

TWO
ESSAYS

ON
CRIME

BY
CARBINE
& JACKIE

PLUS

A CON-
VERSATION
BETWEEN
THE AUTHORS

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the soldier as scoundrel: the (a)morals of heroism

by Carbine (twitter @carbinesaint & cashapp: \$StCarbine)

My earliest memory is of being excited by terror. As is common for children coercively assigned male at birth who turn out gay or transfeminine, it was in the context of molestation. By another child, thankfully. perhaps if it were by an adult I would be more scared than excited, but in that moment it was the reverse. predisposed, due to my race and class and gender in this white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, to live a terrifying life, I think this was a useful way to feel.

I don't have many other memories of my childhood or of my life, but I remember being nervous and deliberately self-isolating. I had no emotional attachments not wrapped up in abuse, so I thought emotional attachment was endlessly supporting others and enduring their inflicting of pain. I was heavily dissociated. I do remember that, as a teenager, I got into left-wing extremism under the notion that working-class solidarity would end racism. Knowing now the actual history of the working-class in white imperialist nations, this was misguided. With similar ignorance, I was enamored with social conservatism. By way of osmosis as a political

extremist, I found myself drawn towards modernist valorizations of ancient or warlike values, towards those values themselves. I read so much labor history that sanitized or justified or hid the racism of white people, the only piece I read from that time that still makes an impression on me is the futurist manifesto. I was too nervous to be around people but I worshipped strident, forward ferocity. Like all moralists, I idealized values embodied only by others, maybe only by myths. I also found myself in love with military history, drawn to it by fantasies of revolutionary civil war but held firmly by a love of action. I was depressed by my life, but I felt excited by seeing people embody the values I respected. I also loved thrillers, too fearful for horror but still craving a familiar fear. I was powerless in my life, but I felt close to powerful vicariously living through men who had to be brave, energetic, and hard.

Edmund Burke, in the preface to *A Philosophical Enquiry to the Sublime and Beautiful*, claims all people roughly feel the same way about the same things, but that some people are attracted to “bitter tastes” by virtue of habit; painful things become pleasing by habit. Perhaps this is what happened to me, perhaps I was forced so much hurt from my earliest ages that i got used to it. As I grew the level of terror grew, and, soon after, so did the level of pleasure I gained from it. Coincidentally, so did my preoccupation with certain moral values.

When I became 20, I became extremely attracted to crime. I had felt emasculated my whole life and I wanted to somehow reverse my castration. I wanted to gain not the passive entitlements of manhood but its dramatic privileges. However, I was too isolated and socially unaware. I was bold and brainless and terrified, women rejected me and men disrespected me. I had always rooted my nascent masculinity in fantasies of violence at the expense of all else, but after a certain point it became something I was obliged to practice. I hated being a man because it was the impetus towards acts that scared me, esteem gained only by violent acts. As a growing

masochist, however, the pain felt good as well. I decided I was going to regain my manhood by burglarizing houses, and from there it became an obsession. I studied forensics with the enthusiasm of an artist studying her craft, I didn't want to just rob but vandalize and destroy. I once read that, strangely, rape arrests were correlated to a history of burglary. perhaps because some burglars view entering a stranger's house as like sexually entering a non-consenting person. i have never been attracted to sexual violence despite being violent in general, not because I'm so good of a person but because all violence is almost sexualized for me, and perhaps this is the case for everyone on some level. I could only gain power by violating all society, by acting against the will of everyone. crime was my means to do that.

I knew I would be incarcerated before I actually was. Looking back on how I was treated by inmates and guards makes me angry. It was a humiliating experience, I was visibly very mentally ill and obviously "green". I was extremely vulnerable, but it was a county jail in south florida so the ways I was hurt were more subtle. I was bullied by everyone, and driven to threatening a man just to stop the worst of it. I was sent to solitary, and asked to not be let out. The abuse I both witnessed and experienced from guards there made me regret that decision, I preferred the alternative of nervously sweating so much I smelled to living like a child being constantly threatened. My hate was evolving from being directed to my very torturers to the groups they belonged to, and eventually it would be directed towards everyone. I'm a happier person today, but hate has been tattooed on my soul by life. As it is for many people.

I remember sitting in the common area of solitary; they let each of us out one at a time to bathe and watch TV. I controlled the remote, and I felt spiritually drawn to the station that always played true crime, as enamored with that as the other inmates were to sports or the local news. They were dissecting and judging the

life of some serial killer in the pornographic way they usually do, pornographic in a way that appealed to a side that was going to consume me. After this man endured a head injury from a motorcycle accident, he became extremely violent towards his loved ones. This violence eventually became directed towards complete strangers, became overtly sexualized, became righteous, became directed solely towards women, became lethal. They were recounting a story from the beginning of his spree of violence. His battered girlfriend, who's eventual rejection triggered his war against women, had enough and drew a knife on him as he was sleeping. She was paralyzed by fear, and her violent boyfriend awoke. He looked at her with disgust and dared her to do it. "You don't have the nerve." She collapsed. And my mind broke open.

I always wanted something that separated me from my abusers - in effect, from most people - and I found it. From then on i began to see my criminal tendencies and actions in a self-righteous way, every criminal act was a heroic conquest of my own fear. I not only gained power over myself everytime I did an antisocial, fear-inducing act, I was proving my superiority to ordinary people. I wasn't a mere criminal, I was brave. I was like the soldiers in battle I read about as a teenager. I felt i was akin to a warrior.

Many criminals view themselves this way, especially those in criminal gangs. This is a way to imagine themselves as more noble, to give their violent business a special veneer, a fraternal elitism, a veneer that builds group loyalty.

Just as labor under capitalism is valorized, laboring in these underground economies is valorized by these subcultures. This is shown clear on the first song on one of Meek Mill's first mixtapes. Here, crime is painted as a great calling:

*Let me out my cell, right back on the mission
Fresh from off a bail, right back in the kitchen*

“Mission” is a relevant, interesting term here. What society sees as mere drug dealing is painted as heroic violence, neoliberal achievement rhetoric warped into something very different:

*Lace up my boots, put on my strap
And go lookin' for that paper I'm like "where it's at?"
They lookin' at, I'm staring back
Feelin' like I'm superman
Every time I wear this mac*

Loyalty and omerta are the same thing in any collective criminal enterprise, both are necessary to carry out their dangerous laboring, to prevent as many people as possible from going to prison:

*I hope they dont find me guilty, it's my word against they word
And I won't get a chance to speak
I caught my case with nine of my n-ggas,
and I'm the only one they beat
I took it for the team*

The purpose of claiming these actions are actually moral, against ordinary society, exists to justify criminal activity and to ensure its efficacy and efficiency. The reality is less epic, bleaker. The cold pragmatism of criminal morality is stripped bare by a former baron of crime, Rene “Boxer” Enriquez of the Mexican Mafia:

“It’s the mentality of the warrior. This is what we ingrained in our soldiers, to be prepared, to be physically prepared and mentally prepared to commit battle and to commit any violent act that’s necessitated by the mafia. This is why they train so hard, this is why they endure what they do in their workouts. You have to understand that all the organizations in nontraditional prison organized crime and prison gangs utilize this mentality, cultural identity and the philoso-

phy and the belief that they are elite warriors, and this is part of the indoctrination process, the part of the brainwashing process. Make them believe they're elite and lead them down the path that they're committing these acts for a greater cause" [Gangster Confidential with Rene "Boxer" Enriquez, 9:07. via Youtube]

What lies behind this is profit...:

"Our true motivation for stopping the drive-bys was to infiltrate the street gangs and place representatives in each gang, representatives which then, in turn tax illicit activities in the areas and we already had it planned out that California would be divided up much like a pie is carved into slices. With each respective member very receiving an organizational turf and for the most part this occurred. Tens of thousands of gang members are here to do what we said. And it was then we realized the true potential of the Mexican mafia. It was then the light bulbs came on above our heads and says "oh my god, we're sitting on a gold mine. We can make astronomical amounts of money without ever having to touch drugs or do anything again ourselves. We can do all this, we could become a true powerhouse because of the finances generated by taxation taxation, extortion, protection, they all fall under the same umbrella" [Gangster Confidential with Rene "Boxer" Enriquez, 18:38]

And property:

8:06: "I used to run quite a large crew, probably one of the most successful crews in southern California. I did it all thru visits or mail, we altered their names, we altered my name...and we conducted business out of pelican Bay for about ten years and I was clearing about 60 [thousand] a year from the cell at pelican Bay. That's not bad for being in a prison a thousand miles away from your base of power. That's not bad at all."

8:34: "[My crew] is making astronomical amounts. I'm at the low end of the spectrum of being paid. I understand I'm the figurehead, they're doing all the work - they own legitimate businesses... Three

legitimate businesses, but underneath that they were doing the illicit drug trade, extortion, so if they're driving Mercedes Benz, Lexuses, Escalades, they're pulling in seven figures easy. I mean the whole crew is seven figures easy."

This is specifically organized as a money-making enterprise:

"as a member you have an organizational entitlement. As soon as you're made you inherit a piece of turf. It's usually where you hail from, say I'm boxer from Artesia, I can conduct any illicit activity in Artesia that I wish without any opposition from the organization. I don't have any kickbacks to give anybody, I don't owe anybody any money, this is all premium, for me. I can also conduct business in the outlying areas as long as it doesn't interfere with another member's business objectives. If it does, we strike an agreement. "I'll give you x amount of money you let me function here or you give me x amount of money you can function here." Everybody pays them up, everybody pays, to do business we all pay. It's smart business." [Very Rare Interview Rene Boxer Enriquez Mexican Mafia Heavy Details the Life, 6:49]

It's parasitic. The narrator of this interview reveals the Mexican Mafia's relationship to its criminal serfs on their fiefs:

"investigators learned that Mexican mafia leaders in prison taxed drug sales on the street. Street dealers were like owners of a fast food franchise. They could use the Mexican Mafia name in return for part of the profits, and they were intimidated into "paying." [29:49]

And like all capitalists, they must invest their wealth for greater profits. Another Mexican Mafia member who dropped dime:

"I was a reserve regiment Commander for the San Jose area. Meaning that anybody paroled in the San Jose area of the santa Clara county, little cities within there, well they fell under my jurisdiction and the other fellas with me in charge of overseeing it. So we'd educate people, send them out there, whether to be out there to do crime in

order to funnel money back, send out hits, do murders, what have you, so anything that happened out there the organization was doing we was aware of it. We'd have them get into jobs that may open the door for other parolees getting out there so they can get jobs there, preferably we'd like to get them in jobs where money laundering would be feasible, such as restaurants, tattoo shops, you know where you have an endless amount of customers, you know what I'm saying? And it's real easy to just doctor the books and say 'well we had twenty customers come in today, that's why we have this extra money.'" [20:11 Very Rare Interviews with Former Mexican Mafia, Nuestra Familia...]

As a quasi-capitalist and exploitative enterprise, the loyalty ingrained in its members, of course, is mostly bullshit. Enriquez discusses the extent thereof:

I can function anywhere in the state of California, anywhere I wish with the full authority of the Mexican mafia, and the full authority of my crew. Me being the figurehead of that crew. As long as it does not interfere with other member's business. And if it does I can easily call a hit on that member, get him killed, and take over his business. It's that simple that's how life is in the Mexican mafia. That's why it's so treacherous." [Very Rare Interview Rene Boxer Enriquez Mexican Mafia Heavy Details the Life, 7:40]

When anyone goes to prison, whether a gang member receiving stipends from their estates of crime or an utter indigent even without commissary, another moral value is promoted for self-interested reasons, becomes a relevant force: discipline. A peckerwood explains:

"When you come into prison it's generally just like being drafted into the army. As a white man, you know, there are certain expectations you're gonna have as in, you know, working out keeping physically fit, to pass messages to where even if they say like there's a sexual predator on the yard and you know you don't get to raise your hand

they tell you to do something, it's expected of you to do and that goes pretty much with anything... You're not your own man. you have to abide by the rules that have been laid down from long before [you] started doing time and they vary from prison yard to prison yard but they're all basically the same rules..." [10:50, Very Rare Interviews with Former Mexican Mafia, Nuestra Familia...]

Criminals invoke the images of warriors and soldiers because many imagine the latter to be truly great, those who feel they are similar wish to be identified with that greatness. We, like these criminals, imagine warriors - like the samurai - as ascetic and fearless people. the first pages of the Hagakure declares that the successful samurai should embrace death, meditate on death daily. I have heard that the prime moral value of soldiers today is incredible loyalty. the Waffen SS credo, one so associated with nazism across the world that it's banned in many places, including Germany itself, is "my honor is my loyalty". War has been a revered source of moral contemplation or spiritual power since the beginning of written word, for centuries. the perspective on the moral values implicitly and explicitly valorized by the epic poetry of the Illiad has changed throughout the ages; the more we associate praise of war with inappropriate and illiberal values, the more outright glorification of violence has become unpopular - despite that the most violent and meaningless wars in the post-cold war world have been carried out by liberal democracies and have been done supposedly in the name of liberal values. For Simone Weil discussing the themes of the Illiad as she interpreted them, war is the landscape for great but utterly bleak moral and spiritual questions; perhaps a work not simply glorifying war, but maybe discussing its carnage from a neutral and cold perspective, a poem of force.

This seems to be the case for art about war during feudal japan, a society politically dominated by warriors. Martial honor was nakedly praised:

Nevertheless, the great hero of the battle was Yoriyoshi's eldest son, Yoshiie. He shot arrows from horseback like a god; undeterred by gleaming blades, he lunged through the rebels' encirclements to emerge on their left and right. With his great arrow heads he trans-fixed one enemy chieftain after another, never shooting at random but always inflicting a mortal wound. He galloped like the wind and fought with a skill that was more than human. The [enemies] fled rather than face him, calling him the firstborn son of Hachiman... [Japan: *The Shaping of Daimyo Culture*, Yoshiaki Shimizu]

But violent organized conflict was also the backdrop for stories about history, about extraordinary people, about humanity. Perhaps to reveal the contradiction between the cultivation of bun (artistic endeavors) and bu (militaristic ones), a scroll painted around the 14th century dwells on the dynamic between two brothers: a warrior excessively interested in ambition and a courtier excessively interested in leisurely culture. Whether war is inherently good or bad is irrelevant, only the level of one's preoccupation with carrying it out is considered. Here, this hard statement might be intended as a sign of this character's obsession:

Because I was born in a warrior house, [yumiya no ie], what could be more natural for me than to practice the skills of the warrior. What is the use of filling one's heart with thoughts of the moon or flowers, or composing verse, or plucking a lute? The ability to strum a zither or blow a flute doesn't count for much on the battlefield. Everybody in my household—women and children included—will learn to ride wild horses and train daily with the longbow. [Shimizu]

In the past, the pain and horrors of war didn't lead to a blanket condemnation, these horrors were either ignored in favor of more important spiritual lessons or accepted as apart of an important spiritual lesson itself, maybe a praise of one's toughness:

Warriors of the East Side Eastern landowning gentry have 500 mounted warriors each at their command Mounted warriors of the east never fall from their horses. If the father or son of an eastern warrior falls, that warrior will ride over his corpse to get to the enemy.

Warriors of the Western Side. If the father or son of a western warrior is killed, he will leave the battlefield and cry. If a western samurai army run out of food, they halt the war and return to plant more crops. In summer they are too hot and in winter they are too cold; they are soft indeed. [*Old Japan: Secret from the Shores of the Samurai*, Antony Cummins]

The routine denigration of war itself is a product of modern times, of an age that has defined all hardship and suffering besides that induced by capitalist labor as wrong, and that is only endorsed with the unattainable goal of bringing about a utopia of happiness, of pleasurable wealth and leisure, of becoming rich. War was frequently seen as an avenue of expressing honor and morality that contradicted this type of thinking, not just hysterical and widespread weeping over the apparent horror that pain can exist.

There is a problem though with glorifying war like how we demonize it, a problem which has been laid bare and discussed for almost as long war and warriors have been centered. War has had all this intense moral meaning throughout history, but in practice it looks a lot more cynical, “materialistic”, cruel. That the people who might’ve materially benefited from war were the first to write about it could be relevant.

Samurai can be defined as “one who serves”. Daimyo is translated as (and was contemporaneously used, apparently [Turnbull]) warlord, but it can be literally translated as “great landowner. they were both: lords and warlords. These were classes that came into being as a result of material conditions, of political decisions made centuries beforehand by an imperial class which would eventually be swept aside. The relationships between these classes were always

being altered, always in fierce constant conflict with each other and with themselves, until from this warrior class a centralized government enforcing peace amongst everyone was established. A class that emerged as the product of being subordinate to civil authority became fiercely independent, eventually took total power, and, in total, took almost a thousand years to be firmly controlled again.

The warrior class came into existence due to a very peculiar situation: revenues to the court were declining due to the prevalence of tax-free estates granted by that court to its low-ranking members [*Brief History of Japan*, Johnathan Clements] - at first small concessions but, thru gift [Clements], becoming massive and decadent fiefs. Alongside the prospect of a long peace with the Chinese empire, it was decided by the imperial court that the national, conscripted army could be ended. [Clements] Those important people who could supply, feed, and pay for an army were expected to raise one on their own volition, with their own wealth, following the dictates of the court. [Clements] Families soon formed around war; stealing by conquest the territory of northern indigenous tribes and being granted their lands by the court for their violent imperialist labor, their families becoming extremely powerful in the process. [Clements] There was a contradiction between imperial authority and warrior power, however, as land granted by the court could be taken away just as quickly:

“It was, in theory, possible that any lord might lose his manor overnight and be ordered to hand over the keys to a successor newly appointed by the government. The real question in Japan, as ever, was who the government actually was: all orders were given in the emperor’s name, but true power resided in the ability to gain that particular stamp of approval.

In many ways, this is what the samurai houses were fighting over. It no longer mattered quite so much if they had access to the luxuries of the court—many of them were living very well on their own es-

tates. But now they required greater influence at that same court in order to make sure that everything they had built over generations was not taken away from them because a minister had fallen out of favor, or because the arrival of a pretty concubine had propelled her father into a new ministerial role at court and ousted his predecessor. Whereas the samurai families had once been “servants” of the court, they now increasingly tried to make the court serve them.” [Clements]

By time the shogunate was established, hundreds of years later, one of these powerful warrior families had been ousted from the reigns of power by a rival family in a civil war, and the emperor and imperial court was long since mostly disempowered, an artifice. [Clements] All attempts at the restoration of true imperial authority were crushed. Over the Shoen, once totally lorded over by civil aristocrats, the Shogun put in place land managers - responsible for taxation - from the warrior class who replaced ones from the imperial court; these new managers were more empowered and routinely abused their authority in relation to the landowners. [Shimizu] Two hundred or so years later, a dispute over shogunal secession was triggered, between which powerful warrior families lined up against one another to back one claimant to the throne or the other. This triggered a decade long civil war and the total dissolution of central authority. [Shimizu] All shoen were finally expropriated by the warrior class [Britannica], provincial military governors put in place by the Shogun “who had limited direct landholding and gained income by taxation” [Shimizu] were either overthrown by or became Daimyo [Britannica; Shimizu] - kogi of essentially independent states (kokka) with only a theoretical loyalty to anyone but themselves, lords of vassals and their fiefs. [Shimizu] All daimyo, with their wealth and their vassals and the armies they raised, jostled for supremacy, allied and betrayed one another. Central authority was re-established only after certain daimyo, thru brute force, grift, and trickery, gained supremacy and established a

shogunal power more powerful than ever put in place before, and enforced peace and submission amongst the warrior class. [*Japan Emerging*, Karl F. Friday]

Parasitism was crucial to this warrior aristocracy at all points in time, as it is to all aristocracies. A saying of the Edo period: “sesame seeds and peasants are very much alike. The more you squeeze them, the more you can extract from them. [*A Modern history of Japan*, Andrew Gordon] Before the ascendancy of warriors, land and governing appointments was tied to one’s finesse in court intrigue. [Clements, Friday] governors were appointed to provinces and given “unprecedented discretion” to forward a specific amount of revenue to the court. Ordinary people were taxed many times over in rice. peasants had the product of their labor extracted by both provincial authority, private lords, and the imperial court. [Friday] Thus, the stolen wealth of this elite:

“Other food products received at the heian court included salt, sea-food - fish, shells, and seaweed, which were either dried, cooked, salted, or marinated for preservation - and grains such as millet. Oil, pressed from sesame seeds, perilla seeds, hemp seeds, walnuts, viburnum, Camellia, or other plants, was used both for cooking and for lamp fuel. Furniture and equipment for the imperial household was manufactured in craft shops in the capital, but the court also requisitioned from the provinces wooden chests, bamboo boxes, wooden tubs, bamboo trellises, kegs, straw mats, and paper for use in its offices. Similarly, textiles were woven both in provincial and capital workshops.” [Friday]

In the beginning of their ascendancy, warriors had to exert themselves in valorous and successful martial combat to gain their fiefs, sometimes to be granted land from their conquests in the north or from failed rebellious upstarts. When they took power, warriors connected to the ruling family would be appointed as jito on many shoen [friday], taking their piece of wealth. Military governors were

placed to manage provinces, and after a certain point were allowed to take half of all produce (called *hanzei*) [Friday]. The system of *shoen* was swept aside during *Sengoku Jidai*, when *daimyo* simply expropriated all the property within their contiguous, defensible domains [Friday]. Absentee, rent-free landlords were dispossessed, and the wealth of the land now belonged to the strongest. These fiefs were hereditary but there was remarkable social mobility within this class, mobility driven by violent exertion in civil war or superiority in local intrigue. During *sengoku jidai*, the most volatile period of feudal Japan, a single misstep, dwelling too much on “*bun*” rather than *bu*”, staying in the decayed capital too long and leaving control of a demesne to underlings who might decide not to give it back, meant the loss of their power and parasitic wealth [Shimizu].

A samurai’s loyalty to their retainer was instrumentalist, abandoned out of expediency or social pressure or the threat of violence. Exploiting weakness, lesser overthrew superiors quickly, ruthlessly, without hesitation. When *Hideyoshi* finally consolidated power over all Japan, he established elaborate and serious systems of control and surveillance to finally prevent the warrior class from making war on each other for the other’s land or allying to each other and making war on the shogunate [book on *Tokugawa*], now finally empowered and wealthy once again after centuries of increasing disorder. This was the nature of *pax tokugawa*.

How coincidental, how strange, that the *Hagakure*, a work of great vitality, was produced in a time of peace and utter inertia. The warrior class of Japan had produced the most austere, extreme defense of values forged in combat as they had ceased all combat. The epic poems produced by this aristocracy when it was vital, seems to have been more evenhanded, less violent, and less extreme than the *Hagakure*. In fact, these lofty morals were expressed in an era when they were irrelevant, in order to enhance the prestige of this class, as a pretentious fetter, like the long since unbloodied swords only

they had the right to carry. [Gordon]

The modern soldier fights not for a fief but for a wage, for professional advancement, out of nationalist delusion, and their loyalty is a bond based on mutual hate for the enemy, nationalist hate, racialized hate, ethnic hate [PBS, *Going to War*, 24:46, 41:08; Marlantes page 64 - 65]. Hate and revenge are the untold, unspoken secrets of war [*Going to War*, 49:28, 39:44], its blood and guts.

As a rule, the modern soldier is an agent of a national or imperialist capitalist class. Behind any romantics in war are very base, un-heroic impulses. Capitalists and imperialists either forcibly press people into service or trick racists and idiots into to voluntarily do the same, and then they get them to hate their enemy so much that they're ready to violate the greatest moral prohibition and kill them. Their "loyalty" serves to deindividuate people, to make ppl more comfortable with killing [Marlantes, 156], to solidify national or racial or ethnic bonds or the bonds of platoons, companies or fireteams. [Marlantes 154 - 155] They're so successful at getting people to hate the enemy, they can't stop this hate from resulting in very unheroic activities like mass rape and random murder and mutilation; actions that might produce similar feelings of heroic, godlike power that dominating the enemy does. Some peasants in feudal Japan reported samurai randomly committing similar atrocities on them, and this is only what was both reported and allowed to survive through history. It seems that every war in history has led to war crimes on all sides of a conflict, even the sides in the right, fighting for something more than bourgeois or imperialist interests. Even the Soviet War against nazism contained atrocities.

In war, as in life, loyalty is an expedient thing, dependent on winning and control. In World War I, the Ottomans could barely pay, supply, or feed its soldiers, and so they were only heroic in thousands and thousands of them deserting [*The Ottoman Mobilization of Manpower in the First World War*, Mehmet Beşikci]. So many deserted while having so few people in the empire's popula-

tion able to be mobilized or expected to have a modicum of loyalty, when they were caught they weren't punished, just sent back to the front [Beşikci]. An army duals as an organization that serves imperialist or capitalist interests and a bureaucratic means by which to prevent soldiers from fleeing in terror. I believe we hear less about soldiers retreating disorganizedly today b/c systems of control have been so well-honed, the innovations and theories of Maurice of Nassau [Lehman; Zhukov] perhaps being enhanced, adjusted, and honed more and more throughout time.

As for the bravery of those in military combat, for the most part it's fueled by the presence of other soldiers and the firepower of a state mobilized diminishing fear like liquor, that and a pleasurable feeling of exhilaration [Marlantes, 78 - 79] partly induced by terror. [Sebastian Junger, *Why Veterans Miss War*: 5:40, Sebastian Junger, *On Fear* 0:45]. When exhilaration is absent but bravery seems acute, this is induced by having become numb to constant stress and violence (in peacetime, we call a similar disposition "sociopathy") [*Going to war*, 40:29]. What we call "elan vital" can be reduced to a reliable mathematical formula - material plus previous success [Zhukov]. People will die for their country only if they're well-fed, well-surveilled, well-controlled, think they'll win, and think they won't die. Few will fight to the bitter end in the absence of certainty or reward.

The bravery and loyalty of ancient warriors and modern day soldiers is near-indistinguishable from the bravery and loyalty of criminal gangs and individual criminals. The conquering of fear that each criminal must achieve in order to engage in criminal action is the same conquering of fear each soldier must achieve. Criminal collaborations or gangs disinhibit criminals like how armies disinhibit soldiers. Soldiers become fearless for the same reason criminals become "sociopathic". Soldiers become thrill-seekers, parasexual sadomasochists, the same way criminals do. Soldiers dehumanize their enemies like how criminals must dehumanize their

victims. Equally, the warrior, the soldier, and the criminal must exert themselves to dominate or exploit. The moral values that seem to be naturally produced by these groups across race, ethnicity, nationality, and history are the product of voracious, violent parasitism. Their bravery or brazenness cannot be separated from their preying on the weak, their accumulation of wealth, their wielding and love of power, their violence, their hate. They function as elite mobs by which death-defying acts at the uncharted and feared peak of human experience are performed, and always done so in the name of crass self-interest; the contours of their extraordinary acts is always tied to their base humanity. They are transcendent in how they reify pleasure-seeking; to get to pleasure they must travel through fear and pain.

Soldiers that make themselves distinctive in terms of heroic actions are similar to criminals that make themselves distinctive in terms of their brazenness or evil; life before or after their foray into conflict, conflict with either an organized enemy formation or with all society, has uniquely shaped them into the most obsessed with thrill-seeking, the most numb by fear or the most desirous to overcome it. War is widely considered a traumatizing and negative experience in the western world, but there exist “natural killers” [*Natural Killers: Turning the Tide of Battle*] who love everything about it, and don’t feel a pang of remorse after the nationalist lies that drove them to do it lose their relevance [26:10 *Going to War*; Marlantes 64 - 65.] I suspect they are very similar to “natural born criminals”, the essay discussing this claims these special individuals are actually “sociopaths”. Regardless of psychiatric pathology, there exist people who see the edge, walk right up to it, and stay there because it makes them feel the most comfortable, either because the pain feels good or its utterly absent. The distinguished soldier is “brave”, the career criminal is “brazen”. One could say each is both, and it’s because they must be in order to carry out their parasitic violence and callousness. The common soldier is mostly tortured,

the elite one perhaps loves being tortured as much as they love torturing others. The common criminal is desperate and deprived, the distinctive one makes war against society because it fills them with joy or heals their hate

There was not just constant betrayal, crass self-interest, and obsessive ambition for the fruits of labor of others amongst the warrior aristocracy of feudal japan. In some moments you can find loyalty unto death from a samurai to their lord, and even find greatness in the exertion of samurai when they overthrew them. one can find beauty in the endless battling between warlords for dominion rather than in the acquiring of it. One can bare witness to samurai on horseback, in an already lost battle to restore the authority of the emperor, running headlong into a column of enemy soldiers knowing firmly that he will not make it out the other side.

Sebastian Junger even-handedly remarks of modern war, alluding to both its obvious evils and its obvious honor:

“For the men and women who fight war, it is a deeply personal experience that leaves them changed for the rest of their lives, so when you engage in stories about war, along with some great sadness and ugliness you are seeing some of the most noble and admirable human traits on display”

Like a soldier who risks their life for their comrades, like a samurai who commits suicide for his lord or deliberately dies in a hopeless battle, as exists in all creative or destructive actions, there are brief moments, glimmers, of incredible transcendence in the lives of criminals, one dark and challenging:

“That’s why we took pride in not breaking. We took pride in saying ‘you know what, I’m gonna die [in prison], and this is my home’. And we took pride when we did our hits. We didn’t care about these residual effects, the consequences; give me the death penalty, I’m

dying for the cause. You kill not for money, you don't kill for status, you kill for the glory of killing..."

The transcendence in criminal action spits in the face of conventional morals even more shamelessly, but reveals the dark heart of any violent battle. The thrilling risk, the sadism, and other powerful feelings induced by violence produce both personal pleasure and unshakeable prestige in any violent organization. Here, the love of violence is inseparable from gaining honor, earning stripes. When Enriquez speaks, he speaks for all who must live under the threat of harm to carry it out, to all those who must live in danger:

"it's a high you get strung out on, you get as addicted to that as anything else, the violence. The more notches you have on your belt, the more ferocity people see you as possessing, the greater you become."

Those who are moral violators even in the eyes of these great moral violators are also not totally lacking in virtue: that is, deserters and snitches. They both reveal most dramatically to all that the moralism of soldiery and criminality is a thing that's merely constructed and reified by individuals, cultures, and subcultures. War can be considered such an abhorrent thing that treason to it can be considered inherently good, there are some crimes that are so abhorrent that those who don't tell authorities are considered just as culpable even in the eyes of hardened criminals.

A peckerwood explains his reasons for dropping out, perhaps very good ones:

I started seeing that things that I held respect for and things that I actually felt were honorable, they were really nothing but people trying to boost their own egos within the system; they were a bunch of men that were never going home, that had life to do and were trying to use people like me that did have a date to get them money

on the streets, or to - I mean, they send somebody out there to kill somebody just to tell their partners they had somebody killed out there, you know, like they had some kind of power and it didn't sit well with me [that] I was gonna be used as a puppet like that".

Enriquez touches on his personal reasons for giving up his power:

"We had a sense of honor among us, that we wouldn't do that. I'll admit that some women got killed by the Mexican Mafia throughout the history of the organization, many of them. Because they participated in our activities, they were in the loop. If you're in the loop, you're subject to being killed. But this arbitrary targeting of families 'because I am your adversary' takes it to a whole different realm of violence. This wasn't part of the bargain, this is not the Mexican Mafia that I joined".

Deserters have also been demonized by the violent organizations they represent, but their reasons for doing so have less to do with weakness and more to do with family problems, personal problems, sometimes even political problems with a war itself. Anything at all, even weakness, has greater weight than anything in any capitalist, imperialist war. And considering that a common punishment for desertion was execution throughout history, not just a dishonorable discharge as it commonly is in the United States today, one can respect the risk it took for many to run. Considering how dangerous it was to desert during the great patriotic war, Stalin once quipped "it takes a brave man to be a coward in the red army".

It's true that soldiers sometimes desert because they're cowards, and that criminals sometimes snitch because they can't handle too many years or a lifetime spent incarcerated because of their own actions. Noble or ugly motivations can exist in the same person according to different people, maybe both to that person themselves. Here, morality is an argument, a thing contested between opposing forces, like a war itself, more representative of certain interests than

certain values.

Any act can be considered moral or immoral when viewed from certain perspectives, dominant ones or subaltern ones or ones that are utterly skewed. We can consider loyalty to one's friends or comrades as bigotry towards others, we can consider bravery cheap sensation-seeking, and we can value loyalty and bravery above all else. If we are strong enough, the moral values - or lack thereof - that speak most to us can be the ones we follow. we can determine our morals free from all influence and follow them only as much as we ourselves allow. This is not the liberty of liberals, this is the liberty to act.

On Law

Jackie

The law is only a long list of prohibitions. You can obtain the law and read it: in the UK it is available on the website *legislation.gov.uk*, which publishes all UK legislation. It's like a big list of items, similar to a dictionary, detailing which acts precisely are prohibited. For example:

“Causing death or grievous bodily injury by careless or inconsiderate driving

11A. A person who causes the death of, or grievous bodily injury to, another person by driving a mechanically propelled vehicle on a road or other public place without due care and attention, or without reasonable consideration for other persons using the road or place, is guilty of an offence.”

- Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 (NI 18) after Article 11 insert

I could theoretically memorize the law, item by item, and regard it as a set of prohibited actions. But nothing could be further from my actual experience of the law! By its length, complexity and inscrutability, I experience it in a kind of transcendent way: it becomes a space. I am *within* the law, or *beneath* the law. The law's

long list of little 'No's become a single, powerful 'Yes' - its limits become a terrain of possibility. The hundreds of ways I can live my life, the people I can become, all become the property of Law.

In this totality of Law, I can perceive only dark shapes on the exterior: the figures of Crime. Crime is not, for me, a small set of prohibited actions, but a vast exterior space. Crime is all of the possibilities outside of my own terrain of possibilities: its the hundreds of ways I *cannot* live my life, the people I *cannot* become. If the law itself is finite, it is merely unfinished - it hasn't caught up yet with the unending space of Crime. And outside of the Law - in Crime - anything goes. There is not even a Yes, just an infinite smooth space. Emil Cioran writes: "Freedom can be manifested only [...] where the laws have no more authority than a hypothesis." It is Crime's "absence of axioms" that gives it its beautiful, infinite danger.

The inadequacy of written law to live up to the Law is clear in Northern Ireland. In protestant housing estates, paramilitary eyes and ears are embodied in the apparatuses of everyday life. The window cleaners are members of the Ulster Volunteer Force who while cleaning peer into homes for traces of betrayal. The taxi services, too, are staffed by Volunteers, to overhear drunk conversations. Everyone lives continually in the shadow of their Law, going about domestic life with nervous obedience.

Yet no website lists the legislature of the Ulster Volunteer Force, nor could it even theoretically be memorized. There are in fact no prohibitions per se: the same activities that one person is killed for another is forced to carry out under duress. Cornelius Castoriadis writes:

"A tragic hero in Greek tragedy does not perish because there was a limit and he transgressed it. This is sin. This is the christian sin. The tragic hero perishes out of hubris. That is, because he transgresses in a field where there are no foreknown limits." [Cornelius Castoriadis, *Beating the Retreat into Private Life*]¹

The law that the paramilitaries enforce is of this latter type. It is as though I am punished not for my crime but for my hubris, for my ambition, my attitude.² It is my perception of the world that is rendered within or outside the Law: my views on the Good Friday Agreement, on Sinn Féinn, on drugs and sexual morality... The UVF's law is the true Law, which is not a law but a power: a non-derivative power whose rulings are "valid [by] their source, not their content." [Emanuele Ottolenghi, *Carl Schmitt and the Jewish Leviathan*]

But the UVF is itself, along with its sister-company the Ulster Defence Association, a criminal organisation in the eyes of the British occupation. The two Laws are in contest: a literal contest of might, fought with armoured cars, sectarian murals, surprise raids and civilian bodies. For myself, it is not possible to follow both, and I cannot choose between one or the other. I am pushed and pulled by the currents of two contesting Musts, two powerful incompatible Yeses in the face of which I try to stifle my terrible, secret No.

In the days leading up to the most recent 11th night - a night where enormous bonfires are burned, covered with flags representing Ireland and ethnic minorities, to commemorate the victory of Ulster's primordial father King Billy - there was agitation between the UVF and the state over the issue of a bonfire at Avoniel which

1. "Greek tragedy is a tragedy that recounts the birth of the law and the mortal effects of the law on men." - Michel Foucault, interview (retrieved from *Foucault Live*, pg 134)

2. "Guerilla warfare produces injuries that are intended to have a psychological as well as a physical effect on the victims. Intentional violence in the form of punishment beatings or shootings inflicted on one person are used to control the behavior of members of a like group" - John Williams, *Casualties of violence in Northern Ireland*, Intl. Journal of Trauma Nursing 1996

was in violation of the state's law by its height, proximity to a public building and use of illegal material. After the illegal material was removed, the discourse shifted from the legality of the bonfire to the involvement of the UVF. The pro-UVF line became that the UVF was not, and had never been, involved in the bonfire.

The loyalist agitator Jamie Bryson argued for the standard UVF line on twitter. He posted pictures of some celebrations around the bonfire - children playing and elderly women dancing - and said "this is what Sinn Feinn and Alliance are saying is an East Belfast UVF run bonfire." The representation is surprising: under normal circumstances the UVF carefully portrays itself as the true expression of the protestant community - it protects us from drug-dealers and pedophiles, carries out essential services (window cleaning, taxi driving...) and, yes, when it has to, fights for our freedom. But fascist propaganda can always twist and turn into whatever shape it likes. At a moments notice the UVF present *themselves* as the enemies of the people, the police firmly maintaining that, no, they are really the organizers of family fun-days and fundraisers!

On the other side, Alliance councilor Emmet McDonough-Brown gave a short interview to CoolFM where he stated that there "is an allegation made by the police that there is the presence of East Belfast UVF..." He voluntarily presents his statements in neutral journalistic language, reducing the involvement to a possibility - some new information that should justify the continuing police pressure.

This sort of discourse - an almost constant presence in the newspapers and on the radio - was one I never understood: who, I always wondered, was it meant for? Anyone who's lived in this country for any amount of time knows the bonfires are UVF - it's not a secret. UVF flags hang from every streetlight and UVF bands lead the commemorative parades. Yet you turn on the radio to "an alleged involvement..." But Emmet isn't a fool: he is of course in on the game, as are the police and the UVF. The game is a game of

appearances: because everyone knows it's bullshit, no one is obliged to tell the truth. The challenge is not to present the truth of your side but to assemble the best appearance. The police, the paramilitaries and the state all work dilligently on their optics to ensure the right appearance in the eyes of an absent observer - a no-one who believes for them.

It's tempting to argue that the conflict between the police and the UVF itself is only an aspect of the game of appearances, knowing what we know about the extent of police-paramilitary collusion. It is correct to, as many have, call the UVF and UDA *death squads*, the extra-legal enforcers of the legitimate British occupation. But no one who has witnessed it first hand could interpret it, I think, as a false opposition merely kept up for appearances. The police and the council act as a continual frustration to paramilitary power, exposing designs they would have preferred to keep private and ensuring by force their fidelity to agreements they would rather have disobeyed. The UVF, too, continually obstrct the police's reach by demanding their territory be off limits to patrol, appropriate vacant houses the council would rather relet, and intimidate workers who provide essential services. Both would undeniably operate more smoothly without the other's obstruction. Yet, in the final moment, each fundamentally ensure the other's existence.

In *The Republic*, Plato writes: "[W]ar is of two kinds, civil and foreign; the first of which is properly termed 'discord,' and only the second 'war' ". A war between Hellenes is a 'civil war' or merely a discord, and should be prosecuted "with a view to reconciliation [...] as of those who would chasen but not utterly enslave." The discord is directed not against a whole nation "but only against a few guilty persons; when they are punished peace will be restored." [Plato, pg 61] In *The Concept of the Political*, the Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt transforms this notion into the *inimicus* or the private enemy, belonging to the former, and the *hostis* or public enemy, belonging to the latter. It is the *hostis* whose subjugation all politics

is oriented to: my conflict with the *inimicus* is, in some sense, not even political. [Schmitt, pg 28-29]

The *hostis* around which the occupation's politics turn is, of course, Irish Catholics, or, even moreso today, their own captor: the Irish Republican Army. Within the demesne of the occupation, the UVF and the state are at cross purposes: they have discord. But in the face of the *hostis*, they spontaneously assemble into a perfectly united front. While they may have opposed ideas on the best way to run the country, they both recognize the Irish as an existential threat to the occupation itself. The protestant, captured by both forms of domination, is therefore like a shadow puppet or a figure projected onto a screen: their struggle between one Law and the other is hidden behind their role in the play of politics as the occupation's People, in who's name "the original violence in its essence, the hate and emnity"[Clausewitz, *On War*]for the *hostis* is preserved.

So much for war and politics, how do we return to Crime? Here's the trick: if I want to sell drugs I can only really do it through the UDA, who have a preexisting monopoly. Perhaps I could go it alone for a few months before my inevitable murder, but I would have to grow my own: who would take the risk of supplying me? When I finally step out of the confines of Law I discover abruptly that "what I thought was a ghost was merely dried grass"; that all of the infinite space is already 'taken up' by criminal monopolies that enforce their own modes and orders, perversely, their own Law. I discover an insight from Marx in inverted form: under their law of the jungle, the Rule of Law lives on under a different guise.

As if confirming the quotation, the legitimate institutions of the law begin to take on the character of extralegal paramilitaries. In the United States not only is the law increasingly enforced by private contractors and volunteer militias, but the police themselves take up the arms of terror. When racists and opportunists claim that the victims of antiblack killings could have saved themselves

by “just following the Law”, it is not the written law that they refer to but the unknowable tragic Law of paramilitaries. In India and Pakistan extrajudicial killings by the police and military are known as “fake encounters” and exceed in number the killings by loyalist paramilitaries in Northern Ireland. The Nazis, when installing their dictatorship, never officially overturned the old constitution: it was merely suspended, their extrajudicial killings only temporarily rendered legitimate. [Agamben, *Homo Sacer* pg 96]

What we are left with is not so much an antithesis of Law and Crime but a more complex figure: the legitimate institutions of the state and the extralegal federations take up a flexible, contiguous space, and orient themselves towards a third pole: the hostis. The law-crime continuum is “chameleon-like [...] in each concrete case changing its character” [Clasewitz, *On War*] to reflect the demands of the political moment. Horkheimer writes:

“Rackets ruled as the rackets of clerics, of the royal court, of the propertied, of the race, of men, of adults, of families, of the police, of crime, and, moreover, within each of these sectors as individual rackets against the rest of the respective sphere. Everywhere they have established the opposition between the inward and the outward. Man, if he belonged to no racket, was in a radical sense on the outside, was lost as man.” [Max Horkheimer, *Die Rackets und der Geist*, trans. Lars Fischer in *Rackets* by Gerhard Scheit]

How, then, can we become “lost as man” and reclaim those infinite lives, becomings, and possibilities that Crime promised us?

A Conversation Between Carbine & Jackie

CARBINE: when one individual has a gun to the head of another one, isn't he as much the law as the UVF is the law? Unofficial, in conflict with the "actual" law? What's the difference between a sole home invader and the police but the much greater power of the latter, the powerful material interests the latter supports, and the particular "order" each wishes to establish? I've also noticed that widespread gun ownership, from the far-flung colonies of France to the battlegrounds of Sri Lanka to the white supremacist utopia of the United States, seems to be rooted in settler-colonialism. Ordinary settlers are given guns and they don't rob their neighbors, they establish peace amongst themselves and rob the people who were there first. The criminal is desperate and has to establish their own order of exploitation based on naked brute force against society; the settler is benefitting from exploitation and positions itself /as/ society, and becomes legitimacy because all their violence is directed towards the people causing a disorder by resisting. A settler is like a burglar who gets spooked by a homeowner who unexpectedly walks in and decides to shoot them dead; property has changed hands in this moment, one feels entitled to what has become theirs and to defend the order that has now been established that benefits them.

JACKIE: In one sense there definitely is no difference. You'll sometimes see free market conservatives on forums use a (put generously) thought experiment about "men with Big Sticks" - say, you come to an island and there are men with big sticks who tell you what to do... being an analogy for government. They see government as coming from a kind of first use of force, precisely the same as a home invader, an act of terrorism, or a night raid by a rival tribe: but this first use of force takes credit for all force, it attaches all force to itself, it establishes a monopoly of force. It's not just that it declares my use of force illegal and punishes me for it, but also that any force I use is in support of or opposition to its own: I either rebel and break the rules, or I become some kind of loyalist vigilante... My capacity to use force is overdetermined by the State's primordial force, it preexcludes my own unique force, my capacity to determine the direction and meaning of my own force. When you hold a gun to my head, you reenact this manoeuvre: while before my world was quite large and complex - I thought about who I would vote for, what television show I'd like to watch, which kind of chocolates I'd like to buy my girlfriend, etc. - it immediately becomes small and simple: do I do what you say or try to get away... Even if I defy you, I play your game.

But there is also some crucial difference which comes from the involvement of other people. I can never fully instrumentalize another person. I cannot trust them to just do as I say, to maintain fidelity to a shared project in just the same way as me, to do as my will directs them. They have their own will, their own say. Like when playing a game like Go or Stratego, I need to account for the unpredictable decisions of the other player when making my own moves. The other's agency is already implemented in my intervention, their capacity returns on mine as a factor intrinsic to it. They also take part in this 'factoring in', and our actions and our ambitions become interdependent, mutually determined, at each point accounting for the other. This reciprocal 'factoring in' takes the

form of a bargain, a contract, or some kind of law: a record of many little negotiations, many little coercions- compromises, solidarities, shared dreams and dashed hopes, and secretly held terrible secrets. This fabric of prefactored interdependencies is Politics, which is what makes up the difference between a lone home invader and a criminal organization. As they say, three's a crowd...

JACKIE: There was a prominent UDA brigadier called Jim Gray (nicknamed 'Doris Day' for his effeminate manner & dress) who was assassinated by other elements within the UDA, supposedly for informing to the police, and for "building a criminal empire outside the UDA." But another detail is associated with his murder. After his death a former friend of his gave an interview to the Belfast Telegraph where he said that Gray confided in him that he was "a businessman first," and that "loyalism wasn't paying the bills." The implication is that this was the reason he informed - he was more interested in money than loyalism. It was never clear to me what exactly being a 'loyalist first' would have changed about him: being a parasitic criminal monopoly is about all the UDA does! There's no reason not to think that the quote was fabricated after the fact, to represent a certain picture to the public - that there is a true loyalist mission that the UDA fulfills beyond their profiteering.

I feel that in the United States this kind of manoeuver wouldn't make sense. The selfish acquisition of wealth is identified completely with the betterment of the oppressed people the criminal grows up with. You bring this up when talking about Meek Mill's lyrics, "what society sees as mere drug dealing is painted as heroic violence" - even in a relatively organized criminal sphere, in America an individual crack dealer becomes a folk hero. An oppressed person accumulating wealth for themselves, by their own means or, at least, not by the means of legitimate society but by criminal means, is celebrated as a kind of resistance. It's almost as though in Amer-

ica there is a kind of “Drug Dealer’s Two Bodies” - like the King’s body politic which exceeds his natural body to become a symbol for the political system itself, the drug dealer’s activities become a kind of symbolic revolt, a stand-in for all everyday resistance to domination, his personal success moving ‘ahead of’ the successful liberation of the whole people.

CARBINE: I think this is the result of the destruction of revolutionary and working-class mass movements - which always meant something very different for the settler masses in the United States than for the workers in contemporary movements in Europe - and of any way out for the poor in this country. There is a neoliberal individualism that seemingly infects all classes and groups, and it manifests differently for each each of them. in order to be free from the horrors of work, working-class people in the united states have no other choice but to engage in fantasies of upward mobility or be wracked with a subdued or overt hopelessness that can only be numbed. I see this everywhere in my life, delusion or desperation or both. The further down you go, towards the margins of the margins, it becomes dramatic, dangerous, sadistic, and vital. In a documentary about Indiana death row inmates I saw a career criminal, who shot a pig dead who was chasing him for stealing cars and hubcaps, say in response to the host asking why he himself felt he couldn’t be rehabilitated: “I’m the kind of guy that does need to be in prison... if I get fired from a job and I can’t find a job, I’ll do it the legal way, try to get a job, and I can’t find a job and I can’t pay my bills, I’ll go get a gun and pay my bills”. Without collective resistance to the capitalist state there can only be individual resistance, and everyone can now become an enemy; not the ppl exploiting them, not the ppl who created this situation, not the ppl brutalizing them, everyone. This is the true way of the warrior as it has actually existed throughout history: personal wealth gained by any means necessary, gained in spite of the threat of death or

suffering, dreams of decadence obtained through struggle and violence. The difference is that a criminal doesn't have the backing of a capitalist, imperialist, or feudal state to support his endeavors. This necessitates a higher level of nerve, and they can recognize that in themselves with pride.

CARBINE: At the end of your essay, you ask how we can "reclaim those infinite lives, becomings, and possibilities that Crime promised us?" When everyone, from individual criminals to powerful organized formations, must reckon with the theoretical or actual resistance of those they are lording over and the wider context of any hierarchal relationship which limits not just victims but victimizers, what are those possibilities? What are the promises of crime that you allude to?

JACKIE: The question, of course, only finds its full completion in communism. Communism appears as the abolition not only of the written law but of the tragic Law: the abolition of even those limits which are not foreknowable. In the sense that I experience Law not as a prohibition but as a space of possibility, communism is actually the abolition of that possibility, of the lives possible to me right now - as Baudrillard says, "the gift of work which can only be responded to by destruction or sacrifice" [Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*] - and the opening of those unknowable transgressions: my hubris...

But I also have an eye to the possibility of something nearer, prior to the abolition of Capital. Antonin Artaud wanted to create a theatre which would "give us everything that is in crime, love, war or madness", that could "appeal to certain unhabitual ideas, which by their very nature cannot be limited or even formally depicted." But he saw this expression not as something unique to theatre but a "sense of a creation of which we possess only one face, but which is completed on other levels", which was the property of "the mag-

ic and the rites of which the theatre is only a reflection.”[Artuad, *Theatre of Cruelty*]

In this way, Artuad’s writing on theatre can be transposed into a kind of social critique: where he opposes the “cheap imitations of reality” of contemporary western theatre and its “artificial amusement” to the “ceremonial quality” of Balinese theatre which we are meant to “experience immediately”, which “extirpate from the mind of the onlooker all idea of pretense”[Artuad, *Theatre and its Double*], one can read backwards an opposition between our everyday experience of capitalism - which is, as Marx writes, “for the enormous majority a mere training to act as a machine”[Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*] - and a direct, unmediated experience of eachother.

Cioran writes: “There are experiences which one cannot survive, after which one feels that there is no meaning left in anything. Once you have reached the limits of life, having lived to extremity all that is offered at those dangerous borders, the everyday gesture and the usual aspiration lose their seductive charm.”[Cioran, *On the Heights of Despair*]

Crime, even when politically overdetermined, holds something of the promise of this limit-experience that occupies a mystical position within Artuad’s theory: when I become a criminal, I break completely from the established order of my everyday life. Even if I later restore myself as a citizen, or become a captive of criminal rackets, I for a moment experience a unique gesture: of choosing from the full list of immanent possibilities, of seeing my conditions and my trajectory as it is, and make a choice based upon my own agency and not only social compulsion. Perhaps this gesture, where I become a criminal, is like theatre only a reflection of some magical potential which exists at other levels. Dissatisfied with the real prospects of my criminal career, could I see those unlimited possibilities somewhere else - in the motions of struggle itself?

JACKIE: You say “there are brief moments, glimmers, of incredible transcendence in the lives of criminals.” It’s interesting to me how, in many cases, it is not through rebellion but through extreme fidelity to an organization that these moments of transcendent agency emerge. Zizek at one stage said that in Agamben and some similar philosophers the whole history of western philosophy, from Plato forwards, leads inexorably towards Auschwitz: no matter what way you try to escape, you are recaptured... but in Deleuze, its the opposite - everywhere, even in Plato, there are ‘exceptions’. It seems to me that these ‘exceptions’, these ‘moments of transcendence’ that emerge from present conditions, sort of answer the question I pose at the end of my essay, or at least give one answer: it is through the normal processes of organization itself, in criminal enterprise as much as legitimate society, that enables moments of escape. What do you think we can ‘do’ with these moments of transcendence?

CARBINE: I remember being a kid reading an obscure, very old book on the russian revolution and I found a very odd moment in it. The revolution had reached the sailors of a naval base or ship, and they were getting ready to execute their captain. As he was being dragged out to be shot, he resisted the entire time, hurled insults, and loudly declared his loyalty to the russian empire to his dying breath. He showed no fear. At the time this was jarring to read. I thought all rich or powerful people were stupid cowards, I thought a man in his position would be begging to be allowed to live. I’m sure Georges Sorel would be very impressed by the defiance of that exploiter in the face of death, however. His concerns when he wrote “Reflections on Violence” were that both the working-class and the capitalist class were becoming slovenly due to social peace, by the election of socialists to government and the improved parlaying of bread crumbs, and that society as a whole was being worsened by it. I think he felt that “morals” can be found in any person or any class. I personally feel that “morals” can also be

found in any act, whether they're morals forged by peace or morals forged by violence, and I believe moments of transcendence can be found everywhere, in everyone at one point or another, in good or heinous acts. I actually do believe that it can be found in lone individuals, albeit in much rarer moments. 'Exceptions' seem to always be tied to a love of pain or an energetic pursuit of pleasure, tied to some anxiety-relieving agent or mechanism that's structural or internal, tied to mutual or hierarchal coercion and mutual or hierarchal surveillance, tied to a negotiation with ordinary life in some way. However, I still think any lone individual is capable of transcendence in their life, even for a brief moment. Even an individual amongst our enemies.

With the rise of white nationalist terrorism, we can see that they are willing to kill and be killed to preserve and enhance white supremacy. There can be no appeals to their kindness or intellect, they will not give up their power voluntarily, they are proud of their cruelty. Just as all classes and groups throughout history have done in the name of their interests, they are willing to fight to the death and they are willing to create organizations to industrially facilitate a fight to the death. We must do the same.

In moments of transcendence we go beyond material concerns, we go beyond the limits of the body, we go beyond the limits of the mind, we go beyond all rational limits, we adjust to life at its highest pitches, we adjust to life at its most painful and otherworldly, and we demonstrate a humanity that's rare, always transient, and sometimes awe-inspiring. For us, this can mean genuine allyship between oppressed people and those people benefitting from their oppression, mutual aid without conditions, and sheer resistance within the context of total, organized, structural blows against the systems that control us. Our enemies are maniacs who are willing to do the killing themselves to preserve social hierarchies, and we must become maniacs so we can abolish them. Many of us are an-

ti-capitalist individualists skeptical to what may sound like moralizing, and that's fine and admirable, but if we want to advance our individual interests as oppressed people we must be ready to obliterate ourselves as individuals. If we intend to preserve our lives, to protect our friends, to protect oppressed people, to liberate ourselves from capitalism, imperialism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and somehow prevent or lessen the coming ecocide, we must hone our ability to sacrifice, even meaninglessly sacrifice, to sacrifice our very lives. We must be ready to die at any minute.