



Journal of
Theoretical & Philosophical Criminology

January, 2015, 7, 32-41

Response to Dragan Milovanovic's and Simon Winlow's comments on *Theorizing Crime and Deviance: A New Perspective* (See the critical commentary in the featured text segment, JTPCRIM, July, 2014)

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First of all I would like to thank Dragan Milovanovic and Simon Winlow for taking the time to read my book and write the two critical reviews that appeared in the previous issue of the JTPC. We all lead very busy lives in today's micro-managed academe and the publishing industry churns out a huge volume of books and articles, therefore asking colleagues to pay close attention to complex theoretical works these days – especially where a particular work does not affirm the theoretical and philosophical positions the reader prefers – is to ask a lot. I would also like to thank the JTPC's editor-in-chief David Polizzi for being generous enough to organize this review symposium and allow me to reply to my critics. I do hope that one day the grant-hungry empiricists who populate our elite institutions will also get round to reading my book, and indeed other theory books, including Milovanovic's, perhaps when the time comes to seek a new theoretical framework after the landmark one-millionth article about non-existent phenomena such as 'moral panic' or banal phenomena such as 'adolescent-limited criminality' has been written and someone finally cries 'enough'! We should start counting now – retrospectively, of course.

However, I fear that before anything like this happens my body will have been lying a-moulding in its grave for quite some time. In the meantime it's good to hammer things out with fellow theorists in the knowledge that at least some social scientists with a theoretical inclination are actually listening to each other. I would like to thank Simon Winlow for giving my ideas such a thorough airing and presenting them so clearly. Professor Winlow and I have worked together for a long time now, so it was obvious that his would be the supportive critique. Dragan Milovanovic comes from somewhere else on the theoretical map and it was equally obvious that he would be the critical one, so all in all that's a splendid arrangement which provides a good balance of extremes. One day we will understand that discursive balance needs at least some acknowledgement of 'extremes', otherwise you totter precariously on the tightrope with too short a pole and inevitably fall off. There's a political analogy in there somewhere, but we can pursue it some other time.

Winlow homed in on the book's central concepts and explained them with great clarity. He presents my work far better than I do. Winlow did complain, however, that the concept of harm as I presented it in the book veers too close to moral absolutism. In my defence, I did try to explain as clearly as I could that harm needs to be conceptualised in a dialectical core/periphery model. In such a model core consensual harms can be constantly sifted in an ongoing and therefore never absolutist debate, one that

mainstream criminology, content with biased and partial legal definitions, refuses to centralise. Core harms can be contrasted with peripheral harms, many of which can possibly be relativized and decriminalised, again in a process of ongoing debate. I must apologize if I failed to achieve that intended clarity. My complaint is that post-war criminology, weaned on the institutionalised reaction against the horrors of our past and overly sensitive about the possibility that condemnation equates with pathologisation and all its horrific political consequences, spends too much time systematically avoiding the core, or approaching it very selectively according to the interests of various competing intersectional groups. This simply allows the conservative and classical-liberal right to play with the ball, and leaves the liberal left constantly chasing them with little success.

Dragan Milovanovic also gave the book a close read and engaged very intelligently with some of its core ideas. In his piece, as was to be expected, there was far more critique. His position and mine at first glance appear incommensurable. What was perhaps a little disappointing, however, is that Milovanovic missed the opportunity to seek common ground, debate and dialectical movement forward. 'I doubt [the book] will have any major impact on entrenched theorists who will protect their ontologically based turf' he avers (2014: 157). Perhaps working for too long in the cultural pluralist/postmodernist trench without sticking his head over the top too often has convinced him of the value or even the inevitability of fragmentary homeostasis; the idea that criminological theory will lie around in separate – separatist? – bits forever. This rather fatalistic declaration seems to be a projection of his own separatist tendencies rather than a discipline-wide analysis or prediction, because he spent a good proportion of the review promoting his own preferred 'quantum holographic' theory, which seems to suggest that he is optimistic about convincing me and other readers that there is value in it. I have no problem with this and I appreciated the useful condensation of his ideas, despite the fact that a review of someone else's book is, strictly speaking, not really the place to do it. However, it must be said that if we are to be generally fatalistic and take Milovanovic's tragic separatist position to its logical conclusion there would be no point in publishing our ideas. At some point, perhaps when we tire of the easy life in the postmodernist archipelago, we must begin to take the more well-aimed critiques on the chin and once more start talking about cross-fertilising ideas, as Robert Agnew (2012) suggested a little while ago in this journal, and kick-starting dialectical movement in criminological theory. However the 'integration' Agnew calls for has a rather static and teleological ring to it, whereas dialectical movement might reach some terminus, but then again might not and simply produce useful and topical new ideas along the way.

The book's thesis rests on new concepts such as pseudo-pacification, special liberty, the criminal undertaker, political catastrophism and the conversion of criminal energy.... but especially transcendental materialism. I won't offer an exposition of these ideas here because to do so would be to repeat what can be found in the book, my synopsis and Professor Winlow's review. These are my own in-house criminological concepts, except for transcendental materialism, which belongs to philosopher Adrian Johnston (2008); it was imported, modified and adapted by me. This shows clearly that Milovanovic misread my criticism of criminology as an importer discipline. I was not suggesting that criminology should stop importing ideas and create its own concepts and theories in self-imposed isolation but merely complaining about the discipline's tendency to *import ideas whole* and fail to modify and synthesise them in its own very important context. On the other hand, the discipline *also* needs to come of age and construct its own in-house concepts. This book synthesises imported concepts such as transcendental materialism with original concepts such as pseudo-pacification.

Milovanovic, in his discussion of consumerism, anxiety and 'radical evil' cited below, was certainly aware that such a synthesis was taking place, and that it offered an explanation of crime and harm. However, his analysis was rather brief compared to the time he spent promoting the 'quantum holographic' position. This is a novel and potent variation on liberal-postmodernism's standard domain assumption of radical indeterminacy. In fact it could be said that Milovanovic's forceful argument is designed to establish radical indeterminacy as a radical ontological certainty. However, the position is not yet fully developed as a criminological explanation of the subjective drives and social contexts associated with crime and harm other than to offer the all too easy explanation that, given a bit more freedom, people could always become not what they are but something else. Thus it might be useful in criminal justice studies as an insight into possible modes of desistance, and as a sociological explanation for creative cultural forms, but it falls short in its ability to offer a contextualised psychosocial explanation of the motivations behind core harms.

Milovanovic's principal objection seems to be that my main operative concepts are not components in transpraxical programmes or manifestos for subjective and social transformation as 'becoming', and my overall thesis can be read as rather bleak. Firstly, I don't like vague 'if only' cultural manifestos that are anything less than proper political manifestos for substantive changes in the socioeconomic structures and logics of the advanced capitalist system. Secondly, I always feel that to trumpet these lightweight culturalist manifestos is to patronise readers and present oneself as an ideologue rather than an analyst, so, in an environment that should be defined by free scientific and philosophical enquiry, I tend to stop short of climbing on the soap-box. If political and social transformation

is about moving from point A to point B, I'm keen to have a clearer idea of where point A actually is and what it looks like. Given the broad liberal-left's abject failure to propel us on the road to point B over the past 200 years – in the USA a period of activity far shorter than that, of course – it might well be that the time has come to get a firmer grasp of how things actually work in this world before launching any more manifestos of transformative practice.

Thus the ideas in the book have one specific and exclusive purpose – to construct a framework that can offer a useful perspectival explanation of crime and harm in today's world, and answer the fundamental political question of why some people choose to inflict harm on others rather than seek solidarity. What people do with these ideas by way of politics and social transformation is up to them. In fact, Milovanovic himself neatly homed in on the political possibilities inherent in my thesis:

He does seem to support a balance of the Real, Symbolic and Imaginary Orders as in Lacan, but in a political economy that provides fundamental recognition and love (rather than perverted consumer capitalism's offering of objects of desire that build on a primordially lacking subject). This is a necessary condition for less manifest eruptions of the "radical evil" within the subject (2014: 160).

Milovanovic may be right to cast doubt on the ability of my thesis to broadcast clear transpraxical possibilities for social transformation to all readers. However, if the above quote is anything to go by, I can claim at least one success – Milovanovic himself! Knowledge of the true source of 'radical evil' and how to dampen down its energy gives 'becoming' a direction and a necessary social objective. To celebrate 'becoming' as an end in itself is to open Pandora's Box and hope for the best, but, as Peter Dews (2008) argues persuasively, do we have to celebrate all forms of 'becoming'.... even violent, harmful and genocidal forms? I would aver not. Perhaps we should celebrate 'becoming' in the absence of monstrous consumer pressure, its hollowing out of subjects and its turning of their primordial anxiety into a relentless and painful energy source for the circulation of commodities and the provision of security. If I am guilty of anything here it is not clearly expressing the ability of *absence* to be politically causative and transformational – subtract or even diminish consumer pressure, for instance, or corporate deep state influence on the surface state, and we would live in a very different world with very different subjects and states. Absence is hugely important in its political forms of refusal or subtraction. Slavoj Žižek (2012) has argued recently that to achieve true transformational momentum important aspects of the cultural, the subjective and the political must become *less than nothing*, a condition of true motive absence. Simon Winlow and I explain the criminological aspects of motive absence more clearly in forthcoming work (Hall and Winlow, 2015).

I apologise for missing Milovanovic's more recent work on definitions of harm (Milovanovic and Henry, 2001), but past work that I read and cited in my book did not hint strongly that he was heading in the direction of firming up criminology's ontological ground. That was a misjudgement on my behalf. Rest assured it's now on my 'to read' list this coming winter, and I will look for possible points of commensurability. However, it must be said that Milovanovic's charge that my thesis is trapped in the quagmire of obsolete classical materialism is simply untrue and based on a complete misreading. It is materialist, but not classical. Transcendental materialism, grounded in the latest thinking in quantum physics (see Žižek, *ibid.*, chapter 14), posits radical indeterminacy at the material level. This I did make crystal clear in the book. However, what I also made clear is that one cannot simply transpose understandings of the external world, either classical or quantum, to the human world. Foucault's notion of automatic resistance – a classical Newtonian concept, of course, yet Milovanovic still seems to approve this thesis – has been a political damp squib, as I argue in the book. Thus, from the transcendental materialist view, the radical indeterminacy that exists as the primary natural human condition is experienced not as exhilarating freedom but a *terrifying trauma* from which the subject must escape into a coherent symbolic order. This is the painful birth of the subject, which seeks something other than the indeterminate natural condition, a 'state of culture' in which the Real's unexplained irruptions can be given explanations and ascribed values.

Radical indeterminacy is the primary condition of terror from which the subject must escape. This is not a new idea, not even to criminology, but Milovanovic, along with other liberal-postmodernists, is misrecognising and mislocating it. Milovanovic makes the fatal mistake of dissolving the material realm to posit the human being as a radically indeterminate information processor in a condition of *always becoming*, which of course is by now a rather old and meaningless Nietzschean-Heideggerean cliché trapped in the centuries-old meta-paradigms of idealism and naturalism. Drawing on notions of innate creativity – which, I have to say, makes us all sound like primary schoolteachers encouraging small children rather than criminologists dealing with adults who carry the scars of the world – makes it appear

all too easy to change criminal subjectivities and recruit today's anxious debt-ridden individuals to projects of social transformation. Because transcendental materialism understands that creativity comes into play as the subject tries to *escape* its innate condition of trauma, it is a position far more useful to criminology and politics because it appreciates the *extreme difficulties* involved in changing a subjective mode of being and how they might be overcome, the fine details of which I discuss in the book and elsewhere (see Hall, 2012). Simply banging on about radical indeterminacy being the natural order of things and assuming it to be a cauldron of transformative creativity is getting us nowhere. In fact it is actively counter-productive, especially in a period of our history where *objectless anxiety* – another one of my core ideas that Milovanovic did not choose to discuss – creates predictable and reactionary responses rather than creative responses in most individuals, which we witness in the return of the far right across the West. Creativity and radical indeterminacy are of course great human potentials, but a cursory glance at history and our current condition tells us that they are not the culturo-political norm. Oppressive systems grind on for centuries, and despite the so-called countercultural revolution and nearly six decades of affirming and promoting creativity and indeterminacy neoliberalism is now stronger than ever. The radical liberal continuum that stretches from existentialism to post-structuralism and performativity has nothing to teach us about the elementary political problem of continuity. It makes change appear too easy, like making instant coffee or mashed potatoes – simply pour on your creativity and stir! – and neglects the great collective struggles and personal sacrifices that have been necessary for transformation in our past (see Hall, 2012).

Despite his adherence to Foucault's Newtonian-derived position, Milovanovic criticises me for sticking to a Newtonian classical material perspective. This would be hypocritical were it not fundamentally untrue. The main point of possible commensurability between the standard liberal-postmodernist paradigm and the new continental paradigm is indeed the notion of radical indeterminacy, but, as I indicated above, it must be understood in the actual location it occupies and the function it performs in the transcendental materialist framework. The liberal-postmodernists are simply imagining radical indeterminacy to be something it is not and refusing to grapple with it as it is. Transcendental materialism takes the notion of indeterminacy to a new level of understanding, but, as we have seen, places it in its proper location and explains its traumatic relation to subjectivity. Elsewhere we have constructed explanations of violent subjectivity and criminality based on the capitalist system's ability to prolong the originary trauma (Winlow and Hall, 2009).

It's not unfamiliarity that spurs me to omit the terms that Milovanovic insists I should engage with, it is frustration and rejection. He presents simply a list of terms absent in my thesis – 'nonlinearity, sensitivity to initial conditions, iteration, disproportional effects, singularities, catastrophes, the effects of language that tends to speak the subject, discursive regimes' (2014: 159). My rejection and omission of these terms is simply the product of my conviction that the new transcendental materialist position furnishes us with explanatory power that is superior to the by now threadbare transcendental idealist, phenomenological, performative and discursive positions to which these terms belong. These terms represent the baggage of the old postmodern cultural/linguistic turn that that is now running out of steam. Bergsonian and Nietzschean thought are themselves 19th century vintage, and contemporary positions based on unmodified principles drawn from them have now passed their sell-by date. As I said earlier, absence is causative – in this case the absence of these terms has allowed me to construct a better thesis.

Milovanovic's response to my critique of postmodernism's lack of normativity proves my point by, again, listing concepts that are too vague to have any normative clarity or substance. For instance, he suggests that we should value affirmative and transformative redistribution that recognises institutional diminishment. Does he mean the liberal redistribution of economic outcomes and limited representational power or the traditional redistribution of economic participation and material ownership and control of economic resources and executive politico-economic-power, which must include basics such as land and investment decisions? This vague term 'transformative redistribution' could apply to policies suggested by anyone from John Rawls to Pol Pot. Which institutions should we diminish and which are already too diminished and in need of reconstruction? The family? The education system? The health and welfare system? The banking system? Milovanovic's blanket ethico-political declarations are of little use, and pre-empt important and careful discussions that must take place in any mode of democratic transformation.

It is my contention, explained clearly in the book, that the post-war liberal-postmodernist left seek institutional dissolution not in the name of freedom and progress but because they are *political catastrophists*, frightened of institutional power and the very idea of action in the material world. For them, action must be dissolved and played out in a discursive game. Milovanovic is right that active forces produce change and reactive forces produce regression and repression, but *political catastrophism* captures the liberal reaction to the tragic failures of the left's past. The meta-discourse Milovanovic seeks to develop is itself reactionary. It does not *directly* produce positive regression and repression but, as a form of *capitalist realism* – another important term, coined by Mark Fisher (2009), which I introduced to

the argument in the book but Milovanovic failed to engage with – it acts as *negative ideology* (see Winlow and Hall, 2013) to usher in the vicarious regression and repression that neoliberal post-politics and its deified market have imposed upon us all. The whole discourse upon which Milovanovic relies was from its Romantic beginnings, and through its Nietzschean and Bergsonian booster stages, a reaction against Hegelian modernist institutionalism and dialectics, which are now regarded as dangerous and kept in quarantine. Long sections of my book, replete with copious evidence, explained how this liberal position developed itself from the 19th century in the USA against European socialism and acted as the under-labourer to classical liberal-capitalism, but Milovanovic ignored this analysis of political history in its entirety.

Rather than recognise the immense political power of absence and negation, Milovanovic remains steadfastly fixated on standard classical eudemonic conceptions of positive energies – *élan vital*, *libido*, joyful passions etc. His work is unclear on the fundamental issue of how these subjective forces operate, what their source of energy might be, how they connect to external objects, how they attain ethical direction, and what their outcomes might be. The transformative power of absence and negation, however, tells us that we must remove incumbent power first. The removal of executive power from the private financial realm, for instance, would allow targeting of global financial investment to meet social needs. The criminological impact of this type of real transformation and democratic transfer of power, in the sense of reducing crime, corruption and oppressive state power, could be huge, but that does not mean that we should diminish the power of the democratic state as a public servant and organising mechanism. Milovanovic's misreading of Hegel causes him to omit the reactionary power of the *negation of the negation* – in other words the system's ability to constantly negate the oppositional power that periodically arises to negate the system in preparation for transformation – recognised by 20th century thinkers from Benjamin to Adorno and Žižek (see Hall and Winlow, 2015). Liberal-postmodernism, the domesticated replacement for the dangerous traditional left, has been active in the negation of the negation for over fifty years.

What Milovanovic has to offer instead of the political power of negation is a sort of radically indeterminate latent positivity. He contradicts this celebration of natural life-affirming forces by positing a process-informational conception of the subject in its social field:

[T]he brain is a modulated reconstructive wave that interacts with the holographic space within which we are all immersed. We build on this to show that his “modulated frequency wave” is a unique Schema QD matrix signature wave, encoded with all information of the person, that both produces and is a product of its varies [sic] interactions with a political economically organized field. In this view, we leave a trace within everything with which we interact, and that with which we interact leaves a trace within our signature wave. We are all profoundly interconnected in the cosmos. There is no intrinsic separation. There is much yet to be done in this direction. It is merely provided as one example of an alternative direction to a classical-materialist orientation (2014: 162).

If there is no intrinsic separation in the cosmos, why does Milovanovic declare that criminological theorists are destined to remain ever separated? And why does liberal-postmodernism celebrate cultural pluralism and separatism with so much fervour? Furthermore, it takes a lot of effort to pass off these alternative directions as directly political. The activities upon which liberal-postmodernist and cultural criminologists focus seem to have more to do with having fun, which, as the Canadian social democratic philosophers Heath and Potter (2006) argued recently, has nothing whatsoever to do with politics, civil rights or even what has been presented for the past fifty years or so – probably erroneously – as more subtle, gentle and diverse forms of cultural transformation. Apart from the street demonstration of course – but why do Milovanovic and his cultural criminologists place these in the same category as skydiving, base jumping, graffiti or burglary? In fact why are any of these things placed in the same category? Let's find out:

Hall (p.146) references favorably Žižek's critical view of edgework as “stupid pleasures,” and edgeworkers as “adolescent consumer adventurers.” Perhaps an experience in doing a tandem skydive from 13,000 feet; running with graffiti writers who are trying to avoid arrest; stepping up to the front lines of a demonstration against injustices, faced with a massive display of police presence; or spending a few hours in discussion with a convicted burglar and the emotionality of planning, executing, and reaping the rewards with the local fence and in animated discussion with subsequent fellow burglars would provide testimony to the emotionality of being *in the event* and

the sense of empowerment, be it often momentary, be it “criminal” or not, that materializes (Milovanovic, 2014: 162).

The common beneficial property here is a sense of empowerment. Milovanovic seems to be berating me for not getting this – OK, I admit, going further and mocking it. I must have struck a personal nerve. I have to say that in the past I have been told to go jump in the river by critics, but this is the first time I have been told to go jump out of an aeroplane at 13,000 feet. I have to make the pathetic excuse that I have not jumped out of an aeroplane at this daunting height because I suffer rather badly from vertigo – the banal medical condition, that is, not Young’s (2007) metaphorical ‘vertigo of late modernity’. Despite this condition, in the 1970s the need for quick money once forced me to work as a scaffolder on the 47-storey Tower 42 (originally the National Westminster Tower) in London, a nightmare that has never left me. Neither have I ever been involved in graffiti-writing, mainly because of my lack of ability in the visual arts – my old art teacher Miss Mackie once devastated me with her judgement that my drawing of a seagull was the worst she had ever seen. Thus I would have been both a hindrance and an embarrassment to any self-respecting group of graffiti artists, who would, I fear, eventually have asked me to leave.

In my defence, however, I must say that I have sampled at least some of the experiences Milovanovic listed, and others he didn’t. I have certainly been on the front line of numerous demonstrations and strikes – more strikes than demonstrations, on balance, because strikes of course strike at the heart of the capitalist exchange relation. And I have interviewed, and indeed worked with, a large number of convicted criminals including burglars. I have also in my younger days faced a 270lb (122kg) opponent in a boxing ring, which, at my fighting weight of 204lbs (93kg) – no cruiserweight division in those days! – was a rather unnerving experience. I lost, by the way, but not badly. I have also played blues guitar in front of 21,000 people at a festival, driven very fast in a rally car, tackled 240lb rugby players traveling at a joint speed of 35mph or so, faced 90mph bowlers in cricket matches, and lots of other stuff that is all thankfully fading from memory – Lacan’s originary trauma is bad enough without putting yourself through all of this of your own volition. Please note that all this derring-do was at sea-level with feet firmly on the ground, and sometimes, in the rugby games, with face firmly on the ground. I must admit that whenever I partook in these activities I felt that I was as near to being a classical material body and as far away from being a quantum holographic projection as one could possibly travel, although the ability temporarily to transform myself into one during strategic moments would have been very useful, especially in boxing matches.

However, to return to the serious discussion, I also have to admit that at no point during my participation in those activities *except the strike* – especially the famous UK miners’ strike of 1984/5 where we faced heavy and robust policing – did I feel politically or even existentially empowered. Participation in extreme sports was exciting, but neither in the events nor after the events did I feel empowered, if that term is to hold on to any of the substantial denotative meaning it might still have. I would do it all again, as Nietzsche suggested in his deontological command of the *eternal recurrence*, if my body would allow it, but I was not empowered by doing it and nor was I participating in politics, resistance, subversion or any such act. Cultural politics, which entered the political lexicon in the 1960s when traditional top-down transformation was rejected in favour of seeking multiple sites of resistance in everyday culture as the safe option, has been a disappointment. It was a product of what Baudrillard (1993) called the *transparency of evil*, the inappropriate leakage of all potent categories of transformative human action through their partitions and their subsequent melding together in a harmless, enervated mush. This will be discussed in future work (see Winlow et al., 2015). By conflating base-jumping and indeed crime with politics, Milovanovic and his radical liberal-postmodernist associates are being active in this mush-making. As I have argued throughout my work, most forms of crime and deviance except those with an overt and coherent political purpose are modes of *hyper-conformity* to the aggression, dominance and special liberty that lies at the centre of liberal-capitalist subjectivity; I discussed this in the book as a central concern, but Milovanovic either missed it or just won’t have it.

Clichés such as ‘empowerment’ are meaningless liberal weasel-words. Adolescent leisure activities are in the political sense neither empowering nor disempowering. They are *fun*, except where remorseless peer-group pressure forces unsuspecting young citizens to do things like drink their own urine or ‘neknominate’ (Smith, 2014) and place each other in danger of alcohol poisoning. They are usually harmless but sometimes rather risky where one feels compelled to approach the borders of *jouissance* in order to elevate one’s reputation in the adolescent gaze. These leisure activities become actively disempowering, however, when young people are persuaded by adults who should know better that they constitute some sort of proto-political energy. This has contributed to the constant redefinition of politics and resistance to a point where the terms themselves no longer have any coherent or substantive meaning – nothing unusual there, of course, in the postmodernist realm of floating signifiers where nothing has any coherent or substantive meaning, including the term ‘postmodern’ itself. The calamitous mistake made

decades ago by the early culturalists such as Stuart Hall and Dick Hebdige was to run scared from the evils of top-down traditional politics to seek out points of 'cultural resistance' wherever they can be found. Redefining any activity that was most definitely *not* political resistance as political resistance demolished essential semiotic protocols and paved the way for the post-structuralist orgy of relativism and political capitulation that was to follow (see Dean, 2009). This helped to open the door and allow the neoliberal right – who had no problem with the meaning or the practice of top-down politics – to put themselves in the driving seat, where they have remained ever since.

Milovanovic's critique accuses me of invoking despair in the reader because it presents no clear-cut transformative practices. He has again missed a central point. The cultural process of melding, in which everything becomes everything else it can't really be, has turned all clear-cut possibilities into an opaque and impotent mush. Thus, in the liberal-postmodernist Imaginary of constant misidentification, base-jumping becomes crime becomes proto-politics, whereas in reality it is neither – it is a bit of edgy fun and excitement of the sort that might annoy your mum or the local park-keeper, and nothing more. What makes me despair is the current ubiquity and dominance of liberal-postmodernist mush-making, and its wanton destruction of politics and the very possibility of real transformation before we end up in serious economic trouble and become entirely powerless to prevent the return of the far right, the further expansion of the security state and the complete normalisation of criminal markets and purely individualistic post-political criminal subjectivity. False hope, not the honest portrayal of the daunting reality of our times and the realistic appraisal of what must be done to dam and divert advanced capitalism's raging river, is the real source of despair and political inaction (see Hall and Winlow, 2015). Post-war liberal-postmodernism is the (dis)embodiment of false hope. It got nowhere, whereas neoliberalism, ostensibly left-liberalism's enemy, despite its recent crash and the subsequent austerity cuts and state repression, is stronger than ever. Liberal-postmodernist political mush is not even capable of tempering and regulating the runaway monster, which puts it even further down the effectivity rankings than the fragile post-war social democratic compromise. Neoliberals must be forgiven for thinking: "with enemies like the liberal-postmodernist left, who needs friends"?

The destination is not social transformation but microscopic cultural pragmatism and escapism, the forging of tiny spaces of personal freedom in capitalism's remorseless logic, spaces in which the individual can hide from the logic itself and continue to imagine its disruption and eventual demise as it grows stronger and more entrenched in the gridlocked realities constructed by its own unopposed socioeconomic logic. Milovanovic's metaphors of empowerment, seen in parkour, base-jumping, parachuting and so on, are the perfect representations of the post-politics with which they are associated – essentially an attempt to leave behind the world of bodies and things. In this fantasy we are jumping on and off real things, defying reality's restrictions and limits, indulging in frequently repeated moments of imaginary escape from gravity and material structures, time-lapsed like a cartoon, affirmed and applauded from the comfort of the side-lines by the radical liberal priesthood to give the impression that a new world of free-floating spirits can be created by the power of the aggregate will. But without gravity, as Alfonso Cuarón showed, bodies float off into the cold vacuum of space to die agonising deaths. Gravity, and to be grounded in the world it makes possible, is a beautiful thing. This is what leftist politics must come back to, otherwise they will die too, crushed by the anti-political boot of the far right as it promises to tend to matters in the real world in its own inimitable way.

The paradigm-shift Milovanovic is suggesting is forged on fear and headed towards the stratosphere – somewhere out of this world. It is nothing new, simply the latest variant of standard post-war liberal thought, an extension of this paradigm, the total ontological naturalisation of indeterminacy with no idea of what might inspire, energise and give shape and direction to our ideas and actions. It stages no serious challenge to incumbent power, and it is it particularly poor at explaining the *hyper-conformity* that is criminal subjectivity. If indeterminacy is so ontologically central why do we continue to behave so predictably?

However, despite the fact that we are poles apart politically, I'm glad that Milovanovic sees the absence of dialectics in Foucault – whose motto could have been "ours is not to change the world but to reclassify it from as many imaginary viewpoints as we can conjure up and hope for the best" – but if we were to introduce this dynamic and drag the Foucauldian model from the stratosphere of bureaucratic classificatory schemas and liberal-democratic political machinations to the earth of political economy and class, it would collapse. This was explained in the book, in lengthy detail in chapters 6 and 7, but again there was no close engagement with my critique of Foucault in Milovanovic's piece, just a few words affirming Foucault's position.

Slavoj Žižek (2001) reminds us that liberal-postmodernism is a discourse founded on fear – fear of the forces of modernity and the political collective, and what are presented as the inevitable tragic consequences of its impatient, premature and ill-considered form of dialectical materialism. The general post-war 'radical liberal' paradigm of which postmodernism is a recent variant is the opposite of what it purports to be. It is actually a means of taming and dampening the 'free radicals' who seek to change the

coordinates of our existence (Žižek, *ibid.*) by deflecting radical energy – whose source is always the point at which the transcendental ideal meets the traumatic indeterminacy of the material body and creates the Lacanian ‘third space’ of political subjectivity – and sublimating it into harmless, uncoordinated and eminently commodifiable outbursts of adolescent leisure. The terrifying possibility that this radical energy might one day find coherent symbolism and coalesce into some sort of collective politics that combine the negation of current power with its positive replacement must be avoided at all costs. This, we are constantly told, is the road to totalitarianism. Our thinking must be anything but that. Liberals have outdone conservatives by constructing an even more potent and sophisticated variant of the ‘politics of fear’. The fearlessness displayed in base-jumping and so on represents a yearning for what radical liberalism, in its political betrayal of youth, has repressed and sublimated into an airy depoliticised form.

A deep fear of ourselves and the potential consequences of a return to the real politics that threaten the negation of *what is* as preparation for the move to *what is not* pervades and defines post-war radical culture. A throwback to the traditional libertine-conservative romanticism that stretches from Rabelais to Nietzsche, it is the essence of anti-essentialism and the determining force behind all idealist forms of radical indeterminacy. Throughout Milovanovic’s piece one gets the impression of a scattergun firing a relentless and overwhelming volley of positive endorsements of the human spirit, a barrage of positivities, a hail of hopefulness that will one day break through the system’s outer walls and set us free. The sheer volume at which this cacophony is broadcast is an attempt to drown out any sound of flaws in the human spirit, of death drive as malignant will, that require repression and sublimation, even though Nietzsche’s instruction to let one’s instincts flow forth to energise life was *entirely dependent* on the repression and sublimation of the will’s energy into artistic endeavours. This is but one example of the extent to which Nietzsche has been misappropriated by 20th century liberal thinkers, especially Deleuze and Foucault.

Thus the liberal-postmodernist thinking that Milovanovic advocates is an explosion of false positivities and naïve hopes driven by the subject’s supposedly timeless orientation to freedom. This romance blasts a gaping aetiological hole in the middle of leftist criminology, the prime cause of its inability to explain its principal object of harm, loosely and rather unreliably constructed in our sociosymbolic systems as ‘crime’. This naivety cannot explain why human beings have spent almost all of their history under the yoke of oppressive systems and have constantly failed to throw them off. Becker’s (1975) concept of ‘escape from evil’ gives us a far more illuminating glimpse into the human condition – we enslave ourselves to rigid overbearing systems because they promise to postpone our death for as long as possible, and to make our lives comfortable in the meantime. In politics and popular culture, no airy-fairy discourse of radical indeterminacy can ever compete with that. Becker’s brilliant work is not celebrated, however. Instead, lesser works from the post-war era have been established in the criminological canon.

What if Lacan (1974) was right that anxiety is the core of the eternal and essential human condition? So much points to the probability that he might have been unerringly right. Anxiety is of course stimulated, harnessed and given its objects by neoliberalism’s three major institutional complexes, the military-industrial-governmental complex, the corporate mass media and advertising complex, and the liberal-democratic post-political complex. However, it is not simply reproduced by the right’s idealist manoeuvres as they are performed by these powerful complexes. It pre-exists all ideological manipulation as a latent force at the core of the human condition, pre-stimulated as *objectless anxiety* by the real condition of precariousness caused by the instability inherent in the capitalist market system. Milovanovic missed all this, but Winlow got it in detail in his review because of his closer reading of the text. The left’s question is how do we deal with it and overcome it creatively? Transcendental materialism gives us a clue, whereas radical liberalism does not – in fact the latter is part of the problem. The book also suggested how to overcome objectless anxiety by returning to the true cause of anxiety, capitalism’s instability and the racking up of Anthropocene disasters and their consequences. Milovanovic points towards catastrophe, but mislocates and misrecognises it as a cluster of personal phenomena, whereas the real systemic catastrophes we face – global warming, dislocated populations, chronic unemployment, normalised criminal markets – are too big for national governments and of course therefore far too big for isolated individuals, incoherent ‘multitudes’ and endless fantasies of indeterminacy replacing the politics we need to prevent these disasters and restore some sort of order, justice and stability to our current trajectory (see Žižek, 2010; Ennis, 2011).

Thus it is Milovanovic’s outdated liberal-postmodernism that prevents us from recognising ourselves and our position in history, and moving on from it. The naturalist transcendental idealist radical indeterminacy argument is a dead horse the liberal-left have been flogging since the end of WW1. It rests on the old cliché of the ‘free spirit’. This is a nice idea in the art-college seminar room but largely irrelevant to today’s debt-ridden propertyless wage-slaves whose first consideration is basic economic and thymotic survival – some money to pay the bills and a morsel of self-respect to prevent the complete collapse of the ego and the spirit. Things have not *fundamentally* changed since the so-called ‘cultural revolution’ of the 1960s. We have had some successes in civil rights, anti-racism, anti-sexism and so on, but the system

remains locked on its course – financial crises, austerity, resource depletion, labour exploitation, repressive state reaction, competitive individualism, consumer fixation, depoliticised subjectivities and the absence of a coherent alternative. In the absence of collective politics there is recourse to corruption and predatory criminality, which dominate economic endeavours at all levels of the socioeconomic structure. Milovanovic's belief in radical indeterminacy and information-processing as the substitute political ontology for visceral, material energy and collective negatory and reconstructive action has simply been disproven. In the absence of the latter the course of advanced capitalist history and its subjective-political responses has been tediously predictable; as Jean Baudrillard (1993) once said, things have turned out like the formulaic script for a very bad science fiction novel.

However, despite our numerous and fundamental disagreements, Milovanovic is right that we must have sober 'ontological critique' (2014: 165) in criminological theory, and that we must challenge domain assumptions and move forward. However, we cannot do this from the entrenched, closed positions that have become ossified in the post-war era. Radical liberal-postmodernism is one of those positions, which denies its roots in classical Romantic anti-modernism and a thinly disguised and rather clumsy amalgam of Platonic universal idealism and Nietzschean particularism. The genuinely new kid on the block, *transcendental materialism*, throws a clear light on the interface between the material and the transcendental, and creates a parallax view that relocates the position of the rigidity we need to fight: the symbolic, with its flows of signs and information, is the site of rigid ideology whereas the material body is the true but traumatic site of radical indeterminacy. This gives us a genuinely new and synthetically fertile way forward. What's more, as I explain in Chapter 8 of my book, transcendental materialism can also make a fist of explaining crime and harm in their political, cultural and socioeconomic contexts, which is criminology's main job, a task in which all idealist theories have hitherto been miserable failures. Of course we should not become entrenched in transcendental materialism, but adopt its ideas and use them to break through into a new paradigm of criminological thought.

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