

Crime as Struggle

Crime as Spectacle

Jason Rodgers

2017

Law is the framework that props up the state, the matrix that nourishes authority. Law is a web of prohibition and mandate. It is one of the mechanisms that ensure that each individual fills an assigned role. It is a particularly complex and abstract system of power.

While there are attempts to use law in constructive ways, such as discourses on rights and liberties, the law is not something that can be used for liberation. It must be rejected and overcome.

Whenever attempts are made to use this mechanism for liberation, oppressive conditions may be somewhat ameliorated in the short term, but law ultimately proves to be a dead end, usually strengthening and affirming the dominant system.

Working within the legal system is not even of pragmatic use; instead, it is a massive drain on time and energy. Attempting to use law in such a way creates odd spooks. Rights are a particularly strange concept. Conceptually, rights are treated as if they are some actual (but invisible) aspect of a person, like the religious concept of a soul. Yet they only derive their existence from strong belief, and even then are spectral.

Rights can only be protected legalistically. They are externally granted, often reluctantly following social upheavals, and rely on the good intentions of power. Just as easily as rights are granted, they can similarly be withdrawn.

If law is of no use in liberation, then maybe crime is. Individualist anarchist Max Stirner argued in 1844 that, "Only by crime does he overcome the state's violence when he thinks that the state is not above him, but he is above the state."

Crime is an obvious starting point in a rejection of law. It is one form of reversal of perspectives. Any free life will come into conflict with law in some manner. Furthermore, because of the complexity of law, everyone is a criminal in one form or another. By embracing the concept of criminality, a person can escape some of these limitations.

Law provides a framework that maintains hegemony. Insurrectionary individuals such as the Italian anarchist, Renzo Novatore, hold that this struggle against society forms the basis for their life project. Novatore wrote, "In 'sin' and 'crime,' the new spring from which the highest synthesis of life gushes." Crime can be a nexus of struggle. It is also a means of breaking through blockages and internalized repression. Freedom is only found in struggle.

Crime might be a necessary starting point for resistance, but there is a risk of turning illegalism into another spook, the criminal into another image transmitted by the spectacle.

As with every challenge and transgression, the illegal can be co-opted. The system can recuperate and become stronger. It is easy to see ways in which illegalism is turned into an aspect of the spectacle. Gangster rap is one of the most obvious ones (that is focused on too often).

The spook version of illegalism is apparent in the romanticization by CrimethInc of traveler kids shoplifting everything and urban guerillas robbing banks. Neither shoplifting nor bank robbery provide strong enough ends in themselves, though they may be useful means at times.

There is a necessity of something to struggle against, hence, the appeal of the criminal. The danger of the criminal is that it may merely provide the binary support of the law man. Rather than destroying authority, the two can instead play off of each other, enhancing and amplifying each other in a twisted feedback loop.

This was part of the point of the 1971 film "A Clockwork Orange." Director Stanley Kubrick portrayed the idea that as society became more totalitarian, delinquency would become more brutal, which then provides justification for totalitarianism. The criminal becomes more extreme, even adopting the persona of evil, as systems of power and control use this as justification to enhance themselves and escalate.

Systems of control no longer rely only on repression. They are now often based on recuperation. French social theorist Michel Foucault, in his 1977 *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, wrote:

"One would be forced to suppose that the prison, and no doubt punishment in general, is not intended to eliminate offences, but rather to distinguish them, to distribute them, to use them; that is not so much that they render docile those who are liable to transgress the law, but that they tend to assimilate the transgression of the laws in a general tactic of subjection."

Systems of control do not attempt to stop crime, but rather direct it towards its own ends. The gangster fulfills a social role (just as any other profession), preventing people from taking action in the social realm. Or, even worse, the historical use of the criminal class by fascist movements has allowed them into the political realm as enforcers for agents of control.

According to Foucault, "Delinquency, solidified by a penal system centered upon the prison, thus represents a diversion of illegality for the illicit circuits of profit and power of the dominant class." Delinquents were long used as low level tools of law enforcement, such as "informers and agent provocateurs." This further developed after the 1789 French revolution. Delinquents were used in "the organization of a sub-police working directly with the legal police and capable if necessary of becoming a sort of parallel army," writes Foucault.

Illegalism can be an important part of development, as a way of confronting fears of trouble. It is probably a necessary first step. It also highlights the dangerous overlaps between anti-authoritarianism and authoritarianism. At this point, it can go either way. Illegalism must be transcended to an a-legal status; an outlaw status (in a literal sense).

Beyond illegalism, not towards a new morality, but towards an opposition based on resistance, refusal, and play. It is always necessary to seek pressure points of resistance against the monolithic mall whose walls have disappeared, allowing control to become an ectoplasmic goo, colonizing all of everyday life.

Struggle onward regardless of possible failure. It is in this onward struggle that illegalism provides its greatest benefit. Refusal to submit is the ultimate crime. This continual refusal of the nexus of power is a path outside of law.

A hundred years ago, Renzo Navatore wrote, "Life, for us, is a wild flower that has to be cultivated on the frightening edge of immeasurable abysses."

FE note: Navatore's literary work is available in *The Collected Writing of Renzo Navatore*, translated by Wolfi Landstreicher, from Ardent Press; **ArdentPress.com**.

A review of the book by Jason Rodgers is on our web site Archive page in our Spring/Summer 2014 edition, issue #391. Jason can be contacted at POB 10894, Albany NY 12201.

fifth Estate

Jason Rodgers
Crime as Struggle
Crime as Spectacle
2017

<https://www.fiftheastate.org/archive/397-winter-2017/crime-as-struggle>
Fifth Estate #397, Winter, 2017

fiftheastate.anarchistlibraries.net