inside Out Outside In: In Search of 'Gangs', Finding Outside-In Groups and the Dual Parallax of Spaces and Positions

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Abstract

Through a Zizekian framework, this article explores a doubled precarity as experienced by individuals involved in groups described as 'gangs'. This dual precarity being the inability to parallel mainstream discourses of security, and abstracted precarity of mirrored images reflecting 'mainstream' groups. The paper outlines brittle relationships between these two poles and the stories relating to being and *be-coming* through a case study focusing on one of the key participants and supported through vignettes from encounters with other participants.

Keywords

Precarity, Positional Spaces, Insider-Outsider, Identity, Parallax

Introduction

This article explores the double precarity of groups that are commonly described as 'gangs'; in particular the precarity of occupying both positions of outsider and insider simultaneously. These positions and the related actions are easily perceived as being deviant and those of an outsider minority. However, in light of the data presented by the research attention is drawn to an alternative perception: this perception being that of insider by-proxy of reflecting *mainstream* or normative groups or institutions.

The article is based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out as part of a research project which was concerned with how education may take place within groups and cultures that are commonly described in popular and political discourse as 'gangs'. As an explanatory note, the word 'gang' is avoided within this article as the vast majority of participants within the research would never have described themselves as ever being involved in gangs. Yet, their actions, behaviours and lifestyles would, without question be described by the press, police, politicians and the wider public as those of gangs. For example, if the press were describing an event, which included hundreds of thousands of pounds (sterling) worth of heroin, being stolen by a group of men from another group of men involved in the trade of narcotics. The story progressing to the subsequent kidnapping of one of the thieves by the victims of the theft. With all of this resulting in the thief being water boarded in order to ascertain the whereabouts of the heroin. The press would more than likely place the word 'gang' in their reporting of the story. If not they would describe them as an organised crime group, dependant on the current political discourse. In addition, it is likely that law enforcement agencies would describe the two groups in the same way. In recent times, there has been a marked shift in the political discourse around such groups, with a shift occurring from the descriptor of 'gang' to organised crime (OCG) group in a UK context. Although arguably this terminology is still in limbo with 'gang' and 'OCG' being interchangeable dependent upon place, race and crime type (these are issues I deal with in other aspects of the research). Despite these popular descriptors, almost none of the participants in the research described themselves as

being involved in a 'gang' or 'OCG'. Instead, they would typically describe groups as 'friends', 'brothers', 'community leaders' or in any other term but 'gang' or 'OCG'. As such the term 'gang' is avoided in the current study and replaced by the term 'group'.

The background for this research comes from my professional experiences of informal education within youth and community work, predominantly in justice and youth justice based settings. Over many years of working with young people who were involved in groups described as 'gangs' through to adult ex-offenders who had served multiple custodial sentences, one theme came through consistently. That theme being that none of the people I came into contact with in a practice setting merely arose from sleep one day and knew how to *be* in a 'gang' or carry out the daily performances that are essential to their *being* in a 'gang'. Just as in the same way that no individual would arise from slumber on a given day in some kind of enlightened epiphany and know how to be a heart surgeon, a plumber or a shop assistant; there is always some process of be-coming and in position learning. Although such learning processes are to various degrees, (depending on the perceived social status of the role) recognised as taking place, they are not recognised as taking place for groups commonly described as 'gangs'. In the existing literature these groups are absent and dispossessed from any notion that the same developmental learning process must take place.

Why Not a 'Gang'?

As mentioned above, for the purposes of the research the term 'gang' is replaced by the term 'group' or 'group cultures'. Very early on in the research it became apparent that very few people who were being described as being involved in 'gangs' actually saw themselves as being involved or indeed as 'gangsters'. As one participant put it in an interview, "ave never looked at it, 'ave never looked as like bein' in a gang" (Participant 9). This is despite also explaining how he had served custodial sentences for drug dealing, becoming involved in violent altercations as reprisal for friends being hurt by others and listing his best friends as people who have stolen

vast quantities of drugs from other groups; all of which fitting under populist and media representations of what a 'gang' is¹.

Similarly, in another ethnographic site during a discussion with a small group of young men, one informant explained "there aren't no gangs 'round 'ere"; when I pressed the statement asking if people dealt drugs around there the young man replied "yes". I then asked what happens if the dealers are part of a group that work together, to which he explained, "Yeh drugs, but people work for themselves now, there's just main people who they get it off and they sell it on their own." I pressed on and asked if it is like a franchise to which he replied "Yeh". As the conversation developed I asked as there are no longer gangs if it is O.K. to go to other areas, the response seemed contradictory in that he explained that "Yeh, but if someone sees you and they know you're not from there they'll start". This was also resonant when I asked if people from other areas could "just come around here?" as the answer was that they could not as "some people are reppin' their area where they're from and want to make a name for themselves." The irony here was twofold. Not only within the contradictions of the conversation, but also throughout the latter part of the conversation another member of the group of which the informant was a part was talking to another friend about two newcomers and how he was going to beat up "the big guy there yo, he'd better shut his mouth; I swear a'm gonna smash his 'ed in".

The issue of participants not perceiving themselves as being involved in 'gangs', from participants and prospective participants was repeated to me over and over again. With a common thread of describing how things had changed from how they used to be where people accepted 'gang' brand names, one participant summed this up by explaining that "people don't bang like they used to", meaning that groups that were described as 'gangs' operate in a completely different way to how they used to. This new way, ironically, being a reflection of neoliberal economics in that the 'gangs' of *yesterday* with localised brand names who had previously operated like major corporate firms their employing staff whom had a loyalty to the brand and its perceived power. This, apparently, had moved to the 'gang' becoming almost a franchise system where lots of entrepreneurs can buy into the market and be

¹ This article, nor the research it comes from intend to participate in the debates around definitions of 'gangs'. Instead, as the starting point this paper draws on populist understandings and representation as presented through popular media.

supplied with appropriate products, but with all of the risk sitting with those at the lowest end of the labour market (the franchisees, their small teams of casual employees, associates and supporters). Participant 1 and others summarised this in utilising descriptive terms to describe the local 'gang' economy such as 'supermarket' or describing specific spaces linked with the groups as being 'like Marks and Spencer's'; they were describing a neoliberal free-market economy, not the stereotypical pride and allegiance orientated economy depicted in the popular media. Although there were clear rivalries amongst the myriad of groups and entrepreneurial factions, participants and local observations demonstrated that overt violence between the groups was outdated except in the most extreme circumstances. Any intergroup violence was based on impasses relating to money rather than group pride or identity.

Although this *new* system or at least appearance of groups more commonly known as 'gangs' is evident within the present research, it is at the same time, perhaps, an *old* perspective, reflective of other groups that have been described as 'gangs' by law enforcement agencies and the media such as football hooligan groups and Outlaw Motorcycle Clubs. With examples such as Outlaw Motorcycle Clubs preferring descriptors such as *voluntary social pariahs* and other similar terms, as the groups would never consider themselves to be a 'gang'. During the fieldwork, this approach proved to be a sound one as it helped dismantle the pre-framing that takes place in the use of the highly problematic and in some cases insulting word 'gang'.

This point begins the focus of the present article in that the traditional axioms of what precarity *is*, appears to yield a set of reflections, in particular inverted and internal reflections that become apparent in considering the effects of parallax on perceived multiples. In short, this means (following Badiou's set theory and Zizek's concept of parallax) that the multiple is actually the one, in that each, the legitimate mainstream and alternative *outlawed* economic and cultural modes are at the same time different and the same. Different when viewed from one angle or the other, yet the same when viewed through the parallax lens, in that from two different stance points the same object is perceived differently, yet is still the one (same) object. Likewise in reflection, the perceiver is already inscribed into the perceived or in Lacanian terms 'the subjects gaze is always already inscribed into the perceived object itself, in the guise of its "blind spot"' (Zizek, 2009: 17 The article does not intend, nor could it try

to follow the existing range of lineage of what precarity is, as the lived experiences as demonstrated later in the article are precarious in many ways and therefore follow each and none of this range. These forms of precarity, the paper will argue, are multiple, yet the same and both subtle and supple, as opposed to simple and rigid.

Note on Methods

The present article draws on semi-structured interviews, informal conversations and ethnographic observations that took place whilst I was hanging around in a range of social spaces occupied by groups commonly described as 'gangs'. By 'hanging around' I mean spending significant time building relationships and trust with people in the field and living (as much as possible) in their worlds in order to not merely generate 'good stories' (Sugden, 1996: 211) but more to the point to explore emerging and hidden lived experiences and realities with them (ibid).

Simultaneously, *hanging around or hanging out*, in this ethnographic context, refers to the contemporary phrase of spending time with others. In this sense I was the ethnographic tag along, attempting to network within a framework of (hyper) masculine identity based spaces as described by Woodward (2008) in various sites with various people during the fieldwork. The research took place across four key locations including a heavy weights gymnasium, boxing gymnasium, youth centres and a public house. These sites being both micro multi-site and multi-local (Hannerz, 2003) as the interrelations within and across the sites were equi-significant (op cit).

However, despite a seemingly straightforward ethnographic approach within the research, there is another precarity, one which doubles back on the precarities of which it speaks in a torsional motion. This being a precarity that reaches outside of the research participants; this being the precarity of the researcher. In a number of research sites I have occupied the position of both outsider (as a researcher) and insider (cf. Wakeman, 2014) as a person who has a lifelong relationship with a geographic area that holds a lot of similar characteristics as some of those within the research. Having been born, grown up and living for the majority of my life in such a similar environment I have an intimate knowledge of the types of space and very same cultures of the estates (cf. Winlow et al, 2001). None of the research participants were aware of this; they perceived me as a researcher that I presented

myself as. At the same time as me being the researcher and different, I am as much the same in relation to the place and life course experiences; both alien and native (Shapira, 2015). at the same time as being inescapably positioned as the one I am also inescapably the other. Precarious in my engagement with precarity in the research and reflecting the reflections of the reflected (this notion of reflecting the reflections of the reflected will be discussed in more detail below). So in attempting to learn new knowledge in the research process, I am already the *multitude* that I am researching, but perhaps reflecting the questions that education (the academy) thinks should be the questions: in my academic precarity reflecting my own reflections back to the precariat of the precarious and simultaneously back to the precariat of the secure?

Questioning Precarity?

Much has been commented on in relation to precarity of the urban poor in relation to labour markets (cf. Standing, 2011), economic positioning, (Standing, 2011, also compare Venkatesh, 2006), displacement by dispossession in housing markets (cf. McLeod and Johnstone, 2012: 4) and polarised 'seclusion' (Wacquant, 2010: 165) through the '... 'creaming' [off] of the materially stable households ...' (Wacquant, 2010: 172). This latter point being through governmental policy aimed at ramping up home ownership and shifting away from social housing, leaving an impoverished and economically homogenous population as the only people tenable to what may already be perceived as no-go zones (op cit). Mounting up to a point of perceived (op cit) ghettoization (cf. Wacquant, 2010) and underground economies (Venkatesh, 2006).

These are all spatiotemporally bound interpretations of precarity and are 'imposed by global events or macrostructures.' (Ettlinger, 2007: 320). Fundamentally, this is problematic in some ways as although the issues of labour market and work precarity, polarised seclusion, underground economies, perceived ghettoization and or gentrification are all applicable to the geographic areas in which the research sites were situated, the underlying conditions of instability and uncertainty (Waite, 2009: 416) are eclipsed. This eclipse means that other versions of precarity are overlooked. Far less has been considered in relation to specific identity groups (such

as groups that are typically described in the media and political discourse as ‘gangs’) and precarity. With little attention given to ideas of precarity of such groups as an inability to parallel mainstream discourses of security (economic and emotional) on the one side and the abstracted mirrored image of mainstream groups and discourse on the other. For the former (inability to parallel mainstream discourses of security) the similarity with the existing literature is clear in that people living in poverty may strive to parallel their identity through emotional and economic manoeuvres with those of the apparently ‘secure’ classes through imagery of wealth and alternative demonstrations of power. The imagery of wealth manifesting in many ways. From young people in deprived neighbourhoods wearing luxury brand name clothing through to the paradox of reality television shows such as *The Only Way Is Essex* portraying the broad and distinctly working class Essex accent of the shows stars juxtaposed with their lifestyles of designer clothing, Rolex watches, drinking Dom Perignon and driving luxury cars. Generally most people will not either be in a position to become a reality television series star or know how to become one, there are options for gaining the imagery of such a position. Which of course the reality television stars themselves are seizing their own options for gaining the imagery of those who occupy more ‘secure’ positions than they do (cf. Skeggs, 2009 for instance). The options for gaining this imagery, which are always already incapable of fulfilment may only be imagined as possible through occasional or full-time work in alternative economies based around control of the given economy through means of violence. With this control generated and perpetuated through clear identity group cultures (such as those more commonly described as ‘gang’ cultures).

Space as Positional Precarity (first, second, third? The One)

In the course of the fieldwork, several issues came to the fore, which forced consideration of new ways of thinking about the term *precarity*. One example is sketched out in the instability and uncertainty that is found in the problematic use of the term ‘gang’, as outlined above. Other examples follow below, with each, the theme is the same: groups and individuals occupy *positional* spaces, which are at the same time uncertain and unstable, as well as reflecting positional spaces that are commonly perceived to be ‘secure’. Yet, which of these is applicable shifts

depending upon the viewpoint; an interstitial phantom of positional space is always looming. However, what of this interstitial space? Where has this been discussed in the existing literature in relation to precarity? Thus far, other than focusing on the concerns mentioned above, the precarity literature has predominantly taken a macro approach (for instance Ettliger, 2007: 320). Generally this literature has omitted any regard for the possibility of precarity being a concept that may also sit in the micro (op cit). Moreover, precarity may also sit in the meso-spaces of the everyday. The mundane and extraordinary spaces; meso-spaces of groups who are presented as occupying one social and imagined space, yet at the same time reflect the position of the imagined and social space of the presenter. Occupation of such meso-spaces could be described through the allegory of Borges' short story 'The Circle of Ruins'. In this story Borges depicts a mystic who over a period of time creates another person through a dream. The created person (the dreamed) not being fully conscious of the creator and the creator apparently fully conscious of their and the created positional space. Yet, at the end of the story Borges reveals that in the same way that the created person was not conscious of their position as the created, nor was the creator, who it is exposed as too being merely the creation of another beyond their own consciousness. Thus the creator is too the created. They appear to occupy one space, yet at the same time occupy another. The dreamer is the dreamed, who dreamed another and as such is occupying the same meso-space as the one, which they have dreamed. They are both and one at the same time.

Precarity according to the existing literature on the whole leans heavily in the direction of precarity of people firstly and foremost and spans across space in a normative global sense, with the precariat's space (wherever that may be) being pre-fixed as an axiomatic imagined place; a place outside of and beyond the imaginer. However, this literature is limiting in several ways. Firstly that it does not take into account notions of precarity as an imagined and physical space, a space that only constitutes place insofar as the places occupied at any given fleeting moment of perception or target of what precarity may mean, a space that is neither one nor the other, but is instead the 'One' (Zizek, 2009a: 36 - 38). The One being precarious in that it is consistently perceived as being divisional in poles of opposites (ibid), which actually eliminates a true position of precarity in that security is found at either pole. Whereas in the non-divisional space of the One, true precarity exists in the

perceptual omission of the One through the eternal return (perceptually) to the divisional poles in that the precarious positionality teeters in the balance by its absence and existence. This theoretical direction came to be of most importance, not only in consideration of positional space, but also in relation to perceptual space. This line of theory engaged with the stark difference between how, for instance, the gym users (within the gymnasium I spent a year hanging around) view the space of the gym as being a safe space and one of camaraderie and you would “never see no trouble” (Participant 1). Yet for the police this is a space that is perceived to be problematic enough to be worth placing a listening device in the (now defunct drinks machine); this being a topic that came up amongst the owner, his colleagues and some regulars from time to time, especially when the topic of undercover or corrupt police came up. Secondly, the imagined space of precarity is only so insofar as perceived positions of either or remain constant, yet never part of the whole and the same, although always reflecting back into itself via the perceived poles, remaining the One.

This being similar to what Matza (1964: 28 quoted in Winlow, 1999: 51) describes as ‘transiently [existing] in limbo between convention and crime’; many of the people I have spent time with during my ethnographic work occupy this parallax space (cf. Zizek: 2009a). A space both interstitial to convention and crime, yet at the same time reflecting both convention and crime. Again juxtaposed to this are elements of the ‘secure’ classes who are easily identified as ‘conventional’ yet at the same time reflect the criminal and in the reflection of criminality therefore occupy the interstitial space between ‘convention and crime’, which is precarious in its space of in-between and of the One. Once more, the concern of these perceived divisional aspects come into question. I will begin by illuminating this with some examples from the fieldwork. Before doing so it is essential to recognise that in some ways all of the ‘stories’ from the field in ethnographic encounters are to greater or lesser degrees ‘stories’. In considering this, it is important to point out not just the general manner and circumstances of these encounters, but also unrehearsed appearance and seemingly bouncing and incoherent nature of them frequently moving from one topic to another without link. This raises the question of whether and to what extent this incoherence can be accepted as an authentic ‘story’ (Douglas, 2010: 54). In Douglas (2010) this is described as a potential sign that the speech is somehow legitimised.

Likewise the issue of the 'story', is reflected in the ethnographers position; of course we too are telling 'stories', in particular where the subject themes, like those featured here, fall into a general and popularly 'titillating' category (cf. Van Maanen, 1988: 31). Although, many of the informants within this article are what Back (1956) described as 'well-informed informant[s]' (quoted in Van Maanen, 1988: 80), the level of attribution of these stories as *truths* is only heightened through the triangulated considerations of stories being told in the presence of others (for instance in the space of the gym people do not want to lose face by exaggerating or making things up), along with conformational stories being told within discussions. That said, there is still the outstanding issue that on the one hand the stories could be performances for the entertainment of the ethnographer, yet could also be projections of what the informant thinks is 'important', the manifestation of the social norms of the ethnographic site (Agar, 2008: 159 – 160) and or a version of lived reality. This of course is in keeping with Lacanian understandings of language itself being beyond the absolute control of the subject, with language failing and always already subjugating the subject.

The following vignettes follow a case study drawn from the time I spent during the ethnography within one of the gymnasiums. Primarily these focus on the stories of Participant 1.

The Threat

Whilst hanging around in the heavy weights gym with a participant who may be described as having previously been involved in a group culture that would typically be described as an organised crime group (as well as others who still are involved in such groups). The participant told me in conversation about how at the height of his career within that culture he was called in for a meeting with a senior police officer who was (allegedly) *on the payroll*. During the meeting the police officer told the participant that he could have him killed if he wanted and no one would give it a

second thought as it would just be another tough guy who got himself into trouble with his peers in 'gangland' and got shot with a "dirty gun" .²

Whilst this 'story' sounds the stuff of blockbuster gangster films or hit television series and therefore sounding like a work of fiction in itself, other considerations must be taken into account in how this story could be interpreted. Firstly, the story came about from what seemed like nowhere. The participant in question and I were sat reading newspapers and drinking coffee when upon the participant reading an article that jogged his memory (which I cannot go into the details of as the article relates in such a way that it would bring out identifying features), the memory stirred the retelling of the story. Secondly, in the midst of the story the participant's tone and body language changed and he began to speak in terms of defence and fear, explaining that he had spoken with his partner about the eventuality of anything ever happening to him (even today). Thirdly, on several occasions various regulars in the gym spoke openly about alleged police corruption including various sets of data being leaked, which would be of considerable value to organised crime groups. Again the latter could potentially be a story telling performance, but for who? Not me in the latter case as two of the people in these conversations were always very cautious around me and took care as to only engage in conversation with me out of politeness and then only at a very superficial level of "How're you doin'?"

As a potential audience I received mixed receptions ranging from the 'gang' leader who everyone else described as such, yet when I was introduced to him and the participant who was introducing us explained that my research was "on gangs", he instantly said "I'm not in a gang mate" and let go from shaking my hand. The participant who introduced us may as well have said "This is [Author], he has got leprosy"³ as the change in facial expression, body language and speed of withdrawal from the handshake all spoke volumes about his distaste and suspicion of what this might mean. On other occasions, the same man came and stood next to me looking down on me while I was training in the heavyweights area of the gym, he didn't say anything, just looking down at me. What was he saying to me in this silent stare? I do

² Referring to a gun that has been used before in many varied crimes and therefore meaning that it is highly likely that it has been used by many people either rented or owned.

³ The sensory and emotive aspects of this encounter are described in this way and framed by the analogy of leprosy in order to try to instil an emotive response in the reader. It intends to jar upon reading in the same way that the feeling in the encounter was emotive and jarred in the moment.

not really know, but I do know that it felt very intimidating, which is one possible answer. In other cases, trust developed over time with people testing out milder, less challenging stories on me.

Going back to the not so veiled threat, this demonstrates both the precarity of the position of the participant living under the potential threat of both his peers and those in official positions; for the latter the threat divides again into the official threat to the participant's livelihood at that time and the unconventional threat of the official. Both threats in the perceived division are actually one in the same, both are a threat which reflects back into itself. Both parties seem to have learnt in the process of becoming, the same lesson that the threat can pay. Although both parties are viewed from different stances and appear different, the parallax filter of this 'story' seems to demonstrate that the perceiver, is as Lacan would have it, is inscribed onto the perceived (in both directions) - both occupying the positional space of 'convention and crime'.

Remembering the Door

During another conversation a participant explained that at a "certain level you never really give back the key" indicating that it is difficult to fully be detached from the culture in which the person was involved. He went on to give a personal example of going past a pub after an evening out with his wife and seeing an old associate working on the door of the pub. Stopping to say hello his old associate invited him in for a drink after briefly chatting about old times. The participant described feeling an allure to the nostalgia and the associated lifestyle, but he declined the offer as he could tell that his wife did not want to go in and his feeling of allure was only short lived as he quickly remembered the stress and unpredictability.

In the same conversation whilst I was spending time at the gym another story followed which emphasised these points. This story began similar to the last in that Participant 1 bumped into an old associate who had been involved in some his previous 'adventures'; the old associate was a notorious member of a well-known 'crime' family. Following a brief chat about old times, the old associate invited the participant and his wife around for a meal to meet his new girlfriend, which he agreed

to do. On the evening of the meal the participant and his wife arrived at the home of his old associate to find his girlfriend distraught because her boyfriend had had a telephone call minutes earlier for something that he needed to 'deal with'; "so he had had a load of coke and was bouncing around the place" getting ready to go and do what he needed to do. The participant explained that he assured the man's girlfriend that he understood and not to be worried (embarrassed) and that he knew that things could change with one telephone call, and then promptly left making their excuses.

Again, the precarity herein is one of convention and crime. Not only is this precarity clear in the two paragraphs above, but is also emphasised in the participant explaining that had he stuck around in either of the two cases, in particular the latter of the two, he could and most probably would have been swept back into a world he had physically he had left behind.

The following example of precarity demonstrates another slant on precariousness in learning how to be within outsider outsider identity group cultures and what is expected. This example is one of precarity between perception of being able to and expected to be able to do 'gangster things' (sic) and not knowing how to do 'gangster things'.

Participant 1 had been telling me a story about how early on in his career within group cultures, he was working on a nightclub door and had thrown an ex-marine out. The ex-marine later in the week following the incident sent a message that he was going to come back and "do the big one", referring to Participant 1. Having asked around to establish the validity of this threat, Participant 1 had found out that the ex-marine was known to have mental health issues and had a military background specialising in explosives. When Participant 1 mentioned this to his boss, his boss asked if he could "get a piece"⁴, to which Participant 1 said "yeh, if I put my mind to it". Participant 1's boss advised him to get a gun and bring it to the nightclub the next week just in case. Participant 1 explained he made some enquiries through his networks and the next week brought along the gun that he had borrowed, which he said was "massive, it was like the Dirty Harry gun" whilst gesturing at the size of it with hand movements. He went on to explain that he had never even handled a gun until that point and he was not even really sure how to use

⁴ A 'piece' being slang for gun.

it saying “I didn’t know if you had to pull it back like in the cowboy films or what”, referring to the hammer, and a making the hand gestures to illustrate his point. Participant 1 also described how uncomfortable it was stood with the weapon down the back of his pants for the duration of the night. The story went on to its conclusion that the threat turned out to be empty and the person in question did not go to the nightclub to carry out is threat.

Within this story Participant 1 is describing a torsional event in which his position as a doorman associated with a company, individuals and groups that had reputations for protecting their interests (including, cyclically, reputations) with violence necessitated the enactment of potential for violence in order to maintain the reputation for violence. Effectively this was the protection of the interest of reputation that protects the wider interests of the group through the means of projecting an associated identity and act(ion)s. Within which he had found himself fall into a situation where he was expected to protect himself and associated interests. Not only this, but to protect those interests in a manner that was deemed to be conducive to the wider groups way of being. This being the precarity of not knowing how to enact the very act which in this situation was essential to *being* within the wider group and set of accepted ways (group cultural norms) of being; to be clear, he did not know how to discharge the gun and did not want to ask either. In effect had he had to have discharged the gun, the learning would have been on a trial and error basis in the moment, although there was a prior learning that he was expected to know where to get a gun from and expected to know what to do with it once he had it. Here the precarity is based on expectations and knowledge; the participant was expected to know, but did not really know and at the same time wanted to maintain the illusion of knowledge until such a point that he had gained the knowledge through the trial of the event.

Two equals one: the precarity of the two and the one

The next example comes from a story about how at another venue later on in his career Participant 1 had been informed that a far more serious threat (than the one described above) had been made against his life, one that was far more likely. This time with a less conspicuous firearm, and having learned from previous experiences,

rather than take the risk of keeping a firearm about his person he came up with a plan to have his wife hold the firearm whilst waiting around the corner from the nightclub door in a car. Participant 1 had his wife's mobile number pre-dialled on his mobile telephone so he could ring her in an instant (only letting it ring once before putting it down) if he saw anything unusual happening during the evening, which he saw as a sign of the threat being carried out.

The plan was that at the point of his wife receiving the call and it ringing once she would drive around the corner to where he was stood, park the car in front of him (providing confusion and a temporary shield), get out and walk away (to a safe spot away from the building) leaving the car door open. The reason for this being that Participant 1 had made a concealed slide out compartment underneath a seat in the car that was just big enough to hold the weapon in. At the point of his wife walking away he could lean into the car pull out the compartment and take out the gun in order to counter or pre-empt the attack. Participant 1 briefly interrupted his description of the plan at this point to explain to me that this incident took place at a time when "mobile phones were massive" (referring to the size of them) again demonstrating with hand gestures depicting holding an imaginary phone with two hands. Participant 1 carried on with the story at the point he had left off prior to the digression. He described how everything was quiet, although he was on edge; then adding that all of a sudden his wife drove out in front of him, got out and walked away. Confused, he took the firearm from its concealed compartment and looked around to see where the threat was coming from. He could not see anything happening and waited, but still nothing. He explained that he thought that his wife "must have known somethin'" that he didn't, but as it turned out she didn't. What had happened was that whilst his telephone was in his coat pocket it must have triggered the dial button and rang his wife, who in turn had responded as arranged and was nervously anticipating the worst. Only for them both to find later that the other in both directions had mistook the signs that they had prearranged, without having double checking mechanism, nor probably the luxury of time to have a double checking mechanism.

What stands out in this story was not the potential of violence (which like the previous story did not actually come to fruition), but instead the actualisation of love irrespective of risk (cf. Badiou, 2012) or the morality of the situation Participant 1's wife was prepared to put herself in danger on several levels in order to ensure the wellbeing or safety of her husband. This certainly was not 'Safety-first love' (Badiou, 2012: 9), yet it was precarious in the act of trying to mitigate risk (through the plan and experiential learning process) through an act of (perceived) risk (love). The following aspect of precarity to this being the precarity of the participant's wife who also, in this act, occupies a space between convention and crime; in being conventional and carrying out the act of risk, love is also being criminal and may easily be perceived as one or the other at any given point in time and as perceived from a range of positions. However in this parallax position, the wife is neither one or the other, but both as one. Likewise, she is not, nor was not part of a group that would commonly be described by the press as a 'gang' like her husband was, but in the position of their love the two were one in perceiving the world as the same (Badiou, 2012: 25) through 'the paradox of an identical difference' (ibid) the one 'Subject of love that views the panorama of the world through the prism of [their] difference' (Badiou, 2012: 26). Or as the Spice Girls described it in their song '2 Become 1' (1996) as needing love more than they have ever needed love at any other point prior and that the instant in focus of the song is the night in which the two separate protagonists of the song will be-come whole as one entity. Reflecting the two being one of the convention (of love) and the crime (of carrying a concealed firearm); convention and crime here being one whole of the set of one in Badiouian terms.

Conclusion

Throughout the examples from the field sketched out above, there are several possibilities of precarity, which are each parallaxed through normative model dependant perspectives of the reality of the situation. None of the perspectives are any more real than the other, just as none of the positional spaces occupied are more different than they are the same. Perceptually different and polar, yet occupying the parallax third space in the lived experience as always already one.

From the internal reflections of 'gang' labelling and the accepted learning and associated stories of what is inside and outside or 'good' and 'bad', through the rebounded images of security and insecurity, the perceptual viewpoints simultaneously multiply as precarity and in the same space and time are non-divisional as one via the medium of the third space parallax. For example in the story of the alleged police threat to a person who at one time controlled their livelihood under the same threat of potential violence as was being used against them, which in itself is a kind of precarity of being and the associated 'good' or 'bad' of the respective learning processes. Yet this precarity can be contrasted with another, this being the potential for those who have left or become peripheral to groups such as those discussed here may at any given moment easily become involved again. This was spelled out by Participant 1 and Participant 9 respectively:

“the pitfall that I now need to avoid is bein’ called back into that type of activity, which is just too easy. I mean, I think a phone call, somethin’ as simple as a conversation can draw you back into that activity. Erm, an’, an’ th’is a feelin’ of helplessness about that so for me it’s about bein’ shrewd an’ on the ball an’ avoidin’ that phone call, avoidin’ that level of conversation where a’ could be pulled back in.” (Participant 1)

This is more than simply never being able to *give back the keys* as Participant 1 put it. It is more a sense of there being no key at all, instead being perpetually suspended in an open doorway. Positioned between real and imagined spaces of being, becoming and re-becoming. Participant 9 also explained how despite him repositioning himself in the realms the conventional mainstream, that he too would find himself at the borders of being (one thing or the other). He explained how he was asked by a friend who had stolen drugs from another group to get back involved in his previous activities that he had long since left behind:

“I was sayin’ a’ want nottin’ to do with it. He was sayin’ ‘*Flip some of ‘em an y’ can make money off it*’, an’ I was sayin’ ‘*a’ want nottin’ whatsoever to do with it*’. ‘Cos a’ knew the outcome [...].” (Participant 9)

For the precarity of leadership specifically from the reverse and conventional perspective, the 'secure' classes inclusive of those in official positions are perceived in some way as leaders, but as has been questioned by participants "[...] who are the real leaders [?]" and in answer I have been told that the leaders "are the people who don't get their cars broken into" (Participant 1). Again, the precarity of identity shines through in that the 'leaders' are the leaders, yet at the same time they are not; with the reverse of the powerless and led are the powerless and led, yet at the same time they are not: in effect the 'leaders' lead and follow in their lead and the led are led and lead in their being led.

This is resonant of not only Lacan and Borges, but also Zizek's proposal of the '... blind leading the blind, or, more precisely, the blind leading the blind ...' (Zizek, 2012: 89). This is evident in the example of those involved in what is typically described as 'gang' or 'OCG' designing a curriculum for educating security staff, which was subsequently adopted by the state. With the state ultimately rebounding this curriculum as the state educating those involved in the security industry; educating those who would typically be described as 'gang' or an 'OCG'. This precarity of the position of crime and convention is in a way two fold, demonstrating potential and reflecting back structural precarity, which for some may be a catalyst for creativity and seeking 'crimes of opportunity'. And the reflective loop goes on as a cycle of '... marginalized groups organizing for "mere life" (Holston, 1999, 2008 cited in Pine, 2010: 1117 also see Wacquant, 2010: 169-170) as precarious 'insurgent citizenship' (Holston, 1999, 2008 cited in Pine, 2010: 1117). Which brings us back to the starting point of the precarity of security and the security of precarity, in that the perceived precariat of the 'multitude' (may) have the answers but are not sure of the questions (Zizek, 2012: 89).

Likewise for those involved in groups commonly described as 'gangs' or OCG's there is an uncertainty of positionality in that both those inside and outside of the groups *know* the groups positionality, but do not know how they got there. This precarity multiplies again in that both insiders and outsiders to the groups 'know' their position, which positions the group as somewhere in-between. They exist in the parallax. The real and imagined third space, liminal to lived experience and hyper-real interpretation through a cycle of media presentation, public consumption and

replication of presentation. Like in Borges' 'Circular Ruins', the dreamer dreams the dreamer, yet is already being dreamed of themselves (by another).

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