

Chapter Seven

Conclusion: Approaching the Reality of Our Times

The context of this criminological reality is global capitalism in a condition of permanent intensifying crisis and insecurity. The basis of the crisis is a human-made consequential reality, and the attempts made by left-liberal intellectuals to explain all representations of the crisis as products of the *politics of fear* are becoming increasingly implausible and counter-productive. Of course some are, and carefully distinguishing between real consequences and ideological exaggerations is one of ultra-realist criminology's most important tasks; for instance, into which category does the recent BBC child-abuse revelations or reports of the new cyber-market in fake prescription drugs fit? However, underneath all this, the very real process of global resource depletion means that, even in the recently dynamic BRIC nations, the underlying growth in the real economy required to tempt investors to invest and banks to create money as debt-generated capital is entering a period of slowdown and eventual decline. The principal strategies for restoring growth from the long recession that appeared in the 1970s were the reversal of the global flows of trade and capital and the creation of abstract financial markets (Varoufakis, 2011). The explosions of personal debt and crime during the socially destructive deindustrialisation process in the West and the fall of communism in the East, the resultant massive increase in securitisation and imprisonment, and the austerity cuts and immiseration of the poor that followed the recent financial crash, were examples of the failure of these methods to compensate for the shortfall in real growth (Horsley, 2015). Permanent slowdown means that a large proportion of the global population will find it increasingly difficult to find meaningful and legal economic participation and livelihoods.

But hold on a minute. Despite all these problems, which should have caused huge increases in crime and social unrest, isn't crime declining internationally, isn't social unrest sporadic at best, isn't violence at an all-time historical low, and isn't liberal-capitalism the least worst of all possible systems currently leading us into a better and more sociable future? In our brief look at the *pseudo-pacification process* we have already seen how physical violence and social unrest are temporarily suspended in the dynamic realm of sublimated sociosymbolic competition, with its fragile promise of constantly increasing opportunities to achieve personal wealth and social status. Besides, although the pseudo-pacification process does seem to have reduced physical violence in the public sphere, a significant amount of residual violence, bullying and intimidation – especially the abuse of women (DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz, 2014) and children (Radford et al. 2011) – continues in hidden private spaces. The 'crime decline' thesis is not at all watertight. It is more likely that today's empirical research in criminology, confined to the phenomenological dimension of perceptions and observable events, is focused on standard volume crimes that are sinking into obsolescence (Kotze and Temple, 2014). If we are indeed largely restricted to measuring obsolescence, it looks likely that the criminological canon – inclusive of its mainstream and quasi-radical dimensions – is entering a historical phase in which most of its data, methods, theories and underlying assumptions are also becoming obsolete.

However, we cannot simply dismiss the crime-decline argument. Some traditional crimes such as vehicle theft and burglary are certainly declining in reality quite markedly (Van Dijk et al., 2007), but whether the underlying reasons for these declines indicate any real and generalisable progress in the liberal-capitalist way of life is another question. The whole business of producing crime data and constructing an empirical basis for criminological

theory is shot through with problems. We have already seen that empiricism gives us a highly restricted perspective on the world, but the general philosophical problem is exacerbated by numerous technical flaws specific and intrinsic to mainstream criminological research.

Although some argue that crime surveys are of some limited use (DeKeseredy, forthcoming), others argue that they are bedevilled by methodological flaws that often seem insurmountable (Young, 2004).

Many of the crime types capable of being ‘measured’ by the static instrument of the crime victimisation survey are certainly moving into obsolescence (Farrell et al., 2010). The big crime victimisation surveys are restricted to the countries of the old industrialised West, which are historically heavy on welfare and securitisation and regulated by sophisticated rhizomatic criminal justice systems. Their consumer-service economies are replete with myriad imported commodities and lurid forms of entertainment that are either cheap or free, a situation that renders many acquisitive and expressive crimes – such as burglary, theft of electronic goods, twoc’ing or voyeuristic sexual harassment – irrational and redundant, simply not worth the effort and the risk. The surveys cover only a small number of countries, and they suffer from small, inconsistent samples, low response rates and the failure to penetrate low-income high-crime locales where criminal markets are most active and ‘victimless crimes’ most numerous. The surveys also suffer from systematic undercounting, and they are restricted to capturing events only as experiential phenomena (Currie, 2009). At the outset they are hampered by poor conceptualisation of their objects of study, which are largely restricted to legal definitions of increasingly obsolete forms of crime. Invisible and significantly harmful crimes such as domestic violence, harassment and intimidation are consistently underrepresented (Pakes, 2012).

The crime decline mirrors the crime explosion in the 1980s and early 1990s insofar as it is unequal in terms of its social and spatial differentiations (Dorling, 2004; Parker, 2008).

‘Street crime’ tends to be concentrated in impoverished locales, while ‘suite crime’ is largely hidden by the numerous methods of concealment available to wealthy and powerful individuals. The unknown dark figure of crime, combined with the localisation of ‘street crime’, renders regional and national statistics virtually meaningless except as initial comparative indicators across time and space. Many crimes that some members of communities regard as victimless, and some indeed might regard as beneficial, yet inflict long-term harms on individuals and communities – such as tax evasion, organising sex work, distributing smuggled cigarettes and alcohol, dealing in illegal and prescription drugs, distributing stolen goods and working in the shadow-economy with no health and safety regulations – obviously do not appear on victimisation survey statistics (Kotze and Temple, 2014).

Any decline in specific volume crimes will make the overall figure appear to decline if it is not adequately differentiated, which of course allows political parties and indeed the liberal-capitalist system itself – which, as we have seen, is supported by a cross-party establishment of ‘capitalist realist’ politicians, academics and popular figures drawn from across the CCLA/LPSA spectrum – to use the ‘crime figures’ for general image-management purposes. The wild swing of the distortions between sets of causes is transparent: the liberal-right blame any apparent rise in crime rates on the moral failures of individuals and cultural groups, but when it appears to fall it is put down to good management of the economy and the restoration of the normal progress guaranteed by capitalism and liberal parliamentary democracy. When things look worse it’s down to the individual, when they look better it’s down to the system. The liberal-left, as official opposition, tend to reverse the formula, exonerating the individual

and blaming specific repairable aspects of the system. Both the dominant and subdominant political groups in their own ways separate the subject from the system, which means that in the main, as we have seen, we are denied sophisticated analyses of the system's ideological incorporation of the subject.

Ultra-realist criminology must transcend the restrictions placed on research and theorisation by the mainstream and the official opposition, without resorting to any easy and regressive move back to unreconstructed conservatism or Marxism. Where some might claim that the statistical 'crime decline' renders a move to ultra-realism unnecessary, the unreliability of the statistics, an understanding of the intrinsic fragility and corruption of the pseudo-pacification process, and the role of repression and seduction in the reduction of crime and violence, would suggest precisely the opposite. We have already briefly examined some of the *technical flaws* in the research process. A further brief examination of some of the main *socioeconomic factors* behind the differentiated statistical crime decline can show us quite clearly that they do not give us cause for incautious optimism.

Since the 1990s there has been a demographic shift in Western populations, which now comprise more old people and fewer young people. Thus we see an obvious reduction in the guileless, easily detectable crimes in which younger people tend to be involved. The polarised social inequality of the neoliberal era has divided society into highly securitised super-rich, rich and middle classes who are therefore far less vulnerable to crime, and a badly securitised poor, reliant on cheap consumer goods, who possess little of high value for criminals to steal and who are unlikely to report what they see as victimless crimes. However, the gargantuan private-public 'reflexive securitisation apparatus' (see Farrell et al. 2010), with its smarter policing, advanced target-hardening technology and practice, digital

surveillance systems, CCTV cameras, helicopters and so on, does to some extent benefit potential victims from all classes – albeit unevenly – because there are now fewer opportunities for traditional crimes. Smarter policing has probably reduced some volume crimes in reality, but it has also artificially reduced crime statistics by changing its practices of defining, acting against, recording and reporting incidents in order to meet performance targets (Guilfoyle, 2013). The recent revelations in the UK about many police services in high-crime areas asking victims to investigate their own crimes suggest to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary that many standard volume crimes are effectively being decriminalised (Travis, 2014). This indicates that the government is turning a blind eye towards a vast amount of everyday illegal economic activity, not simply because the police lack the resources to deal with it but because without it there would be further economic decline and social unrest.

Beneath the superficial empirical level, in the realms of the actual and the real, we have seen profound developments in the neoliberal era. We have seen the normalisation and sociocultural integration of 'hybridized' illegal and legal economic activities (see Palidda, 2013) in a shadow-economy that operates beneath the government's statistical radar. The precarious existence of workers is shored up by a huge and expensive infrastructure of welfare, social programmes, projects and schemes and, in a way that echoes Huxley's dystopian classic *Brave New World*, the distribution of prescription drugs to stave off the depression, anxiety and restlessness that has been afflicting individuals across the neoliberal era (Breggin, 2012). Technology and globalisation have accelerated the mutation of crime and criminal markets into innovative, hidden forms and the virtualisation of many commodities desired for an 'entertainment' lifestyle serviced by cheap drugs has pacified much criminal activity by driving it indoors and off the street (Aldridge et al., 2010).

Criminal markets are now sophisticated and competitive, riven by class divisions created on the back of the individual's relative success and failure in markets; a successful new proto-bourgeoisie drawn from all positions on the former social order dominates a defeated precariat. Many individuals are retreating from the social and political worlds into subjectivity (Winlow and Hall, 2013). Defeatism, emasculation, depressive hedonia, lack of skills and wherewithal, nihilism and lethargy drive an escape inwards, an absorption into the mass media spectacle. The world is awash with cheap, pirated or free virtual commodities such as movies, music, pornography, computer games, social media and so on, therefore many traditional *acquisitive* and *expressive* crimes – crimes committed for material gain or crimes committed to discharge libidinal energy or display positions of social domination and status – are no longer worth the risk or the effort. In a world awash with non-criminalised harms from tax-avoidance to the grinding effects of austerity and the intimidation of individuals by criminals and bullies on sink estates, criminology's refusal to approach the concept of harm is an abdication of intellectual duty (Pitts, 2008). Harm seems to be increasingly associated with despair and the retreat into subjectivity. Alongside the rise of mental health issues, the number of suicides in the USA is now greater than the number of homicides and the number of deaths by auto accidents (Bonn, 2014).

How do we approach the reality of our times? Our brief synopsis of the empirical and what we can glimpse of the underlying real reasons for the so-called 'crime decline' tells us quite clearly that most of the factors behind it cannot be assumed to be positive or progressive. Are we therefore compelled to be dystopian? In a recent book on what he calls 'realist criminology', Roger Matthews reminds us that '[c]riminology... has a long history of pessimism, impossibilism and dystopian images of the future (2014: 52). However,

pessimism, impossibilism and dystopian daydreaming are three very different terms, which, depending on how we interpret them, can be quite contradictory. Dystopian thinking, for instance, if it is in some way connected to a realistic appraisal of reality, can negate impossibilism and shake off pessimism to prevent the real arrival of dystopia and spur real social transformation. On the other hand, liberalism's peculiar teleological form of utopian thinking – the idea that no matter what we see before us we are on the road to a good future anyway, so we should just carry on as we are – can relieve the pessimism and impossibilism we feel about social transformation by dispelling it from our minds without having to make it real, which leaves our destiny hostage to fortune.

The current politics of crime data in the Western world constantly 'define down' crime and harm and understate underlying criminogenic conditions in order to maintain the mood of optimism and political pragmatism. Thus, we are to believe, the world can be transformed for the better without altering the fundamental structures, processes and norms that constitute its economic, psychosocial and cultural foundations. Criminology is limited by the dual commands 'don't look up, don't look down' (see Hall, 2012b), which means that, in order to maintain optimism and pragmatism whilst avoiding realism and the return to real politics, it systematically avoids too much critical examination of the harm inflicted on others by the powerless 'down there' and the powerful 'up there'. The 'glocal' network of criminal shadow-markets consists of global arteries of illegal trade organised largely in cyber-space and locale nodes that contain real people and markets. Let's call the global markets the *criminal cloud* and the local markets *criminal vortices*. Ultra-realist criminology should be driven by an acknowledgement of the need for rigorous investigations of the symptoms and the micro-causes in both realms, and the underlying macro-causal context they share.

There is a vast constellation of vortices that can be found in any impoverished town in poor debt-ridden developing countries, or any impoverished residential area in the deindustrialised zones, where criminal markets are so seamlessly woven into everyday life that very little activity registers on the statistical radar screen (Hall et al., 2008). The postmodern liberal-left have lived in hope of both the cloud and the vortices as the organic wellsprings of new communicative networks of people and new politics. Unfortunately both are post-political, neither immaterial illusions nor unyielding material reality but spaces structured entirely by the 'rules of the game' that capitalism lays down for everyone (Coley and Lockwood, 2011). Capitalism thrives in the shadow-worlds of the clouds and the vortices, pushing security and profit and discarding those who are in any way dysfunctional to either.

Coley and Lockwood (ibid.) posit the cloud as a monstrous machine of control, but this is a one-dimensional Deleuzian analysis. Control simply prevents the libidinal economy, which has recently been further provoked and structured by capitalist markets and diffused throughout cyber-space, from going supernova. On the Deep Web a vast array of commodities are instantly available, in *reality* for those who can afford it and in its *procession of images* for those who can't; everything from sex and handguns to fake medicines (Hall and Antonopoulos, 2014; 2015). Rules change as they modify themselves to the expanding and proliferating libidinally-charged desires that energise the cloud and turn everything imaginable into commodities, business and profit. The cloud seeks the total conversion of all singularities into pure abstract exchange-value. However, the 'rules of the game' may exist in a third space beyond reality and illusion, but, because they structure and limit human action and politics, they produce *very real consequences* on a scale that ranges from material luxury for the wealthy elite down to a harmful existence of poverty, debt,

insecurity, depoliticisation, enforced competitive individualism and various forays into risky and alienating criminality for the ‘losers’ stranded at the bottom.

In the Anthropocene age the problems we face are too big for our current liberal-democratic political and cultural systems to solve (Žižek, 2010). Burgeoning criminal markets seamlessly woven into everyday life number amongst these problems, direct results of the marketisation of labour and the struggle for status in the privatised economy and post-social world of competitive individualism and revived tribalism. Redhead’s (2004) notion of *claustropolitanism* – based on Virilio’s ([1977]2006) claim that humanity increasingly wishes to get off the planet and leave behind the depleting, overcrowded, gridlocked and corrupt neoliberal world of mega-cities, resource wars, clamorous markets and petty consumerised struggles for social status – contextualises Atkinson’s (2014) notion of the ‘metropolitan cloud’ as the first actual step, both metaphorically and in some ways literally, in this process. In the vortices, the retreat of young generations into subjectivity and fantasy is the pallid substitute for what the rich are beginning to do in reality.

Jean Baudrillard (1993) might have been right when he said that it’s all turning out like the script for a very bad science-fiction novel – or perhaps a slightly better movie such as Neill Blomkamp’s *Elysium*. Some of the hyper-idealist frameworks currently emerging in criminological theory, such as Milovanovic’s (2014) ‘quantum holographic’ theory of subjectivity – which, despite the imaginative isomorphic link between quantum theory and critical criminological theory, disembodies and dissolves subjectivity into pure radical indeterminacy – are little more than symptoms of that reaction. In essence this reactionary radical liberalism is a symptom of the hypermodern yearning for escapism, which, paradoxically, advocates not *transformation* but new modes of *adaptive conformity* to our

inherited social, politico-economic and material circumstances. Recently Alain Badiou said something similar – at the moment, judging by the way we think and what we desire, as disembodied subjects running away from reality we all, as Redhead (2004) implies, want to be ‘out of this world’ (see Hallward, 2006).

One minute something is forbidden, the next permitted, the next celebrated and normalised. This – little more than constant bending of the rules – is what passes for ‘transformative praxis’ in late capitalism. Once feeding on resistance to the *Ancien Regime*, liberal-capitalism’s pursuit of freedom and enjoyment now feeds on fleeting resistance to its own rules, and therefore resistance becomes destructive hyper-conformity and, more importantly, motive energy. The rules adapt themselves to allow through, hopefully but never assuredly in sublimated forms, the constant exploitation, duplicity and criminality that saturate the new virtual and real criminal markets. But some forms of crime that require real harms for the consumer’s enjoyment, such as child abuse and fake pharmaceutical distribution, cannot be permanently sublimated because the gratification of the drives and desires behind them at some point demand *acting out* in the physical world.

If Marx ([1867]1990) was right that in the market of exchange-value commodities are ungrounded insofar as they can establish their values only in relation to the market values of other commodities, and if Veblen ([1899]1994) was right that the conspicuous consumption of such commodities defines group status, the game of *jouissance* is taken to new extremes as limits are transgressed and rules are relaxed to the extent that they might as well not exist. The pseudo-pacification process must now operate at peak efficiency to contain the explosion of libido, the modulation of affects in what John Wyndham once called the ‘wild riot of pointless imaginings’ (in Coley and Lockwood, 2011: 86). This is not pointless to consumer

capitalism, though, as the ‘wild riot’ of desires is systematically and relentlessly commodified. Currently establishing themselves down there in the vortices and up there in the cloud, and largely off the statistical radar, pure, unregulated, criminogenic and zemiogenic libertarian marketplaces await our new orders.

In this simultaneously seductive and threatening climate, control and security become desires not imposed on free individuals but motivated by the subject’s fear of its own libidinal excess, of just how far the individual – and, he suspects with great trepidation, everyone else too – is willing to go in the pursuit of *jouissance*, the pleasure that in its excess becomes painful and destructive. Biopolitics, the management of the system and its politically inert yet libidinally active bodies, is not the malign yet productive force of Foucault’s biopower.

Foucault’s term is redundant. Biopower no longer exists, if it ever did; it was the fundamental and impossible control fantasy of a bygone age (Baudrillard, 2007). We now see the anxious post-disciplinary subject (see Berardi, 2009) actively seeking the comfort of the biopolitics regime. The majority actively solicit the system’s symbolic order, the order of exchange value and its attendant security systems, as they sense themselves as vulnerable, isolated individuals in a competitive market. They remain inspired by capitalism’s consumerist imaginary, yet scared of failing to compete and win or, if they do, having their rewards taken away from them by those who do not play strictly by the rules of the game.

In this psychosocial energy trap (see Hall et al., 2008), realism is about neither optimism nor pessimism, utopia or dystopia, impossibilism or the naïve idealism and realism which, as we have seen, are two sides of the same liberal coin. Realism is about identifying and analysing the human drives and activities behind the abstract forces that structure the capitalist system, and evaluating their consequences with as much integrity and honesty as possible. Whether

the picture is inclined towards utopianism or dystopianism should not matter to a genuine critical realist. Empiricism is used by liberal-capitalism's powerful ideological forces to convince us that there are problems but nothing too difficult to manage within the political limits set by our current system of parliamentary democracy and social administration. The system's elite spokespeople are lauded and remunerated well for giving this established form of utopianism as much credibility as possible. For instance, the Harvard linguist Steven Pinker, in a best-selling pan-historical work called *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (2012), blends dubious empiricist pseudo-science with teleological prophecy to stop only just short of telling us that liberal-capitalism is leading us into the Promised Land at the End of History. To manifest this dream all we have to do is carry on as normal and keep trying to be as nice as possible as we communicate with each other.

Pinker's professional liberal optimism is founded upon an aversion to universalism, which must be opposed, we are told, by a love of individual freedom and diversity. Ever since cultural pluralism and pragmatism were laid down as the foundations of American liberal thought in the early 20th century, the aversion to universalism has been a motif in liberal thought (Hall, 2012a). Existentialist criminologist Ronnie Lippens (2013: 65) avers that 'Paul's universalism, admired by 21st century critics such as Slavoj Žižek, engendered a life denying, very rigid, very divisive form of life'. Žižek's riposte to this standard liberal-postmodernist critique is well-known – such universalism actually gives *positive permission* for forms of life to flourish and negate rigid structures, whereas liberal-postmodernism *negates the negation* to leave the current divisive order intact. Of more direct interest to criminologists, however, is Dews' (2008) response. He counters this sort of quintessential liberal-postmodernist sentiment – born of the deep fear of order and what it might impose upon the morsels of conditional freedom we believe we have won – by asking why we have

to tolerate the destructive forms of life that consistently emerge to 'affirm' and establish themselves at various points in the social order. We have to take this issue further. Why do the majority of individuals actively collude in the maintenance of a supposedly liberal system that reproduces the rigid, divisive and destructive forms of life that Dews points out, and why do they tolerate the harm it has caused and continues to cause across the generations? Perhaps this is the fundamental political question ultra-realism can begin to answer.

To do this would require nothing less than a paradigm shift, a new sociological and criminological paradigm founded not on moral constructivism, relativism, radical indeterminacy and idealism, but on universal notions of harm and ultra-realist representations of the operational actualities and consequences of the subject's disavowed drives and desires, which activate the abstract structures, forces and processes that are the dynamic foundations of our lives in the liberal-capitalist system. Such a project would require international ultra-realist ethnographic networks to challenge and displace the statistical survey industry and a collective theory project based on the principles provided by transcendental materialism. It would leave no stone unturned in the intellectual project of representing to the best of our ability where we are right now, historical point A, which would give us clues as to what we need to do to move to historical point B. The social technicians and reformers of the biopolitics regime who now dominate liberal intellectual life simply tell us how to make life more comfortable at point A. This is neither true philosophy nor true social science, and it maroons us in a position where all criminology is in one way or another administrative criminology.