

The Routine Activity (RAT) Notion of
Crime Opportunity is a Truism
Masquerading as Causality

***PROPOSING THE
QUESTION:***

**Should CPTED develop its own
clear and veracious model of
crime opportunity?**

Eyes on the Street

The Three Main Aims of this Paper:

- 1. To show: That the RAT notion of Crime Opportunity is absurd & to offer a veracious model.**
- 2. To seek out, examine, and cherish any disconfirming anomalies regarding the *Eyes on the Street hypothesis*.**
- 3. To ask: Should CPTED develop its**

Author of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*: Interview with Alan Sillitoe in **Nottingham**



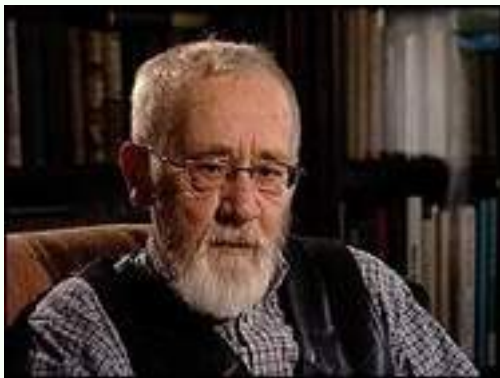
Alan Sillitoe in 1960's

Interviewer:

“Saturday Night and Sunday Morning is such a cult novel because it’s about fighting against the system, which seems increasingly difficult to do today. What can people do to stop the bastards grinding them down?”

Sillitoe

“You can’t do anything. You walk around and you’ve got cameras looking at you. Take a piss in the corner and they take a picture.”



Alan Sillitoe:
A freeman of Nottingham

But who is actually taking the piss?



<https://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/regions/manchester/2009/12/443796.html?c=4n>

So What is an Opportunity?

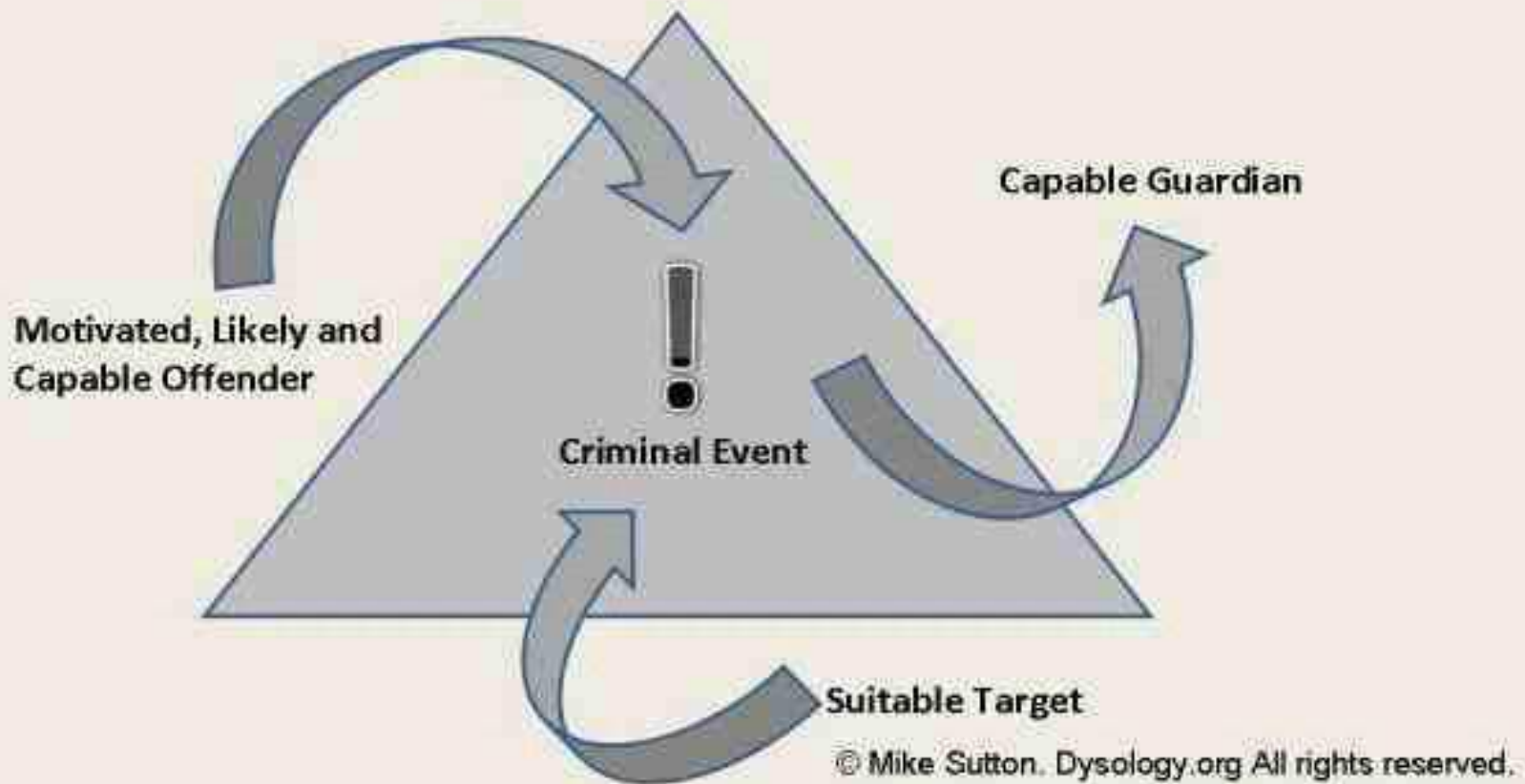
‘A favourable, appropriate or advantageous combination of circumstances.’

Dictionary definition (Collins English Dictionary 1986):

What is an Opportunity Again?

- An opportunity exists **before** it is either seized or rejected.
- Can an opportunity exist if you don't know about the 'favourable, appropriate or advantageous combination of circumstances? Arguably not. **For example:**
- Where crime is concerned, unless an offender knows about it, an open window is *a window of opportunity* for burglary only when a potential burglar knows about it. Until then, it's simply a *vulnerability* that is capable of being *perceived* as an opportunity. Because the burglar's knowledge of it is part of the *combination of circumstances* that is the opportunity.

The Routine Activity Theory Classic Basic Crime Triangle



**WE SHOULD DIG DEEPER TO REVEAL WHAT IS HIDDEN TO
PROVIDE CLARITY AND VERACITY ON WHAT HUMAN
OPPORTUNITY ACTUALLY IS**

Tilley and Laycock (2002) perceive the RAT notion of '**opportunity**' as inseparable from the **rewards** of successful offending. For crime:

'The most significant, and universal cause is, however, opportunity. If there were no opportunities there would be no crimes; the same cannot be said for any of the other contributory causes. In so far as **opportunity** creates criminality by **rewarding** those with low motivation with success in easily chosen and completed crime, it thus comprises a **root cause** - as one recent paper puts it, 'Opportunity makes the thief' (Felson and Clarke, 1998).'

Do **opportunities** *really* exist, in nature and culture, like the RAT model proposes they do, as solidly existing certainties (pre-‘rewards’), as if they were analogous to mountains or homes?



Success! And *Reward*.



Incapable guardianship against a successfully completed crime is **proven**, but is proven only ***after the*** target becomes a victim of the motivated and capable ***successful*** offender. For example, the wolf might have bust a lung or been shot by the little piggy before blowing the house down.

And so, the telling questions are:

- Does any offender actually *exist* as “pre-capable” **before** the successful **completion** of the crime?
- Does any offender actually *exist* as “pre-capable” of even getting so far as to commit an attempted crime in failing to overcome a target?



1

The aggravated burglary to steal a pig:
Motivated Offender Breaking in
What might possibly go wrong?



2

Potentially capable guardianship
before the break-in

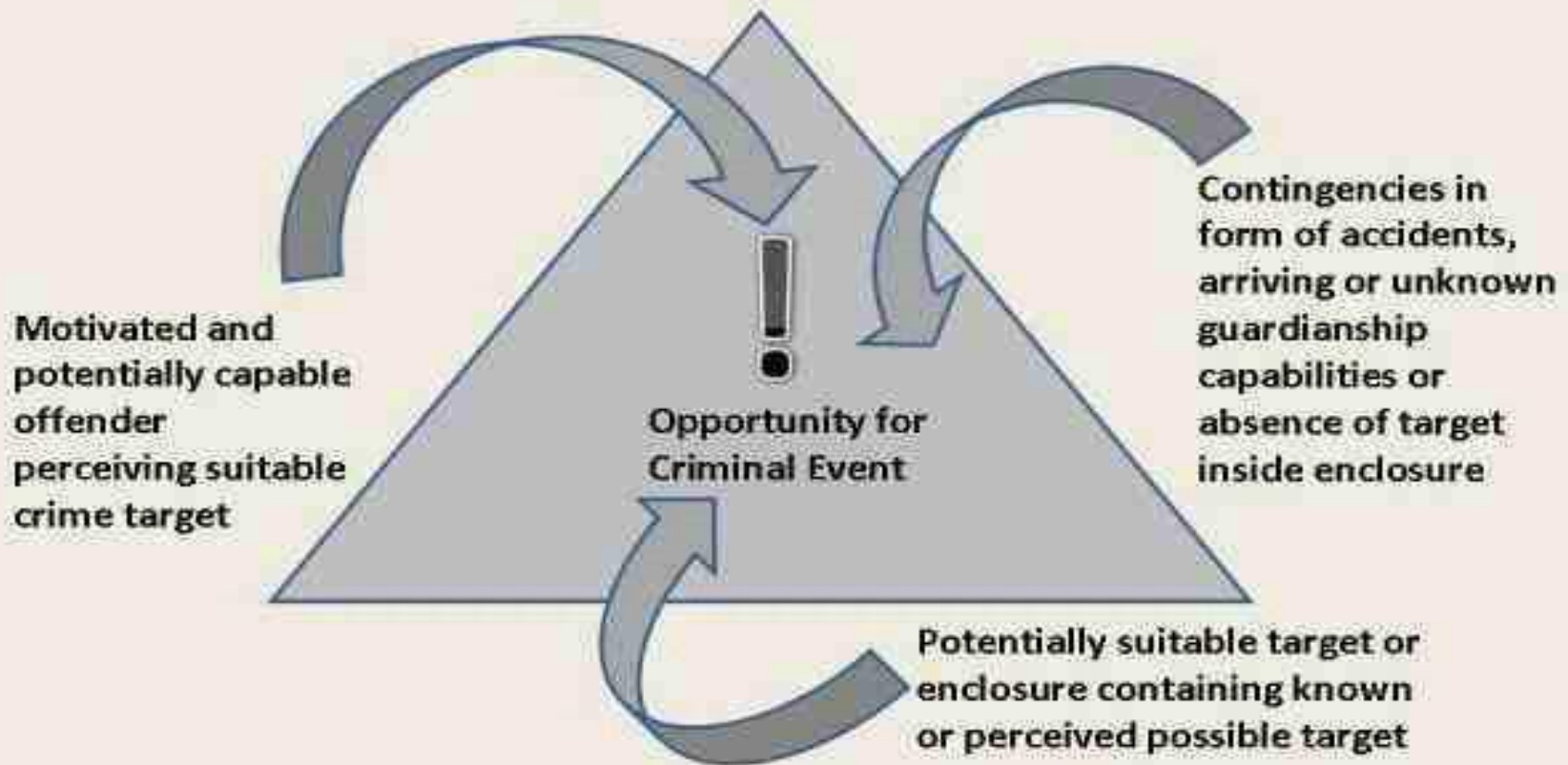


3

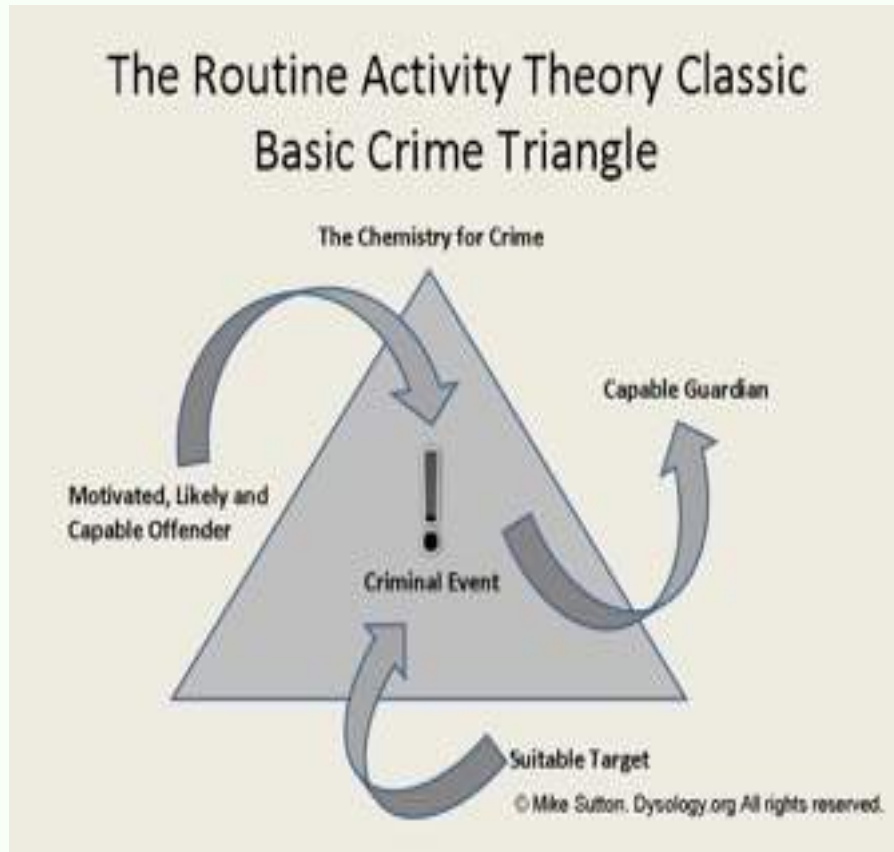
Capable guardianship known to exist but
is only known to exist **after** the failed
attempt

The Real Opportunity for Crime

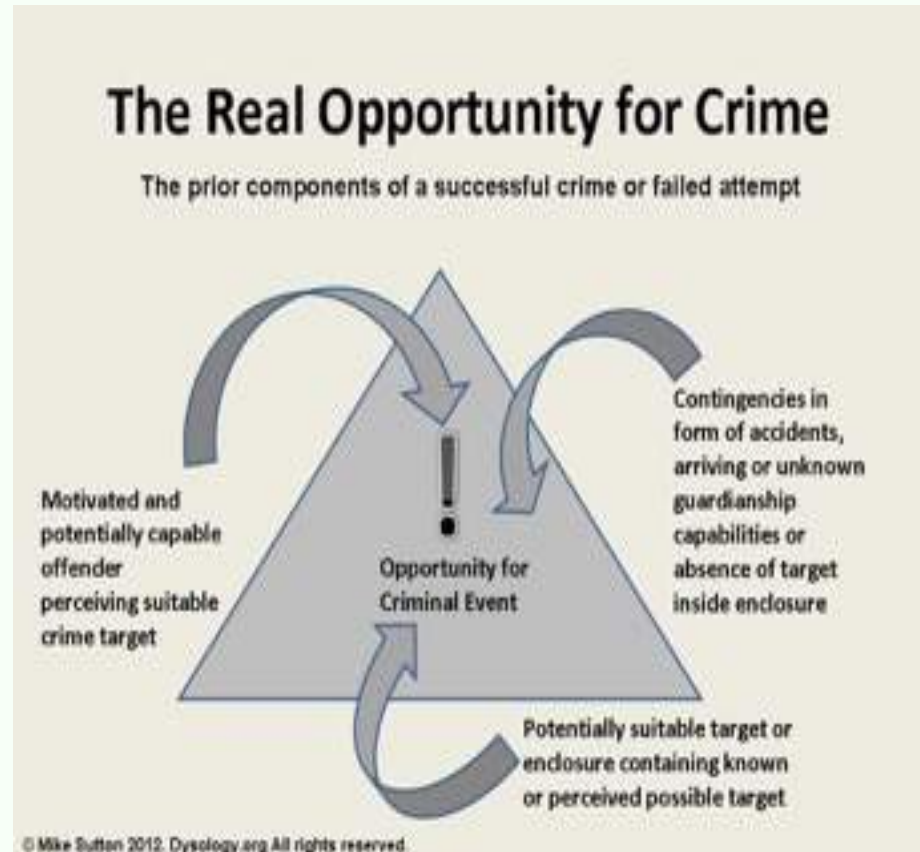
The prior components of a successful crime or failed attempt



The current model representing notion of crime opportunity is a mere truism



Not an opportunity, only an after the crime event **description.**



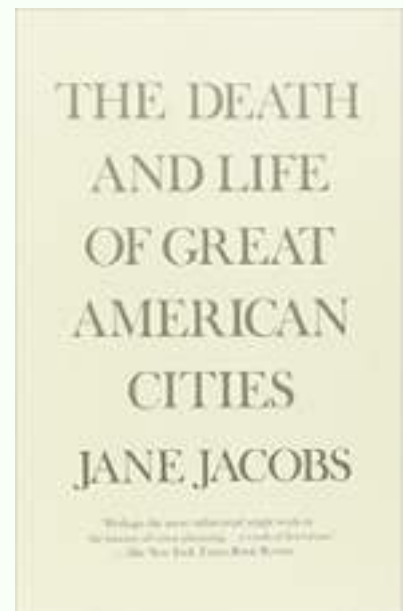
A veracious pre-crime event opportunity

“A city street equipped to handle strangers, and to make a safety asset, in itself, out of the presence of strangers, as the streets of successful city *neighborhoods* always do, must have three main qualities:

First, there must be a clear demarcation between what is public space and what is private space. Public and private spaces cannot ooze into each other as they do typically in suburban settings or in projects.

Second, there must be eyes upon the street, eyes belonging to those we might call the natural proprietors of the street. The buildings on a street equipped to handle strangers and to insure the safety of both residents and strangers, must be oriented to the street. They cannot turn their backs or blank sides on it and leave it blind.

And third, the sidewalk must have users on it fairly continuously, both to add to the number of effective eyes on the street and to induce the people in buildings along the street to watch the sidewalks in sufficient numbers. Nobody enjoys sitting on a stoop or looking out a window at an empty street. Almost nobody does such a thing. Large numbers of people entertain themselves, off and on, by watching street activity.”



**BUT
WHAT
ABOUT
EYES ON
A
CITY
CENTRE
STREET?**

There are, of course, many types of neighbourhood street



Many types of city centre street



The *context* of city centre streets:

Time as well as place.

There are, of course, many types of street and their character can change at night and day



Reality on the streets proves the worth of the old adage in science: “*Treasure your exceptions*”.

[William Bateson \(1908\)](#)







Think about it

- Opportunities exists ***before*** they are either seized or rejected. Hence, **opportunities** to even attempt to commit a crime, never mind for succeeding, **cannot** be mere post-hoc **descriptions** of completed crimes. Because before the crime is completed there are too many uncertainties that can materialise in the form of contingent events.
- In other words, the ***outcome*** of a crime – which is all the RAT model describes - cannot have *caused* itself to happen.
- Instead: Opportunities are (a) **offender perceptions**, (b) **guardian perceptions** and (c) may include **contingent** (unexpected or expected) **events** that are either favourable or unfavourable for the offender.

- So, logically, we need a **new paradigm** (model) of what a crime opportunity is, because the current one is built on the absurd punctured myth that *all successfully completed crimes caused themselves to happen. And that all attempted (thwarted and otherwise failed) crimes did the same and that what happened later is the opportunity for it to happen pre-crime event.*
- **The current RAT Crime Opportunity Model, therefore, is an absurdity because it is a simple truism masquerading as a complex causality**

OPPORTUNITY IS CONTINGENT

Opportunities are subject to unexpected, or even suspected, contingencies



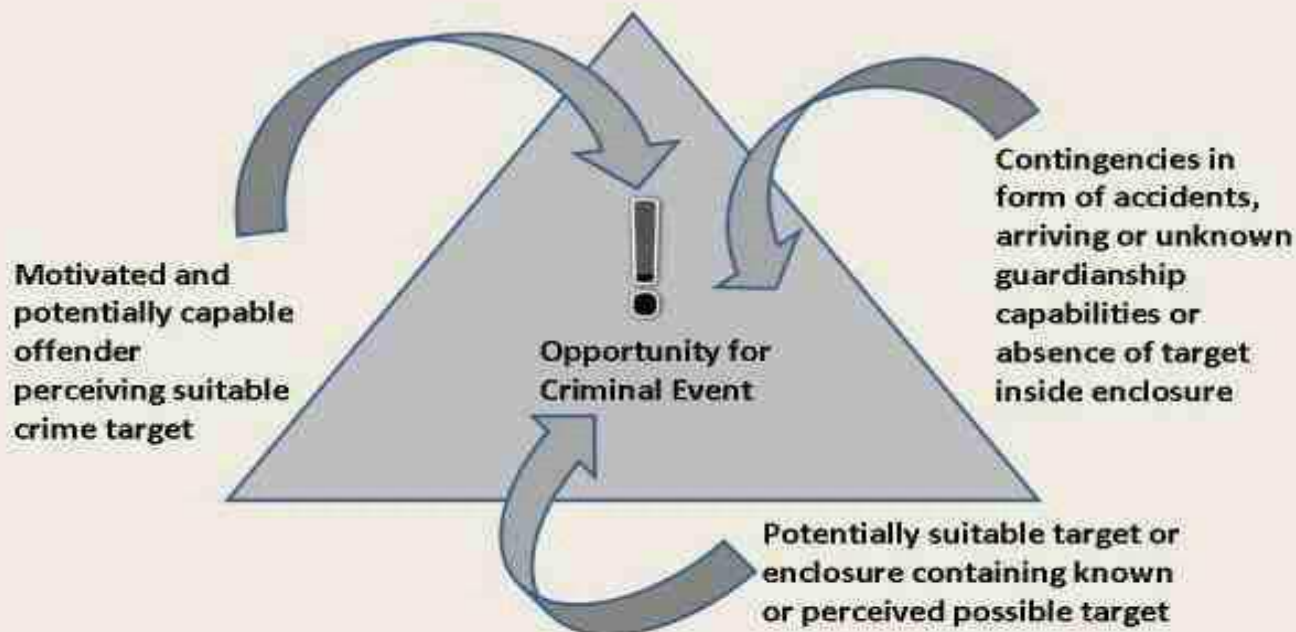
Absolutely, yes!

Should CPTED develop its own clear and veracious model of crime

Might this help CPTED theorists and practitioners?

The Real Opportunity for Crime

The prior components of a successful crime or failed attempt



How Might a Perception/Contingent Model of Crime Opportunity aid CPTED?

**Design-in protective
*'perception facilitators'***

- **Potential offender perceptions.**
- **Potential guardian perceptions.**

And

- **Increase likelihood of *'protective contingent events'*.**
- **Decrease the likelihood of offence-facilitating contingencies.**