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Cultural Criminology: The Time is Now

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Abstract

Cultural criminology understands crime and its control as products of meaning. It explores simultaneously the macro-, meso- and micro-levels of social life, sensitive to the operation of power, in order to produce critical analyses that are politically potent and germane to contemporary circumstances. The cultural criminological project is broad and inclusive, but focused and urgent. It relishes coalition and collaboration, clarity of thought and purpose, praxis and intervention. In its relatively short history, it has carved out a distinctive identity whilst contributing something to the development of a host of other perspectives. This article begins by offering a contemporary definition of cultural criminology, including some reflection on its antecedents and the responses that have recently been addressed to its critics. This is followed by a discussion of the concerns cultural criminology shares with a variety of complementary perspectives and how it can be used to address malign structures and discourses. Finally, the relationship that the sub-discipline might form with transformative politics is explored briefly. As truth and meaning have become the theatres of struggle between fundamentally opposed political positions promising radically different visions of crime, criminalisation, criminal justice and everyday life, never has cultural criminology been more prescient and necessary. The time for cultural criminology is now.

Introduction

As I write this paper in November 2018, American society seems torn, with the identification of threats and the correct response to them key points of contention. Individuals on the political left and those on the right appear to be opposed diametrically and one's political positioning would seem to determine whether one fears violence from white nationalists or the arrival of a potentially hostile 'caravan' of immigrants from Central America. To a large extent, liberal, western democracies seem no longer able to agree on a common set of truths, let alone political positions.

Cultural criminology has long contended that that matters of crime and its control are 'cultural products... creative constructs' (Hayward and Young 2004: 259) and hence open to contested interpretations and intractable controversy. It is unlikely, however, that the scholars who developed the perspective (see Ferrell et al. 2015) could have foreseen the extent of their own prescience. In a world of galloping climate change (that some leaders still deny vociferously in the face of strong scientific evidence), where would-be dictators dismiss criticism as 'fake news', (see Brisman 2018) and where the desire for radical change is dismissed as mere 'identity politics', a criminology attuned to the politics of meaning has never been more important. In a world where all manner of tribes across the political spectrum hold forth simplistic 'solutions' to ever more pressing and desperate economic, environmental, social and structural problems, there is a need for a criminology that is willing to

eschew pre-determined meta-narratives and engage with the texture, complexities and contradictions of contemporary life. Having already established itself as an influential perspective, the time for cultural criminology to truly come into its own is now.

This article begins by presenting a contemporary definition of cultural criminology that revisits its antecedent and foundational texts, whilst addressing its critiques, in order to arrive at a novel restatement that best reflects its current status. Having traced the areas where cultural criminology has been influential, this article indicates areas in which it has potential to work alongside various vital perspectives seeking to identify and intervene against different kinds of oppressive structures and discourses. In doing so, the article will demonstrate how cultural criminology's open and inclusive ethos distinguishes it from more dogmatic and didactic perspectives. Finally, this article reflects on the complexities of contemporary political action and the place of cultural criminology within it.

Cultural Criminology: A contemporary definition

As much a general sensibility as a specific set of theoretical concerns, cultural criminology has been defined deliberately and explicitly in an open and inclusive manner—'a loose can[n]on', to quote Ferrell (2007: 99; 2013a:258). Cultural criminology is dedicated to analysing how the dynamics of meaning underpin every process in criminal justice, including the definition of crime itself, and a wide variety of work classifies itself or may be classified as cultural criminology. In as much as the perspective is specifically associated with the work of Jeff Ferrell, Keith Hayward and Jock Young, whether analytically, methodologically, or substantively, there is a wide variety research that might be located comfortably within the broad tent of 'cultural criminology'. Indeed, within this special issue itself, there are a number of other areas that have clear links to cultural criminology. This does not mean that the perspective is necessarily vague, meandering and unprincipled. Nevertheless, it is worth reflecting on the origins of the perspective and some responses to its more recent criticisms to allow for something of a contemporary definition to emerge, however partial, contingent and contested it might be.

More than 'new wine in old bottles' (Carlen 2011: 103), cultural criminology is arguably a fusion of a number of traditions that together become greater than the sum of their parts (Young 2003; Hayward 2016). For example, following subcultural theory (Cohen 1955) that has its own roots in Chicago School thinking (see Blackman 2014), cultural criminology recognises that differently situated individuals and groups attribute meaning in different ways. Following the labelling perspective (Becker 1963), cultural criminology holds that meanings assigned by the powerful set norms with implications for how the legitimate and illegitimate are defined. Drawing on the Birmingham School tradition (Hall and Jefferson 1976), cultural criminology accepts that crime, crime control and culture (including cultural products) are intertwined deeply and are inter-dependent. Put simply, cultural criminology is cognisant that behind moments of crime and its control are contested interpretations of 'the right thing to do', 'security' and 'justice'. The approaching flashing lights and sirens of the police car mean one thing to a recent victim of crime who sees them as evidence of her tax dollars at work, and another to a member of a socio-economically marginalized group who feels unjustly over-policed.

A dedication to meaning should not be interpreted as abrogating material and structural analysis. Cultural criminology has consistently drawn on (and been part of) the critical criminological tradition (Ferrell 2013a), recognising the extent to which crime and its control are both manifestations and drivers of socio-economic inequalities. With a critical disposition underpinning its analysis of

unjust inequalities, cultural criminology has nevertheless refused to constrict itself to more-radical-than-thou dogma, pushing to understand crime and crime control in the contemporary world with greater theoretical and methodological expansiveness. Later in this article, the modes in which the perspective has engaged with substantive questions of structure and inequality are explicated and discussion on potential future direction is provided.

Cultural criminology's engagement with media theories and analysis (Hayward and Presdee 2010; Ferrell et al. 2015) has placed it in a position to understand the ways in which meanings are produced, contested and consumed through mediated communication—a vast area of growth in more recent times. As a result, it has absorbed enough postmodernism to make sense of a greatly complicated and contradictory world (Ferrell and Sanders 1995; Hayward 2016: 299). At home with the mediascape (Appadurai 1990), engaging with the digital world (see, e.g., Yar 2012) and dissecting crime and criminalisation in the exchange of digital products (see, e.g., Ilan 2012), cultural criminology recognises and traces the complex capillaries of meaning that snake through and around our media-saturated society. Focusing on the individual, the perspective has drawn heavily on the work of Jack Katz (1988) to understand the phenomenological experiences of crime and control—how it feels subjectively to the various parties involved. Cultural criminology expands how 'meaning' is understood which, in so doing, allows it to explore better the ways in which offending and law-enforcement are animated and energised.

Methodologically cultural criminology is generous and welcoming, although ethnography has had a particularly pronounced role in the development of the sub-discipline (Ferrell and Hamm 1998; Kane 2004; Siegel 2012). Indeed, along with the early US body of work that established cultural criminology (e.g. Ferrell and Sanders 1995) and subsequent UK contributions that are rightly said to have emphasised its structural and material analyses (e.g., Young 1999; Hayward 2004), a continental European (especially Dutch) tradition of the ethnography of crime can be understood as having contributed to its development (see Hayward and Ferrell 2009; Schuilenburg et al. 2018). This interest in ethnography extends beyond methodology; the ethnographic lens informs cultural criminology's epistemology, connecting individual experience to group meanings and ultimately to social structures.

Beyond ethnography, cultural criminology has embraced various modes of cultural, media and visual analysis (see Carrabine 2008; Hayward and Presdee 2010; Ferrell et al. 2015; Thurston 2016; Jewkes and Linnemann 2017) and, as discussed below, is poised to deploy these to a greater extent to the online worlds and digital phenomena that impact so deeply on how events unfold IRL ('in real life') (see Yar 2013). The internet and mobile technology have become connected to processes of crime, criminalisation, politics and campaigning, prosecution, and surveillance, and any contemporary criminological perspective risks irrelevance if it cannot research and analyse this world, without compromising rigour and criticality. The work of O'Neil and Seal (2012) demonstrates how cultural criminology can combine different modes of research with innovative flair. It furthermore highlights the promise of participatory approaches that bring participants to the centre. The marginalised are distinctly disadvantaged in contests around meaning and representation, and the possibility of amplifying their voices, involving them centrally, and in contributing something, whilst taking data, resonate with a notion of truly ethical and transformational research: 'Research practices that aim at producing social emancipation, still reproduce power relations that allow academics to exercise power on the reality analysed, thus resulting in the subjection, rather than the multiplication of practices of resistance' (Dadusc 2013: 48).

Cultural criminology certainly does not have a monopoly on participatory methods, which are furthermore perhaps too often more of an aspiration than a reality. Scholars can have the best of intentions, but the dynamics of their profession tend to call them back from the field into institutional

duties. Meanwhile, participants remain trapped in their own struggles. If scholars are unable to change their participants' circumstances or do not see this as their purpose, there is certainly a role for 'traditional' modes of engagement. Further exploring and clarifying how best scholarship can 'make a difference' would be a fruitful future endeavour for cultural criminology. Indeed, empirical cultural criminology has plenty of room for growth. For example, there is strong potential for it to embrace a more 'conventional' criminological toolkit (Hayward 2016: 313-4) and to have more of an impact outside of the academy. An 'applied cultural criminology' would be an interesting and potentially useful perspective indeed, although it is arguably a concept that would merit its own article.

Despite, or perhaps because of, its flexibility, inclusivity, and versatility, cultural criminology has attracted a host of criticisms. These have been answered with care and attention elsewhere (Hayward, 2016), but the point about cultural criminology responding to concerns about its approach—all in the spirit of dialogue and self-improvement—deserves restatement and consideration. Questions over the extent to which it is sufficiently 'critical' or too poststructuralist (Hall et al. 2008; Winlow and Hall 2015) have prompted cultural criminologists to clarify its attentiveness to structure and injustice (Hayward, 2016). It is not as if its material analyses have been absent, but that cultural criminology's lens has focused on the ways in which abstract structures become concrete in the cut and thrust of everyday life (Ferrell et al. 2015; Ilan 2015). Strawman allegations of what cultural criminology is or is not—or could be or *should* be—cannot substitute for a fair consideration of its aims and achievements. Cultural criminology does not intend to claim innovation (see Carlen 2011) and build academic empires, but to consolidate and advance existing perspectives, combining them with new developments in social theory in order to face the characteristics and challenges of a new socio-economic era.

A more contemporary definition of cultural criminology considers meaning and power over the span of three levels of analysis: the macro, meso and micro (see Hayward 2011; Ferrell et al. 2015; Ilan 2015). Macro analyses means understanding the operation of broad structures: intersections of class, gender and race (see Cunneen and Stubbs 2004; Naegler and Salman 2016); the brutal consequences of late (or 'neoliberal') capitalism (Young, 1999, 2008; Ilan, 2015); environmental degradation (Mol 2013; Brisman and South 2013; Ferrell 2013b; Brisman 2018); geopolitics, refugee movement and forced rootlessness, terrorism and war (Morrison 2004; Hamm 2007; Cottee and Hayward 2011; Ferrell 2018); neoconservatism, the politics of crime control and the criminalization of immigration (Brotherton and Barrios 2011; Wall 2016; Schept 2015; Nagy 2018); globalisation's implication in illicit drug markets (Zaitch 2002, Fleetwood 2014), sex trafficking (Breuil et al. 2011; Musto 2016, this issue) and in the nature of contemporary late capitalism itself. Cultural criminology does not approach these phenomena with a one-size-fits-all meta-narrative, but adopts a more naturalistic, grounded sensibility that teases out the complex realities, contradictions and elusive explanations of social life.

Cultural criminology examines the manifestation of macro forces and structures 'down' into the messy arena of group meanings and mediated discourses (and subsequently into subjectivities and individual experience). The meso level of 'shared meanings' is often an agora of claims and counter-claims, where discourses and ideas, problems and solutions, are bought and sold. Rolling 24 hour news (Greer and McLaughlin 2011), museum exhibitions (Thurston 2016), YouTube videos (Ilan 2012), social media posts (Yar 2012; Smiley 2015), programmed technologies (Wall 2016), reality TV (Presdee 2002), political debates (Schept 2015), criminal justice policies and practices (e.g., Wall and Linnemann 2014), contemporary art (Brisman 2018), notions of knowledge and appropriate research (Ferrell 2018), the nature of contemporary punishment (Brown 2009), youth justice (Petintseva 2018),

history and geography (Fraser 2015), subculture (Snyder 2009, 2017), websites (van Hellemont 2012), celebrity (Penfold-Mounce 2010), far-right organising (Castle and Parsons 2017) and maps (Kindynis, 2014)—all are sites of discourse, representation and performance that have been studied by cultural criminologists. These do not reflect a ‘decorative’ project à la Rojek and Turner (2001), but are testaments to the ways in which cultural criminologists have explored how meanings around crime and control are created and contested, enforced and challenged. The modes of networked communication, production and consumption brought about by digital culture (see Miller, 2010) are such that cultural products are more pervasive, fast-moving and diverse than ever, creating difficulties in the public and collective ability to form consensus and establish shared truths. As will be explored below, cultural criminology can examine and explore the complex social and criminological consequences of this phenomenon, without abandoning a commitment to a sufficiently knowable truth and definite values.

Cultural criminology’s engagement with crime and crime control at the more individual or micro level involves understanding the *verstehen*, or subjective experience, of offending and formal law enforcement responses thereto (Ferrell 1999). It has taken seriously Jack Katz’s (1988) argument that excitement, humiliation, power and rage all contribute to what crime and its control mean for those involved. Notions of risk-taking and edgework have been the subject of examination and debate (see Lyng 2004), although some have dismissed cultural criminological study of graffiti writing (e.g. Ferrell 1997; Kindynis 2017) as little more than romanticizing subcultures (see, e.g., Matthews, 2014). Cultural criminological principles have, however, been used in consideration of banal and ‘everyday’ issues from petty youth offending and diversion efforts (Ilan 2010; 2013) to urine tests (Tunnell 2004). Cultural criminology has thus explored the interplay between boredom and excitement that energises and animates so many acts of crime and control (Steinmetz et al. 2017). Importantly, however, and in contrast to a plain Katzian approach, contemporary cultural criminology tends to be interested in ‘layering’ its micro-level analysis with the other levels previously considered (Young 2003). Hence, there has been interest in invoking Bourdieu to better understand the intersections of structure and agency, cognitive choice and pre-conscious disposition (see e.g. Sandberg 2008; Fraser 2015; Ilan 2013; Shammass and Sandberg 2016). For cultural criminology, subjective experiences of crime and its control are very rarely simply ‘personal’ but connected to broad issues of inequality and power, while crosshatched with complex messages and meanings, many of which are of the product of diverse media. Although there is more work to be undertaken with respect to distinguishing between the emotions wrapped up in the commission of crime per se and broader issues of affect in criminology (Mercan 2018), cultural criminology has been clear that its interest in individual experience is not to romanticise, sensationalise or aggrandise. Rather, cultural criminology’s goal is to better elucidate the contemporary realities of crime and its control in all of their complexities and, contradictions.

Finally, it is important to clarify the nature of the values underpinning cultural criminology. Far from embracing the cultural relativism some might suspect it of harbouring, there has always been a clear set of principles supporting the perspective. Ferrell (2013) is transparent in emphasising the anarchist philosophy underpinning his work: solidarity, resisting oppression, respecting liberty, mutual aid and direct action. Whether this pronounced politics appeals or not, cultural criminology is sufficiently broad and flexible to accommodate a wide range of left perspectives. Certainly, an argument can be made that cultural criminology’s values are decidedly humanist, committed to supporting every human being to reach her full potential—with the material, social and psychic resources provided to do so, open to understanding the human condition in broad terms and opposed to reductionist dogma (see Anderson and Spencer 2017). Cultural criminology is not a product or proponent of radical indeterminacy, although it does challenge empty positivism and ideological dogmatism. For those seeking a more definitive set of empirical principles, there is scope for cultural

criminology to form clearer links to zemiology (see Boukli and Kotze 2018), which focuses on harm as opposed to legalistic definitions of criminality. In sum, it is an open flexible position, clear about how it analyses society, transparent about its values, and straightforward in its aspiration to ultimately help work towards to a more equal, sustainable and therefore happier and healthier world.

Growing together: Cultural criminology and other critical perspectives

A distinction should be made between the analysis that cultural criminology allows for and the kinds of analysis that it has offered in the past. Indeed, cultural criminology can be deployed to conduct a range of analyses on a range of different issues, as evidenced above. Cultural criminology is firmly part of the critical criminological tradition (e.g., Ferrell 2013), and it would seem strange if it did not build bridges to, and grow alongside, a range of other critical positions. There has been a tendency amongst some on the left, and in particular ‘ultra realist’ criminology, to criticise and reject what they call ‘identity politics’ (see, e.g., Winlow et al. 2017; Winlow and Hall, this issue) or what others might call analyses of race and gender in power relations. A distinction is drawn between what is viewed as empty ‘lifestylism’ and ‘real’ politics, and borders are placed around what might be considered legitimate inquiry and political analysis (see Dimou and Ilan 2018). Cultural criminology’s logic is opposite, deliberately inviting participation, challenge and difference. Below, I present a number of areas where cultural criminology has been growing alongside particular analytical perspectives, or where there are significant avenues for future coalition building. It is not nearly an exhaustive list, nor perhaps even a list that all cultural criminologists would subscribe to, but certainly areas where attentiveness to the dynamics of meaning underpinning crime and crime control is or would be productive.

Intersectionality and Feminism

While there can be a tendency to mischaracterise and confuse intersectional thinking with some of the more muscular debates that take place on social media, it is important to recognise that it is a vital strain of critical discourse, tied to naturalistic notions of research and quite frankly, common sense (see Potter 2013; Henne and Troshynski, this issue). For Naegler and Salman (2016: 367), ‘Contemporary feminist theory and research have evolved to the point where studying intersectionality—that is—how gender, sexualities, race/ethnicity, and class discriminations overlap—has become common’. It is not particularly difficult to understand that due to the operation of different social structures, individuals can be privileged in one way, while simultaneously disadvantaged in another. People can be oppressed in one context, while the oppressor in another. Rather than dismissing the approach, it is more useful as Naegler and Salman (2016) have done, to recognise that its principles can be found in a range of cultural criminological studies, albeit perhaps implicitly. Intersectional thinking (see Potter, 2013; Henne and Troshynski, this issue) around the complexities and contradictions of social life share a sensibility with cultural criminology’s principles. To what extent are different structures operating in systems and moments of crime and crime control? How do they relate to each other? What does this say about the nature of contemporary society? These are questions of interest to both cultural criminologists and scholars who pursue intersectional thinking.

While cultural criminology has been influenced by feminist methodology and thinking (Hayward, 2016), it has not always been as explicitly attentive to gender dynamics as it might be or should be (Naegler and Salman 2016). There is ample scope for it to consider gendered differences in experiencing the everyday—from walking around a neighbourhood to taking public transport—as well

as in the feeling and meaning of those experiences. Patriarchy renders gender structural. Some examples of this include the ways in which it imposes differences in the ability to use particular spaces at particular times, delineates between behavioural expectations in a manner that creates male entitlement and subjects women to unwanted interactions, and in the way that female bodies have been made vulnerable to levels of sexual violence over and above that which threatens males. Cultural criminology's concerns with linking everyday experience to broad structures, through a focus on meaning, suggests that it could be deployed usefully alongside feminist thinking (see Chesney-Lind and Morash, 2013; Musto, this issue). Indeed, we have seen how at the nexus between social media use, legal campaigning and cultural revolution, moves to better respond to allegations of sexual abuse have challenged the status quo in institutions of power from the media to politics. As I suggest below, given that feminism has been at the forefront of contemporary movements for social change, it is an important phenomenon for cultural criminologists to consider—especially because of its interest in the dynamics of rulemaking and rule breaking.

Critical Class Perspectives

For some (see, e.g., Winlow et. al 2017; Winlow and Hall, this issue), intersectionality becomes a replacement for class politics. But this would not be a proper statement of intersectional analysis. The intersectional thinker can recognise that disadvantages can be cumulative and that privileges are often far from absolute. Cultural criminology is certainly capable of weighing and analysing various structures and perspectives without neglecting analyses of class. Indeed, in his famous account of style and criminalisation, Ferrell (2004) makes specific reference to the tendency for both the poor and ethnic minorities to be criminalised. Ferrell's, latest (2018) work on *Drift* extends this reflection on the links between contemporary poverty and rootlessness. In my own work, I have noted the operation of clashing class cultures (Ilan 2010, 2018) and new class identities (Ilan 2011) in contemporary processes of criminality and criminalisation. The entire enterprise of examining 'street culture' is dedicated to exploring how the urban poor negotiate their position and how they are simultaneously feared, while at the same time, a source of fascination and inspiration for popular and consumer culture (Ilan 2015). Cultural criminology does not neglect a robust analysis of the vicissitudes of living with little within late-capitalism.

Class is not just a product of socio-economic stratification; it is also produced by, and indeed produces discourses, experiences and meanings (see, e.g., Charlesworth 2000). In this context, cultural criminology has much to contribute. While it offers the means of understanding how class informs different discourses, understandings, modes of being and feeling, it can do so in a manner that does not grant inappropriately any one structure 'master status'. It is imperative for it to continue to shine a light into the dark spaces of our societies, where some would rather not look, and to ensure that the plight of deeply marginalized, brutalized and disgraced is always exposed, considered and analysed. This will, however, necessitate a gaze beyond the borders of the Global North.

Southern Criminology and Counter-colonial perspectives

Attuned to the power dynamics underpinning the assignment of meaning, cultural criminology is arguably naturally sympathetic to southern criminology. This perspective recognises the operation of colonial modalities in conceptualising knowledge produced in the Global North as universal (see Carrington et al. 2018, this issue). While the northern, 'economically developed' regions of the world become the baseline, the normal—perspectives from the less wealthy Global South, in which the majority of the world's population lives, becomes 'other'. The 'development' expected of 'developing' countries involves embracing northern modalities in a manner that can compromise their own economies and societies (see Escobar 2004; Coleman 2007). The potential for a northern

administrative criminology to appear technologically advanced and sophisticated, whilst more organic approaches from impoverished communities to appear rudimentary can thus exist, even where the latter are significantly more appropriate. At the same time, by failing to study and consider theoretically a more elaborate range of global experiences, criminology as practiced in the global north suffers.

One example that demonstrates this effectively is the criminological notion of ‘the gang’—a concept heavily reliant on the urban US experience and law enforcement fantasy (Katz and Jackson-Jacobs 2004). From this perspective, gangs can be viewed as apolitical entities. The levels of material deprivation and state neglect are such, however, in many of the slums of the Global South, that ‘gangs’ take on a far more embedded, institutionalised and ultimately political role, providing a rudimentary version of the services and amenities that communities need (Ilan, 2015). As such, they cannot be understood solely as apolitical organized criminal networks, but institutions that are deeply intertwined with everything from the globalised economy and failed former colonial states, to individual desires for consumer goods on the one hand and safety and security on the other. Accordingly, an understanding of the Global South alongside the Global North offers the opportunity to theorise from a more complete and ultimately accurate position. Indeed, given the role of flows in people, drugs, money and weaponry, understanding local street crime outside of the global makes little sense.

Ultimately, cultural criminology, though a northern perspective itself, can be part of a decolonising of criminology as a knowledge form. Its attentiveness to notions of lived experience and analysis of power dynamics in the production of meaning sits well alongside the ‘border thinking’ of Walter Dignolo (2000; see also Dimou 2014). Applying northern critique can mark a first stage of decolonisation, when followed with the deployment of critique from a southern perspective and the provision of a subaltern perspective as a counterpoint to elite knowledge (see Ball, this issue). As such, cultural criminology’s interests in southern criminology can be one of mutual enrichment as opposed to a situation where the northern perspective benefits at the expense of the ‘other’ (for some effective reflection on the relationship between northern and southern knowledges, see Goves and South, 2017).

Anti-Racism

The colonial legacy continues in the Global North in the way in which people of colour tend to be marginalised and criminalised (Staples 1975). Attending to the racial politics of legislation, policing, imprisonment and parole (amongst other processes) is crucial to understanding the structure of contemporary society—and not just an exploration of identity (see Hall et. al 1978). The disproportionate criminalisation of people of colour, their significantly higher experiences of police violence, and the fact they are more likely to experience discretion as discrimination is not accidental. Rather, as Williams and Battle (2017) argue, such inequalities are the direct result of ‘an ideology of disproportionate Black punishment’. For these scholars, criminology has been complicit in masking the operation of racism by shrouding the study of punishment in an obscuring blanket of ‘value free science’. Cultural criminology has similarly critiqued variants of criminology that obsess over methodological technicalities but ignore more fundamental questions of structure, equality and meaning. Where Williams and Battle rightly call for greater examination of ‘qualitative differences in the ways in which punishment is administered’ and an end to the omission of ‘lived experiences’ (2017: 555), it is clear that anti-racist and cultural criminological perspectives share concerns.

Cultural criminology’s attentiveness to capturing everyday experiences and locating them within structural and cultural analyses position it well to critique racist criminal justice. It can provide

a deep description of what over-policing feels like: frequent stops, invasive questions, searching hands, disrespectful comments, harsh shoves, unnecessary twisting, suffocating holds, racial epithets, eye-watering pain, hot blood on throbbing skin, and the sobs of grieving relatives. It can trace these sensations into the street-cultural taboo against cooperation with the police and the desperate measures that can be taken by those who feel they must protect themselves without recourse to the state. Moreover, there is a need to be attentive to meaning where the police can shoot unarmed black people and the ensuing discussion turns around the moral failures of the victim (Smiley and Fakunle 2016). Efforts to combat the oppression, violence and devastation experienced by black populations span battles over mediated meaning online to the application of the law, utilising everything from social media to social movements. Cultural criminology has much to learn from these new modes of campaigning for social change and perhaps something to offer in terms of analysing how meanings are wrapped into the reproduction of racism in criminal justice.

Green and White Collar Criminology

The links between cultural and green criminologies have been explored on a number of occasions. With green criminology exploring the realm of environmental harms (see Davies et al, this issue; Ruggiero and South, 2013)), cultural criminology has proven useful as a means of thinking about the social and cultural factors underpinning the behaviours that lead to ecological destruction and our failure to bring a halt to such on-going and pervasive degradation and devastation. Cultural criminology's focus on everyday life and its critique of consumer culture positions it well to understand how the disposability of contemporary fashion practices and planned obsolescence creates the conditions under which resources are consumed and wasted at an extraordinary rate (Ferrell 2013). Likewise the structural force that is contemporary capitalism stands not just behind this phenomenon, but the commodification of natural products, such as water, leading to its sale in bottled form and hence creating mounds of plastic waste needlessly (Brisman and South 2013, 2014; Brisman et al. 2018). At the same time, criminal justice has been engineered to defend the aesthetics and practices of the consumer society (in all its destructiveness) and to suppress effective protest. Meanwhile, as climate change denial is succoured in right-wing thought, questions have been raised around the extent to which artistic expression might communicate climate truth against such assaults (Brisman 2018). Rather than focusing on particular breaches of environmental law, 'green cultural criminology' is more concerned with how environmental harms become the consequence of 'ordinary' behaviour (see similarities with the emerging perspective of Deviant Leisure (e.g., Raymen and Smith, this issue)).

Decoupling products and production practices from the complex web of meaning drawn around them by thick public relations and advertising can be particularly difficult. Palm oil (for example) can be presented as a natural, wholesome product without reflecting the links that it can have to processes of deforestation (Hol 2017). Criminologically, it becomes difficult when the subject of the indictment is not simply one offender or one act of corporate malfeasance, but *the entire western way of life*. From a green perspective, asking what changes are required to everyday life and cultural understandings in order to shift powerful structures not only resonates with the goals of feminists and anti-racists but arguably connects to ultimate questions about the sustainability of human life. There is great potential for cultural criminology to explore a range of harms caused by elite practices. This should go beyond researching corporate and white-collar criminality *per se*, although this remains an important task where, for example, deficiencies in enforcing health and safety laws are linked to numerous deaths (see Tombs and Whyte, 2013). And while there is scope for cultural criminology to examine the subjective experience of white-collar crime, it can be more ambitious than aiming for a phenomenology of say insider trading (although this might form some

small part of the analysis). Instead, understanding how harmful elite practices become almost banal in their ubiquity could be a particularly fruitful avenue of study.

There is a very particular normative character to wealth and capital in an historical period where 'ordinary' companies, high finance, corrupt regimes, celebrities, high net-worth individuals and organised crime all use the same opaque financial instruments (Global Witness, nd; Storm, 2013). The 'Paradise Papers' revelations that detail 'offshoring'—the ways these actors shield their wealth from taxation and scrutiny—suggest that these mechanisms were used by those who procured disruptive results in key western democratic contests such as the 2016 US election and the UK plebiscite on EU membership earlier in the same year (Guardian, 2017). An unlikely set of allies has been created in the battle against transparency and accountability in public life. The intertwining of criminal, anti-democratic and capitalist interests to this extent represents a key challenge to the legitimacy of current modes of governance. The law and policing becomes increasingly the domain of immediate but limited harms, whereas the actors who threaten the fiscal underpinnings of the state, trust in democracy, social solidarity and indeed basic notions of fairness are left to operate with impunity. Arguably, there remains a near veneration for the hyper-wealthy that ignores the problems that accumulate around the mechanisms they use to evade their responsibility to wider society and the Earth. Cultural criminology has the potential to achieve much in exploring the links between elite ways of life, cultures of governance and the generation of harm—as ever, drawing connections between individual experience, group meaning-making and socio-economic structures.

Whilst all of the areas of study noted above could be considered reasonable topics for any critical perspective, a coalition approach may be preferable to one that seeks to subsume all within a single approach or perspective. The ethos of cultural criminology has been to seek allies, or to be an ally, rather than demanding adherence to any narrow credo.

The Time is Now

As stated at the outset of this article and as suggested throughout, it is worthwhile considering the importance of cultural criminology at this particular conjuncture. I use the word 'conjuncture' intentionally—to refer to the Gramscian principle favoured by Stuart Hall (see Hall et al., 1978; Hall and Massey, 2010). 'Conjunctural analysis' attends to the 'complex field of power and consent, and looking at its different levels of expression—political, ideological, cultural and economic' (Hall and Massey, 2010: 65) at particular moments in history. For our purposes, this entails understanding the ways in which injustice and harm are generated and resisted in extraordinary times. Cultural criminology is especially relevant where the digital media industries shape the nature of contemporary oligarchy, online communication assaults notions of truth, and whilst social media inform the practices of social movements. It is well established that culture is a significant driver of the (re)production of structure and the modes by which it might be challenged (see Willis, 1977; Hall et al., 1978) and the present conjuncture is arguably an ideal time to trace the material and situational implications of culture in matters of crime and crime control.

The internet and digital technology's influence on everything from electoral politics to public discourse have rendered meaning and truth as key theatres of struggle in contemporary politics. In the starkly partisan politics in the United States today, consensus is in short supply, while even the most fundamental of facts seem to be contestable (Brisman, 2018). Digital technologies have lent considerable immediacy to the ways in which meanings around crime and crime control are debated online. Activists thus seek to challenge existing understandings and to ultimately replace them in a

way that will change the assumptions' underpinning law, policy and practice. For example, scholars of the #MeToo and #BeenRapedNeverReported phenomena have explored the way these hashtags were deployed to counter patriarchy, rape culture and sexual violence (Mendes et al. 2018; Musto, this issue). Interestingly, however, a secondary effect has been to transform those who participated in online discussions: 'solidarity often transforms into feminist consciousness amongst hashtag participants, which allows them to understand sexual violence as a structural rather than personal problem' (Mendes et al. 2018: 238). Replacing existing dominant meanings that support oppressive structures, with a set of meanings that expose oppressive structures, paves the way for changes to be sought in law, policy and practice. The relationships between meaning and the law is not linear and there are many obstacles to be overcome before change can happen, but clearly meaning and politics are deeply intertwined in contemporary activist practice.

In her analysis of #BlackLivesMatter, Nikita Carney (2016) clarifies the place of so-called 'identity' in the digital element of movements that challenge racism in criminal justice. Drawing attention to black lives and the violence wrought on black bodies is to specify 'momentarily' and 'strategically' the experience of black people in criminal justice; the purpose is not to elevate any category of identity, but to highlight the exceptionally disproportionate and structural nature of their oppression (Carney 2016: 194). Ultimately the contest between #BlackLivesMatter and #AllLivesMatter (a hashtag that glosses over the particularly unjust experiences of people of colour) is one over meaning, where visions of appropriate policing and criminal justice diverge considerably. Of course, while social media practices are new and notable, they are arguably not enough to secure change. There is ultimately a need for an articulated politics and set of fruitful goals that can be pursued (see Hayward and Schuilenburg 2014), although these can take multiple forms (see Naegler, 2018). Participating in cultural endeavours has, however, been identified as a vital route to politics—both in terms of developing consciousness (Hall et al., 1978) and for cultivating the affective charge and passion that provide motivation (Dimou and Ilan, 2018). And it is important to remember that for all the social media activism, the movements for black lives have well thought out policy positions (see e.g. <https://www.joincampaignzero.org/>).

Cultural criminology's contribution to transformative politics can occur through the provision of effective analyses. This is not the same thing, however, as championing particular parties or causes, no matter what positions those parties might take or causes they might champion. As a scholarly discipline, cultural criminology cannot be satisfied simply echoing slogans for it may sometimes be forced to contradict the claims of sympathetic activists or to point to issues with their plans and/or epistemologies. As scholarship that is dedicated to unearthing nuance and complexity, an open posture is essential. The goal is always to provide astute analysis that remains 'appreciative' (Matza 1969; see also Brisman, 2017) of the multiple parties that operate and interact in crime and control, and to make sense of the perspectives that ascend and descend in the struggle to do and/or redefine justice.

The world is beset by multiple intersecting challenges and crises: economic, environmental, epistemological, political and social. These crises mutually reinforce and catalyse, ratcheting up their urgency and stakes. It is possible for cultural criminology to push for an understanding of a wide variety of phenomena, from the global to the individual, in a manner that is orientated critically towards a set of contingent truths, cognisant of varied power relations, and steeped in humanist values. The unifying point of its analyses remains an attentiveness to meanings—how they are (re)produced and challenged, and their consequences for crime and crime control. For cultural criminology, the time is now.

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