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The Carceral Death Machine: Savagery, Contamination and Sacrifice in the Contemporary
Prison

By
Timothy Malone

Claremont Graduate University
2022

Approval of the Dissertation Committee

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Timothy Malone as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Studies.

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Abstract

The Carceral Death Machine: Savagery, Contamination and Sacrifice in the Contemporary
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In this dissertation, I develop a *convict epistemology* that interweaves two elements: 1) a deep engagement with the works of particular philosophers and scholars investigating questions of punishment, violence, biopolitics and political philosophy 2) with some specific, publicly-reported incidents within California prisons in the late 20th and 21st centuries and my own detailed narration of events and the structural and quotidian dynamics of the prison yard as I experienced them as inmate #K73299 from 1997 to 2005. Diverging from Foucauldian theories of disciplinarity, I argue that under neoliberalism, the primary punishments that any inmate is subjected to within the carceral thresher are in excess of what they were sentenced to endure by the court. Taken together, these extrajudicial punishments constitute a *thanatopolitical machinery* of forms of state-organized violence that are delegated to inmates and are therefore disavowed and have utterly subsumed the carceral interior. Because this violence is directed at particular, largely racialized populations – the majority of the prison population being Black and Brown - abandonment to the contemporary prison and its thanatopolitical machinery is proto-genocidal. The primary function of the contemporary prison, then, is to *actively abandon a largely racialized, rendered superfluous population within a forcefully bounded and state-totalized space to a steered machinery of delegated, proto-genocidal death production.*

As this thanatopolitical machinery of inmate-on-inmate violence has subsumed the prison yard, I argue that the contemporary prison is the carceral state's manufacture of an artificial Hobbesian-style *state of nature*, an always potential *war of all-against-all* or prison race riot, through the interaction of the four following carceral logics: 1) The *imposition of scarcity*, 2) atop a forcefully *undifferentiated*

population, 3) that is barred the capacity to flee, or, the state enjoying a *monopoly over inmate movement*, and 4) within conditions of *functional lawlessness*. Resultantly, through carceral inscription, each and every inmate is rendered as a “savage,” a less-than-fully-human ontological type, and it is this concept that does sufficient ideological work to anchor normative subjectivity within neoliberalized social space through negation. It is also the prison as artificial state of nature and constitutive boundary that civil society comes to define itself against, both materially and ideologically. Further, as a result of these four foundational carceral logics, inmates are forced to enact or endure daily forms of lesser violence, often as conscious means of forestalling more lethal and larger-scale entropic violence.

As disease infects the individual body and undermines it, this violent “savagery” at the gates (prison race riot and lesser forms of violence meant to prevent it) is perceived within the white-supremacist Hobbesian fantasy anchoring normative subjectivity as threatening the “body politic” with annihilation. Through Roberto Esposito’s immunitarian paradigm, the contemporary prison should be read as a series of recursive quarantines called forth to inoculate civil society from the perceived contagious threat of “violence disease” materialized as largely racialized, inmate bodies. The concept of the less-than-fully-human inmate is thus semantically overloaded with notions of both savagery and contamination then, and daily life within prison for inmates is largely organized by “prison-politics” as prophylactic, epidemiological strategy that guarantees social distance between racialized groupings that stalls out a race riot’s transmissibility as the prison’s very condition of being,

And as inmates are articulated as a less-than-fully-human savage/contaminant threats, they are through René Girard’s framework of sacrificial violence to be read as being marginalized from civil society; a sacrificial category of less-than-full-humanness functioning as lightning rod or attractor for all the varied hostilities and insecurities roiling a violently restructured, neoliberalized social space. It is the contemporary prison that allows white supremacist community to cohere through time through the

regular displacement of internal antagonisms generated under neoliberalism towards the inmate as sacrificial subject. The prison is a sacrificial stone.

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prison was a torture in itself. C.O. Parra, a kind and decent man with the respect of the whole cell block, died a month later. RIP.

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And Kai, we haven't yet had the discussion yet around my time in prison. I hope someday that you can read this work and maybe understand it a little better. I dread that conversation. I imagine most excons dread such conversations with their kids, because we don't want you to think differently of us, or negatively. But it is one that we will have to have for the sake of honesty. And I trust that you know me well enough, as your papa, to integrate this knowledge in a way that will allow for a certain complexity. And hopefully our relationship will be further strengthened through truth. If you take anything from this work, I hope it's this: there is no "outside" to things. No escape from it. The whole world is rationalized. The only way *out* of it is *through* it. And that it's not about what we suffer, what we experience. It's about what we do with that experiential suffering, how we make sense and meaning of it. And hopefully how we put it to use in order to make the world a bit better, kinder, gentler and more understanding of a place. I love you with all my heart, kiddo. You're a magnificent daughter and a kind soul and I'm proud of you - not for what you do, but for who you are down in the very core of you. Thoughtful, loving and kind.

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Preface

“Abandon all hope ye who enter here.” So reads the inscription above the gates of the Inferno from Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. And similar to that work, what follows is a guided expedition through a series of hellscape. But unlike Dante, the infernal planes that I give witness to are not immaterial. Nor are the punishments those that await a life poorly lived, in death. They are instead directed at life. Within hellscape that we, as human beings, create for one another in all of our hostilities and our indifference - social, political, economic, racial and psychological - and forget that we have done so. This work is a hesitating remembrance, a feeble attempt to lift my trembling eye and a daring to gaze unreservedly at what one Black convict inside the maximum-security administrative segregation yard in Chino described to me as “a monolith of human terror,” the California state prison. To understand this work, one must first and foremost take words like terror seriously, every day and saturating. I don’t use the word flippantly. Neither did he. A terror that snatches breath. That petrifies with dread, and kills. Or, explodes in a reality-annihilating, entropic violence.

I am a 44-year-old, white, cisgender and heterosexual man. I am also a PhD candidate at Claremont Graduate University in Cultural Studies. And I have taught philosophy courses in the Bridge Program at Antioch University in Los Angeles for a number of years, dedicated to providing access to free humanities-based education to populations marginalized by class, race, sexuality and gender from higher education. By what authority can I speak of the prison? Especially as racialized social control apparatus, so convincingly theorized by Dylan Rodriguez, L  c Wacquant, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Mariame Kaba, Angela Davis, Naomi Murakawa, Joy James and others? By what right do I speak of an institution that, in the United States,

predominantly and deleteriously impacts people of color, and is there anything novel that I can add to an ongoing abolitionist discourse? I am not simply a scholar with a purely abstract and academic interest. I am also an excon. I spent eight tortuous years within California prisons as inmate #K73299, from the ages of twenty-two to thirty. I nearly lost my life to the prison several times over, whether through facing the possibility of a life sentence before my adulthood had really begun or through being pummeled to death at the bottom of a flesh pile in a race riot that I wanted nothing to do with. And many other exposures to varied death potentialities in-between.

As with the inscription on the gates of hell, the prison also makes its obscene demands. During the course of my incarceration, I abandoned any hope for a fully-human life outside of the carceral thresher – I became wholly *of* those pits of social death - unpredictable violence, extreme humiliation and natal alienation (Price, 2015, p. 5) - as the only way to survive them intact, only to be brusquely disgorged after the completion of my sentence. One cannot be half-in: body in prison, mind on the street. On any high custody yard and doing any significant stretch of time, such a psychically-split orientation will get you killed or drive you mad very quickly - biological or subjective/psychological death. Counterintuitively, a “solid convict” forgets about life on the outside as the only assurance of ever getting back to it. One day I awoke and my captors, quite unbelievably to me at the time, opened and ushered me through the perimeter gate in a relative rush; I had survived and made it to the other side of the gun tower with no significant difference between that day and the few thousand I had lost to the carceral vortex prior, excepting some future date on a state form. I never really expected to survive the carceral maw once I saw it up close and chewing, and both intellectually and

emotionally understood what it did to human beings. What it was trying to do to me. My parole date had always seemed an impossible remain of time away until it had rushed upon me in an anxiety-provoking clamor in those closing months of my nine-year sentence. And after my parole from state prison, it took some time to re-habituate to life on “the streets;” to feel grounded in the surety that at any moment I wouldn’t be snatched and rendered back in. Body on the streets, yes, but my mind trapped and circling within the prison for months after. Always primed, ready to go, on edge. Since then, I have attempted to organize a meaningful life through making some contribution to the abolition - the dismantling and obliteration - of these institutional monstrosities, these perverse sites of human sacrifice and torture from the possibility of human experience. I have adopted an academic path as the most effective mechanism I could think of not only to make some cognitive and emotional sense of my own and others experiences within the carceral belly, but also as a prominent theatre in which to fight against a carceral ideology and materiality that has subsumed our culture. It is how I give the appalling experience some larger context and meaning. I have spent twenty years thinking through my time spent within the carceral belly, and that of so many others who were beside me, many of whom are still there. My former cell mate came up for parole just last week (April, 2021), and was denied. He has been locked up for 26 years. For no good reason that I can see based on my lived experience of him.

These pages are covered in pooling blood and swelling contusions. Razor slashings and pummeling assaults. They are drenched in cortisol and adrenaline, in Black-tar heroin and yellowed methamphetamines smuggled in rectal cavities that smell of shit. They are freezing cold or sweltering to the touch. Sharpened steel edges everywhere. These pages are of

concrete and wet iron, and exist in a state of constant tension. Madness lies in these pages. Real madness that screams unseen from tomb-like, dimly lit cells behind filthy steel and cylindrical bars. Madness that throws and smears feces, and smashes faces and soft-tissue against unforgiving walls. Profound loss. Compensatory fantasies. My body ripped apart and exposed is on display, as are the worst acts that I have ever committed. Writing this goes against any instinct toward self-preservation and drags me back towards those forlorn death-zones in an all-consuming memory that shrouds my immediacy and filters it through invasive and seizing series of reflections. My hand shakes. I can't concentrate. I take pills to sleep. The most shameful and terrifying things.

But that is not all that is here. There is also a resiliency. There are struggles for dignity, and friendship. There are longings for a freedom from conditions that are totalizing, obscene in their constraint - a negative freedom. There is courage. And there is insight. Despite the fact that the theoretical contributions I am attempting to make here are fundamentally organized around a set of deeply impactful carceral experiences, guided by them even when not explicitly being foregrounded as object of study, this work isn't really about me. It is primarily about all those that I did my time with, many of whom are systemically abandoned to the carceral threshers, racially or otherwise. Fleshly bodies bound and tracked, never escaping the prison's warping and gravitational pull. This dissertation is a giving witness.

Whenever I relate to another that I was in prison, I immediately feel an implicit demand being made for an accounting. What did I do to get locked up? Am I dangerous? An immoral person? I'm not saying it's right or wrong; just that the demand for an accounting exists, pretty generally. Not describing how I came to be arrested and disappeared, for *so damned long*, can

generate a vacuum between myself and the “citizen,” one that doesn’t really ever go away until the conversation is had. I don’t believe that it is universally the case that every excon should have to explain why they were incarcerated. Not everyone need perform their reformed decency and demonstrate that they are worthy of being listened to. That’s a choice that needs to be evaluated by the excon him or herself with regards to their own case, their own political commitments and experience, and who’s doing the asking. There are whole populations of formerly incarcerated peoples, largely racialized, that shouldn’t have to explain a damned thing because they never should have gone to prison in the first place. They were hunted down, captured, rendered and tortured by the state. In my case, it’s an accounting that I feel I need to make. When I say I’ve been to prison, it tends to recalibrate people’s perception of me - there’s an abundance of cultural baggage fueled by decades of anti-crime and drug war political discourse and popular cultural vehicles that take the prison as their object, as well a defensive response towards the threat I may represent in the imaginary. I know from experience, as I’ve been navigating its reality for sixteen years. To give a proper accounting of my time requires me to explain what was going on with me psychologically in the months leading up to my arrest; to explain how it was that I found myself within the belly of the carceral beast during the peak of the largest prison-build in the history of the world (Gilmore, 2007, p. 5). And to talk a bit about who I am today.

Beyond Good and Evil

On the warm summer evening of August 27th 1997, I checked myself in to the San Fernando Valley’s Northridge Hospital Psychiatric center upon the recommendation of a

childhood friend's father, a criminal defense attorney working in Los Angeles. I had been suffering profound, paranoid delusions and regular panic attacks for about six months, ever since taking an excessive dose of LSD the previous February. I went to my mother's house in Sherman Oaks earlier in the evening after the last of a string of armed robberies I would commit that summer in order to tell my family that I was about to be arrested. I was 22 years-old.

Mom and her friend Jan were having a glass of wine in the kitchen. I tip-toed past them without their noticing and down the hall to my 18-year-old brothers' room where I found him listening to some music with headphones on, playing a video game. I waved to get his attention, and reached in my jacket and pulled out my 9-millimeter handgun and a wad of crumpled cash from my pockets, a few hundred dollars. "Here. Take this. Spend it on something good. Hide the gun somewhere, and don't let the cops find it." It was one of the great mistakes of my life to have put that burden upon him. I think he was in shock and just said "OK," wide-eyed. I was his big brother after all, and functioned in some ways more as a father figure, called forth in a vacuum with my dad out of the house for a bunch of reasons that I don't need to explore here. He had just graduated high school and was headed to University of Arizona in the fall. He took the gun and the cash and I left him there, with that. With all of that.

I made my way to the kitchen.

"Hi Timmy!" said Jan, first one to see me come around the corner. Her son Darren and I were friends, and had been enrolled together at U.C. Davis fresh out of high school. We lived in the same dorm our freshman year. She and mom were catching up - good friends for many years that hadn't seen one another in a while. I have a personality characteristic that,

sometimes, when things need to be said that are difficult and I'm anxious to get them out, I can be too abrupt - not great at cushioning news for others that might be shocking.

"I'm about to be arrested," I matter-of-factly told them both.

The laughter abruptly ceased, and silence settled heavily. The overhead fluorescent kitchen lights seemingly grew brighter – residual hallucinations from the acid. Smiles turned to shocked confusion and fear, and I could immediately see through the façade of small pleasantries and smiles to the real of suffering that had marked their faces through the passage of time.

"For What?!" was mom's response.

"Armed robbery." I replied straightforwardly.

The look of gut-cinching confusion and elemental terror sharpened. She paused for a moment before speaking.

"What makes you think you can rob people?!" she said in some combination of panicked astonishment and incredulity.

It was a peculiar response, and maybe you need to know my mom to know how bizarre. I had just uttered reconfiguring words - a powerful and dark magical incantation. My declaration was so outside of her every day experience that the words didn't register within her normative frame. I had fried her circuits, and initiated her into a new and dreadful, all-encompassing reality - enmeshment within the carceral drag. From then till now, it's been in our lives to varying degrees of intensity.

Jan left after providing what emotional support she could. My mom and stepdad made the decision to call the family friend/attorney. He recommended I check myself into a mental

hospital as a pre-emptive gesture. It would demonstrate to the court that I was trying to get some treatment in self-recognition that I was “mentally ill.” Should we want to run an insanity defense, checking myself into a psych hospital could work in my favor. Although a sound legal-strategic move, it was also quite necessary for I really was out of my mind. In addition, I just don’t think anybody knew what else to do. I couldn’t be allowed to walk back out the door and onto the streets, that much was certain. And I required some type of crisis intervention.

Unfortunately, I wouldn’t be hospitalized long enough to receive any treatment or counsel; a few hours were all I spent in that facility before I was arrested. I packed a few changes of clothes with a cd player and headphones into a duffle bag, and I threw a 12-pack of Coors light into the bottom of it. I knew I would be arrested soon, probably that night, so I might as well be drunk when the police came. One last pleasure before going to jail that could also protect me from being fully aware of what was happening to me.

The answer to my mom’s question, the thought process and delusion that led me to decide that I should get a gun in my hand and “rob people,” are rather difficult to explain. First and foremost, I was occupying an indescribably terrifying psychic space. In February of 1997 at 21 years old, I ingested somewhere between five and ten tabs of LSD. I don’t remember how many exactly, because I just ate them until the bag was empty. I was a recent college drop-out and in an experimental phase with drugs. I had tried coke and speed, weed and mushrooms. Ecstasy. Nothing regular. But lots of booze. LSD was next on the list.

My Friend Marc brought the acid to my apartment, neither of us had taken it before. I put a tab on my tongue, and after about fifteen minutes, nothing happened. I took another tab. Ten more minutes, then a third. I thought maybe it was a bunk dose and didn’t know that it

took up to an hour for the acid to kick in. And I really had no idea of the drug's profound psychological effects. I thought tripping on LSD was probably similar to eating mushrooms, or even taking ecstasy, not entirely off of their experiential spectrum. So, I just kept dropping tabs until something happened. I thought to myself, how bad could it really be? After 45 minutes, I just put the rest of the tabs in my mouth.

Turns out it can be pretty fucking bad. When the acid finally kicked in, it walloped me all at once like a ton of reality-annihilating bricks. It's impossible to adequately describe what I experienced on that drug trip. I either saw god as indistinguishable from myself and everyone else, or went utterly insane. Probably both. It was an utterly terrifying, horrifically sublime and personality-shattering experience – totally devastating. I psychologically annihilated my “self,” and lost the capacity to speak for some time after. There is nothing I can say about that subjective experience that will be adequate, or comprehensive.

There was one overwhelming phenomenological experience, or perceptual recalibration/breakdown, relevant to understanding my psychological state in the eight-month period that led to my arrest. I perceived an utter lack of differentiation between myself and the external world, a deep and polar interconnection. An evisceration of the subjective/objective boundary. I could no longer recognize where “I” started and stopped and could no longer distinguish between my own thoughts, which bubbled up uncontrollably from my unconscious (were they “my” thoughts, then?), and the happenings of the external world. They were coterminous happenings. And I also experienced them as causally connected. Often depicted in popular culture as a joyful realization that “all is love,” a unity of all things, that was not my experience. Instead, I experienced an utterly terrifying visibility. That everyone could read my

mind – further than that, that my mind was indistinguishable from external reality, itself. That my thought was responsible for everything that existed. I lost any internal sense of “I” as distinct from other people and things, and hence any sense of psychological privacy. Whatever I thought was immediately out there in the world, and everything happening around me was the result of my own thought that I couldn’t control. My most intimate and internal self was entirely visible – naked and exposed like a hanging nerve in a shattered tooth.

Generally speaking, when people have had this experience through psychedelics or through spiritual practice, it goes away rather quickly. It is fleeting. I stayed in this state of consciousness - vacillating in and out of the perception for various lengths of time from minutes to hours - that everything happening in the world was a doing of my own mind, for about two years. For the entirety of my crime-spree and well into my incarceration.

In attempting to describe the subjective experience of paranoid psychosis and persecutory delusion, I am faced with its impossibility. The affect is unrelatable – the seizing dread and crippling anxiety. The panic attacks in which reality would seem to melt away and become indistinguishable from my own thought. I was the only thing that existed with any certainty, the only thing real – all of external reality a projection from my unconscious that I was quite suddenly and mistakenly made aware of. Unable to differentiate the boundary of where I started and stopped, if something went “wrong” in the external world, that was my fault. Everything other people did registered as mere reflection of my internal state. From what people said to me or even to one another, to how they moved through space. Their very appearance in my field of vision. I had called them forth. Or we had all called one another forth from the void, and were in polar and compensatory relation to one another, inextricably linked.

And I was in a state of constant, crippling anxiety because of it. The entire world was mad. Radically intelligent, but utterly insane. Simultaneously my responsibility, yet entirely out of my control no matter how hard I tried to do precisely that.

Most importantly for understanding my incarceration, I suffered from the paranoid delusion that this new state of consciousness that I had entered was, actually, the way things had always been. That I was finally seeing how everyone else experienced the world all the time. Up until then, I had been sleep-walking through my life, blind. It was a profound character defect, my inauthenticity, that had kept me from seeing “reality” up until this point, from being awake to it. That perception, or delusion, led to feelings of profound shame. The more my friends and family told me that what I was experiencing wasn’t real, the more that fueled my paranoid delusion. I read their words looking for the truth underneath, unable to take their utterances at face value. Everything they were saying was in code, and needed to be deciphered. Every time I spoke it was a lie, inauthentic, a collapsing away from truth. I couldn’t not lie when I spoke. So, I stopped speaking.

Knowing what I do now about a Lacanian psychoanalysis that asserts that language is alienating in its very essence would have been a helpful contextual frame then. That the symbolic always falls short of describing what it attempts to describe, the irrepresentable Real. That the Real exceeds the symbolic. Instead of understanding that I was experiencing a structural incapacity within language, I experienced this lack as my own failing - as something I was unwittingly doing or unable to do. I could never get to the Real of what I wanted to say – whether about myself or the world. The more I spoke, the further it receded. Every word I spoke a failure. I felt utterly alone, condemned, profoundly inhuman. Incommunicable and false

down to the very core of my being, actually monstrous. Not for this or that particular shortcoming, but failure as essence - developmentally hindered, and unable to bear the responsibility of authenticity and existence.

A couple examples of my psychic state may help to clarify.

In early hours one morning a few months after eating the acid, I was lying in bed with Faith, a young woman I was seeing romantically at the time. She had fallen asleep and as I lay there in the still and darkened silence, my mind began to race. As it often did.

“Calm down, Tim.” I thought to myself.

I couldn't. Trying to regulate my anxiety only drew attention and amplified it until it peaked, clipping like a distorted speaker in blurred vision and inability to gather a breath. At that very moment of my anxiety crescendo, a small earthquake - the bed began to rock back and forth and I watched as the light fixture above us swayed. It's Southern California, small earthquakes happen quite regularly. To a rational consciousness, my clipping anxiety and the earthquake were unconnected, pure coincidence. To my schizoid mind though, I had caused the earthquake. Because no boundary existed between myself and the external world, my inability to control my anxiety had externalized as an event. I experienced not being able to regulate my anxiety as a *moral* failing that deeply affected the external world and put others around me in physical danger. I, along with everyone else, had an inborn responsibility to stabilize objectivity. Everyone else seemed able to. But I couldn't. They weren't afraid as I was. My terror and anxiety, and my incapacity to regulate them manifesting as potentially catastrophic events like earthquakes, demonstrated my straight-up unfitness for existence. I sprang out of the bed and immediately started dressing to leave.

“What’s wrong, baby?” Faith asked.

I interpreted her question as ridicule. I thought she knew very well that I had caused the earthquake and she was teasing me for it. I was ashamed. That’s how the persecutory delusions functioned. I left and never spoke to her again, out of an overwhelming humiliation.

Some weeks later, I was out with some friends at an underground night club in Hollywood. My anxiety had smoothed over recent days - I was feeling a bit better and thinking maybe, just maybe, I was learning how to exist within and adapting to this deeper reality that I had awakened into. As I surveyed the dance floor, I began to get anxious again. It was dark and hot in the club. Visibility was poor. The electronic music was aggressive, pounding. Dance floor lights were moving scattershot and unpredictably, randomly shining in my face and blinding me. I didn’t know anyone near me. So many strangers, some of whom felt threatening.

“Calm down Tim,” I thought to myself.

I couldn’t control the upcycle. The more I tried the worse it got. I grew anxious about being anxious, was trapped in a closed feedback loop. The anxiety peaked and transmuted into panic attack level, and at that very moment a young man crossed the dancefloor towards me. I froze, trying to calm myself through breath control. And by extension, to control his action with my mind as he was nothing but an externalization of my own thought. Regulating my anxiety could smooth objectivity. At the very last moment, he veered a bit towards the stranger standing next to me and brutally drove a knife he had been cuffing deeply into the stranger’s stomach, sending him careening end over end to the bottom of a staircase behind us.

The club broke into chaos, everyone screaming and running toward the exit. I just stood there frozen, in shock. Trying to calm in order to make reality settle. My fear had caused an

innocent to get stabbed, drew it like a magnet, and I felt an immediate and overwhelming guilt as if I had stabbed him myself. I was responsible. The man who assaulted the other wasn't an autonomous actor; he had performed the action as reflection of my own internal state. And he was trying to demonstrate to me that I had to control my anxiety in order to stabilize reality. Both he and the victim had both sacrificed themselves in order to teach me this secret truth of the universe. That was the unfolding of a logical structure grounded in a perception that the objective world was merely myself, externalized. That as my fear grew, the world would grow more fearful. And that as Shakespeare said, all the world is a stage, a performance.

My friend, Michael, grabbed me by the arm and pulled me towards the exit.

"C'mon man! We gotta go!"

Nothing felt real. I couldn't speak. Anything I said would have been inauthentic and I didn't know what to do. I could only make a mistake no matter the action. I let Michael lead me out of there like a frightened and defenseless child, totally incapable of making a decision and lacking the capacity to distinguish between the real and fantasy. As we made our way down the staircase, we had to step over the stabbing victim, writhing in pain and shirt soaked in blood. He looked up and reached towards me, and he implored:

"Help me!"

And I stopped there, standing astride him. I wanted to help. It was my fault that he was stabbed, after all. But I couldn't make sense of what to do. I just stared with him, eye to eye, until Michael grabbed me by the arm and yanked me violently towards the exit.

"Jesus Christ, man! Let's fucking GO!"

And we did.

Looking back, I understand a bit better what happened. The LSD rewired my perception of cause and effect, inverting them. Effect became causal. Threatening situations weren't causing anxiety. I experienced my anxiety as first, manifesting externally and causing the threatening situation to appear. My wires were crossed. It is difficult to express the thought and affect of a psychotic break. I do so in order to illuminate the unbearable psychic load I was carrying that caused me to "crack" and led me to conclude that committing crime was my best option.

After several months, all day and every day - even in sleep through paranoid nightmares - it got to the point where I just couldn't take it anymore. The crippling anxiety. The terror that if I couldn't control it, bad things would happen to other people. I felt responsible for all the negative events happening in the world. And consuming, unbearable shame. It wasn't just extreme examples like the earthquake and the club stabbing. It was all the time and everywhere. If someone tripped in a parking lot. A couple fighting near me were actually just external expressions of my internal dialogue. I would try to empty my mind to get them to stop. If an NBA team was missing shots in a game I was watching on television, I perceived them as missing shots because I was too anxious. Which would then make me more anxious. I tried to control the game through calming my mind and through self-regulation. I saw news reports on the "Heaven's Gate" cult mass suicide. Only the victim's tennis shoes hanging out underneath bed sheets as corpses lay dead underneath. One of the victims was wearing the same shoes I was wearing that day. I read that as interconnection and interpreted their mass suicide as my fault; that these human beings had annihilated themselves in order to demonstrate to me, personally, that life was illusory and I needed to get over my fearfulness. I wanted away from

the gaze of family and friends. I was terribly embarrassed, shame as the very core of my being. And I was utterly terrified. Exhausted. I wanted to pay whatever price I needed to pay to rebalance things, for all the pain I had caused. I wanted to be punished.

I had a gun within a few days.

I believed that I needed to be punished for all the bad things that I had caused to happen around me, all the time and everywhere. And if I was going to be a tragic failure, I already was, it would not be in the view of those whom I loved and no longer trusted. I felt so betrayed. I couldn't stand who I perceived myself to be through my families' and friends' eyes. And I needed to be stronger and less fearful. In my schizoid, yet rational-within-insane-assumptions thinking, going to prison would satisfy these needs. I would be away. I would be punished. And I would be forced to come to terms with my fear. And if I was annihilated in the process, well, I probably deserved that too. I began robbing restaurants throughout the San Fernando Valley in the full expectation I would be caught, arrested, and sent to prison. I would walk up to the cashier, gun in waist band, and say: "I'm here for the money. I'm not going to hurt you. Just give me the cash and I'll be gone." Sometimes I wore a mask, sometimes not. As I said, I figured I'd get caught eventually, was planning on it, so didn't really care if I was identified.

I know this may all sound insane, which I exactly was. There are more often than not reasons beyond neoliberal ideologies of "personal choice" for why people end up in prison. I have come to understand that the primary function of the contemporary prison is to disappear racialized and otherwise superfluous subpopulations non-conducive to the creation of capital from civil society. That's how most people I was locked up with got to prison. That is, in some

significant measure, is who and what this work is about and will be explored. But that's not how I got there. Other social scrubbing functions have been attached to the prison's mandate through the withdrawal and reorientation of state capacity over the last 30-plus years. Prisons are also the dominant mechanism through which civil society disappears the mad (Kupers, 1999). I earned my place in prison, the dominant mechanism of racialized social control within the United States, in the midst of a substance induced psychotic break while suffering profound, paranoid schizophrenic delusions.

In the most superficial sense, I made a choice to perform a series of criminal acts. But that choice was made within a larger context of madness and intense psychological suffering. Making rational choices assumes the existence of a stable and objective world. I perceived the objective world as free-floating, an indistinguishable extension of my own thought. If I understood that I was not the cause of every bad thing that happened to anyone, I would not have felt the need to be punished. If I wasn't suffering paranoid delusions, I wouldn't have perceived everyone as ridiculing and talking about me all the time and wouldn't have felt desperate to escape it. I wouldn't have felt so alone, so monstrous. If I weren't suffering crippling panic attacks, I wouldn't have felt the need to grow stronger to overcome my anxiety through trial by fire. I simply wouldn't have made the choices I made. They were contextual, rational within a larger irrationality, driven by terror and psychotic delusion. I needed psychological intervention. Not prison. But in all my symptomology, I wasn't going to seek help. That was part of it. I thought my schizoid perception was real and that my persecutory delusions were telling the truth of me and my relations. I just couldn't stand it any longer, but I

also didn't want to kill myself. I wanted to live and to figure out how to survive within this insane world.

Checking in to Northridge mental hospital, they searched my bag. An orderly found the beer, and laughed a little.

"You can't have this here, man..." said the orderly with a grin.

"Worth a shot," I replied with a flippancy that masked the crippling anxiety and reality-slippage I was constantly experiencing. I was desperate for human connection and kindness. I would get steel bars and concrete instead.

They took me up an elevator several floors, down an improperly lit hallway and into my own, secured room. The blinds were drawn as I entered, and I could see the commercial and industrial lights of the deep San Fernando Valley stretched out before me down Roscoe Boulevard glistening and shimmering in a polluted haze through the hospital window. I contemplated for a while, imagined myself running those streets over the last couple of months. How I ended up here. The robberies. The drunken Black-outs to escape excruciating anxiety and psychological turmoil. The shadows through which I had walked. The city seemed filthy, but familiar. My home that I loved in all of its complexity and darkness and artificial illumination. I turned off the fluorescent overhead lights and lay down on the hospital bed atop overly starched sheets and let the enveloping, ambient city light saturate the room in a faint orange glow, holding me in mechanical, natal embrace for the life I was to be born into.

The phone on my bedside table rang loudly, startling me from sleep. I had dozed off, but I'm not sure for how long. No more than a couple of hours, but enough to disorient me. It had grown freezing cold in the room.

“Hello?!” I said, with quickened and just-waking confusion.

“Is this Timothy Malone?” a male voice queried.

“Yeah,” I said reflexively, still half-asleep.

Then click.

I only realized after hanging up who it was.

“Well, that’s it,” I thought to myself.

I sat up in bed and put my feet to the floor. I put on a thick pair of khaki pants and began lacing up my tennis shoes, then began layering clothing. I slipped on my thick flannel jacket because even though it was a summer evening, I had no idea how cold it would be in jail. As I would come to find out, county jail is freezing. Other inmates told me that the Sheriff department intentionally kept it that way to compel us to sign plea deals. County jail is maintained in a state of maximal discomfort – cold, lights on all the time, no blankets, et cetera - so that we would plead guilty to get out of there and on to state prison instead of fighting our cases, a low-intensity torture.

They must have called from downstairs, within the hospital, because it took less than five minutes for the L.A.P.D.’s Special Investigations Section (S.I.S. squad) to show up.

The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) has a secret weapon in its war on crime. The department’s Special Investigation Section (S.I.S.) is an elite tactical detective squad with a straightforward mandate: Track down the City’s most dangerous offenders and take them off the street. (Fasano, 2015)

When they burst through my hospital door, they looked like a militarized assassination team. Automatic weapons drawn, balaclavas, and body armor.

I actually wasn’t dangerous, but there was no way for the cops to know that. I never intended nor actually did I hurt anyone during the commission of my crimes. Prior to that

summer, I had never been a violent person. And I still didn't think of myself that way. What I did was performative. I would show people I had a gun, lift up my shirt and point at it in my waist band. Never draw it. It usually never had any bullets in it. Pure prop. I'm actually lucky that I didn't get shot in the process of someone defending their business. Not that that matters. I understand the fear that I caused, and I am sorrowful for that beyond expression. All the people that I frightened. People just doing their jobs. Raising kids. If I could take all that back, I would. For what they experienced and what I would come to, as well. I was so psychologically terrified at the time that I couldn't see outside of it; the fear I inspired in others didn't even register to me. And I'm not making excuses. Just trying to be descriptive of my psychological state back then. And I understand the precaution. On paper, I sounded like a very dangerous person. At the time though, it certainly felt like overkill being that I had no plans on anything beyond compliance and surrender. And being that I was pretty much in a state of disorganized psychosis for the entirety of my crime spree and taking very little precaution to prevent my identification, I'm not sure why it took them more than two months to find me as an "elite detective squad."

Regardless, they came banging and pouring and shoving into my room in force, guns drawn – five, ten, I don't know how many - it seemed like all of them. I put my hands in the air as soon as they came in. They ordered me down on the ground, put my hands behind my back and cuffed me. They mirandized me and escorted me out. I could feel their tensions relax once they had me in custody out in the hallway, they felt they had really accomplished something that night. As we made our way towards the elevator, I saw the orderly who had found my beer. The look on his face had changed. From one of humorous rapport, to apprehension - I

nodded at him just to let him know, “hey man. It’s ok. I’m no danger to you.” He backed up further into the corridor and away from me. That’s the look I still get when I tell someone for the first time that I’ve been to prison. And why I’m sparing with the information, particularly in academic contexts.

In the back of the cop car on the way to the Van Nuys substation, I made sure to take a good look at everything around me. I took in the familiar sensory experiences of where I had grown up. I counted the street lights as we drove, read the signage and the storefronts. I took notice of the places where I had always liked to eat, the streets I used to take to go to Little League games as a kid, avenues that led to childhood friends’ houses, schools I had attended. I closed my eyes and took deep breaths. The cops had the front windows down, and I could feel the warm, summer air against my face. I tried to take in as much as I could. I had no idea how long it would be until I would see those places again, feel them. But I knew it would probably be a while.

It would be a long while, indeed. Eight years by the time all was said and done. From August 22nd of 1997 through July 5th 2005, I was incarcerated in various institutions throughout Southern and central California for the crime of armed robbery in the 2nd degree. My odyssey began in the Los Angeles County Jail system, a veritable war zone and pit of brutality and degradation subsequently investigated by the FBI for unimaginable abuses that were taking place during the time I awaited trial. I spent three months in county before taking a plea deal for nine years within California Department of Corrections custody, with “two-strikes.” As all “two-strikers” must serve a mandatory minimum of eighty-five percent of their sentence, by

the time all was said and done, I ended up doing seven years and 11 months of my nine-year sentence. Plus, three years of “high-security” parole upon release.

From LA County jail, I “caught the chain” - the transport bus to North Kern State Prison for reception within state prison. Also called Delano after the central California farming town in which the prison is located, my reception and classification there took about five months. In Delano, I was on 23-hour a day lockdown with yard twice a week for an hour. We showered, if we were lucky, once a week. From CDC reception, I was transferred to a high-security level-three yard at RJ Donovan Correctional facility in San Diego County to formally begin my “main-line” sentence. I did a little over two years on that yard, before being transferred to a medium-security facility, the California Rehabilitation Center (CRC) in Norco after my “points,” my security level, dropped due to no disciplinary infractions. While at CRC, my points continued to drop, and by 2003 I was assigned to a level 1 minimum security fire-camp within CRC, a prison inside of the prison. There, I was assigned as clerk for a first-responder team deployed regularly throughout the state of California to fight brush fires. While in fire camp, I got “caught up” in a riot between the “Woods” and the “Southsiders,” White and Hispanic inmates, boosting my custody level points back up to level-2 medium security and, after returning from the hole, was housed back on the mainline of CRC. While in the chaos pit that was CRC, I received two disciplinary infractions in total that led to “lock-up orders,” being transferred to the Administrative Unit (Ad-Seg) of California State prison at Chino, euphemistically called “the hole.” Upon completion of both ad-seg sentences, I was sent back to CRC. I finished out my prison sentence and was released from that institution after being locked up within it for a total of five years minus the trips back and forth to Chino, from 2000 to 2005. Between reception,

administrative segregation and the innumerable lockdowns, I spent about a year and a half of my eight-year sentence on total lockdown, either in single cell isolation or with a “cellie.”

Before I had committed any criminal act, my mom took me to see a psychiatrist because there was quite obviously something off with me. Unfortunately, she didn’t have any framework for understanding how psychologically disturbed I actually was.

“Tell him about the birth of the universe thing,” she said to my therapist, there in his office.

“I had a vision that god is alone and insane, and to escape his isolation, he shook his head back and forth so fast that it exploded into an infinite number of pieces. That’s the big bang. And we are all god’s delusion, an insane god that forgot himself. We are all his dream.”

My therapist replied that I was obviously suffering from substance-induced temporary schizophrenia. He prescribed me Prozac for the depression, Zyprexa for the psychosis and Klonopin to keep the anxiety attacks down. I never took any of them as I thought they would mute the truth I was experiencing about myself and the world. I’m thankful I didn’t. In recent years, I couldn’t help but take notice of infomercials asking: “were you ever prescribed Zyprexa? You could be entitled to financial compensation...” Looking back now, I have come to terms with the fact that I have within me the potential to break what they call schizophrenic. It is pretty well dormant, but if I take even mildly psychoactive drugs like THC, it activates. It was a great relief when I discovered that. It gave me something to get a hold of and things to avoid. Everyone wasn’t making fun of me. I wasn’t psychologically or spiritually underdeveloped.

The court wasn't interested in exploring any of that. I was charged with 15 counts of armed robbery. That spoke for itself within California law, and brooked no nuance. According to the M'Naghten rule:

Every man is to be presumed to be sane, and ... that to establish a defense on the ground of insanity, it must be clearly proved that, at the time of the committing of the act, the party accused was laboring under such a defect of reason, from disease of mind, and not to know the nature and quality of the act he was doing; or if he did know it, that he did not know he was doing what was wrong. (Findlaw, 2019)

In essence, the M'Naghten rule states that in order for a criminal defendant to be found not guilty for reasons of insanity, that defendant must be incapable of distinguishing between right and wrong at the time of the commission of the criminal act. In my case, right and wrong simply didn't exist. There was no objective world to ground them. I experienced the world, all that exists, as fundamentally dramatic. Right and wrong can't exist if the world itself isn't real, but a performance. It would be like trying to hold actors to account for their actions in films.

My attorney came to visit me in a Van Nuys jail holding tank prior to my first court appearance. When I asked her about the viability of an insanity defense, she informed me that to plead not guilty by reason of insanity is to take an enormous risk. For if the court determined I was fit to stand trial, I would likely be "maxed out" - given the maximum sentence possible. She told me I was facing a likely 65-year sentence. The fact that I actually was, even by legal definition, insane - experiencing the world as an effect of my own mind hence making nonsensical concepts like "right" and "wrong" in schizophrenic delusion - would not be heard. She further told me that state machinery had already been at work and that the District Attorney had a "deal" for me. Twenty-five years-to-life. They wanted to strike me out. That was their mercy, and I was taken aback. I had never been arrested before. During the commission of

my crimes, I assumed that the three-strikes law applied to repeat offenders, people who had already been to prison. I thought this arrest would count as my first offense, I would do a couple of years at most and get out. That is not the case.

“What?!” I inquired incredulously, “It’s my first charge!”

“You are charged you with 15 counts of armed robbery. *Each of those counts is a strikable offense.* It’s not how many times you’ve been arrested. It’s how many felonies they can charge you with. You are looking at 65 years if you don’t take the deal.”

A primary and brutal lever of carceral power is levying the great threat of many, many years in prison so as to compel the criminally charged to take a plea deal. As Loïc Wacquant notes in *Punishing the Poor* (2009),

One of the main functions of the jail ... is to extort a guilty plea from its denizens and allow the judicial system to realize mammoth savings by cutting out the costly trial phase... 92 percent of those sentenced to more than one year in prison... do so following a barter of this kind. (p. 123)

In order to avoid the resource expenditure of going to trial, the state threatens criminal defendants with maximum sentences, truth of the matter be damned. My mental state would not formally be mentioned in court, nor would it factor in the calculation the state performed with regards to my guilt or innocence, nor the length of time I should do. I was so used to terror and reality slippage that when she told me the amount of time I was facing, the anxiety I experienced was just more of the same. I don’t know where I got the strength. Perhaps it wasn’t strength, more dissociation than anything. My mouth just speaking words that I didn’t really understand the implications of.

“If they give me a deal under ten years, I’ll sign. Anything else, we are taking it to the box,” I said.

Taking it to the box meant going to trial. If found guilty, I'd probably get maxed out at the sixty-five. But I was willing to face that because, at twenty-two years old, anything more than ten years seemed like they would be taking my life away, anyway.

"Are you sure? I don't know if I can get the D.A. to agree to that," my attorney said.

"Yes, I'm sure. I can't do that much time. I'd rather kill myself." The words just came pouring out.

She paused for a beat after I said that, but recomposed herself quickly. And after she left me in that solitary, stifling hot and filthy concrete cube, I went to the steel sink and looked at myself in the scratched, barely reflective and dulled metal mirror bolted to the wall. And I began to think very seriously about whether or not, if I did get a life sentence, it was worth staying alive for. Thinking through what it would actually feel like to cut my wrists open vertically with a state-issue razor and how to do it should the time come. Really imagining how much pressure it would take to pierce through my flesh deeply enough to be fatal. What my family would say and how they would react, my mom and my brother. They would wonder what had happened. How had it all gotten so out of control so quickly? What did they do wrong? It made my hands clench, and I wondered if I had the resolve to go through with it should the need arise. Or if I would instead allow myself to be caged for decades, until an old man, because too much of a coward to end my own life.

The next time I came to court, my attorney had the state's final offer waiting for me. Nine years and they would give me two strikes, which meant that I would have to do eighty-five percent of my sentence. Everyone told me then – my parents, my attorney, anyone else I trusted, what an amazing deal it was and how lucky I was to have gotten it. They were all afraid

for me. It could have been so much worse. And while that is certainly true, it could have been a lot worse, I didn't feel very lucky at the time. It was just too much time to face. No one feels fortunate staring down the barrel of close to a decade in prison. People still say that to me, occasionally. That I was lucky. I think its revelatory of the degree of carceral tyranny that we are willing to accept as a "civil" society that I am expected to be grateful for not being disappeared forever into a state-organized torture chamber for committing crimes in the midst of psychological crisis. Something needed to be done with me, an intervention performed no doubt. But after having gone through it, barely survived it, I am as sure about the fact that I didn't need prison as I am of anything. Where and who I am now - a scholar and a teacher, a father, and a good friend, and a lover of so many - including many that I did time with - is despite that pit of catastrophic violence and despair, not because of it.

During my sentencing, the judge said to me: "Malone. This court is giving you a chance at a future life. But if you so much as spit on the ground wrong after you get out, I'm striking you out. We'll bury you under the prison." My dad told me a few days before my sentencing that no matter what the judge says, look back at your mom and tell her, "It's ok." The judge banged the gavel. I looked back at my mom and my brother. I could barely see through the adrenaline haze and the fear. I heard nothing, but did what I was told. I Looked back and said, "it's ok." Of course, it wasn't. I saw her head drop, and inconsolable tears. I was grabbed ahold of by sheriffs and ushered by handcuffed wrists at the elbow out of the courtroom back to the holding tank below, deep in the bowels of the Van Nuys criminal court to await transfer back to county jail in Downtown LA.

There were a bunch of OG's in that holding tank, men deeply familiar with the sentencing process who had been in and out of this very courtroom numerous times. Only one inmate was younger than me. We were all from disparate sections of the valley, a holding cell full of the just-sentenced. One of the OG's began asking everyone in the tank what they had been sentenced to. After asking a few of the older folks their crime and time, he got to the kid. He was Latinx, gang tattoos signified he was from Pacoima. The OG asked about his charges. As it turned out, he was charged with 15 counts of armed robbery, same as me.

"How much time you get, homeboy?"

"227 years, holmes. I'm on my way to the Bay." He was referencing Pelican Bay, the most notorious supermax prison in the California system. A gladiator school.

"Daaaaaamn, fool!" The OG said. "How old are you, youngster?"

"Seventeen, fool."

Holy shit, I thought to myself. This kid is fucked, for life.

"What are you in for, wood?" the O.G. asked me.

"Armed robbery," I said.

"How much time you get, wood?"

"Nine years, two strikes." I replied matter-of-factly and projecting strength through solidity of voice because self-aware of the disparity. And then the youngster asked the essential question to understand what had happened here.

"How many counts, wood?"

I could have lied, I suppose. But why do that?

"Fifteen. But I took a deal. They struck thirteen of 'em."

I was charged with fifteen counts of armed robbery, same as the youngster. But in my plea deal, the state dropped thirteen charges against me, found me guilty on the remaining two robberies and added a gun enhancement. Put through their mandatory minimum sentencing guidelines, that equaled nine years, and they struck each robbery count (two strikes).

“You’re lucky, Fool! I didn’t get no deal,” said the kid.

I was middle class and white. He was poor and Brown. I saw no other mitigating factors. That isn’t to say that I deserved more time. Or that my time in prison wasn’t brutal, absolutely horrific. It most certainly was. But it wasn’t 200-plus years starting in Pelican Bay at 17-years-old and a guarantee to die in prison. Today, I am writing these words in a Starbucks in Woodland Hills, Los Angeles, my hometown. And I have been home for 14 years. That youngster has been in prison for 22 years. If he is still alive, he is 40 now. And he’s never getting out. He was chucked into a flesh thresher. Charged with the same crimes I was charged with, he was Brown-skinned and I was white. That was my first experiential lesson on race within the criminal justice system. I would come to find out it was incomprehensibly worse than all that, as will be described in detail throughout the course of this study.

Discipline and Freedom

It took a couple of years from the time I ingested the LSD for it to work its way out of my system - before I began again to experience the world in what I would describe as a rational way. To be able to differentiate what I was in control of, and not so much. All through my time in L.A. County jail, my reception in state prison (a combined eight+ months) and well into my stint at Donovan, frightening flashbacks. Periods of time in which the subjective/objective

boundary collapsed, unpredictably. A couple of years before I stopped doing things like trying to open cell bars with my mind or perceiving other convicts on phones as calling C.O.'s in the gun tower to report on me. As I began to be able to put delusions in their place and became more capable of ascertaining the real from the not so, I began to take a deep look at the world I had come to inhabit, the California state prison. My intellectual journey began there.

I began to read. Partly because of the boredom of lockdown, but also because I had no interest in being up in the mix of the drama of the yard – the hustle, the drugs, the prison politics. I tried to insulate from all that the best that I could. I read everything I could get my hands on rather indiscriminately, from trashy western novels to autobiographies. The bible and science magazines. Sometimes the drama of the yard finds you and is unavoidable. I couldn't always choose to stay in my cell reading. Sometimes I was dragged out. But I didn't go out looking for trouble either.

Reading all that stuff helped to get my reading comprehension back on track. While at Donovan, I got a cell change and moved into a cell with Joey, a lifer who would become a good friend to me during my stretch. Joey was enrolled in college correspondence courses offered through Ohio University. After asking some questions and thinking it through for a while, I decided to enroll, too. I had some real insecurities about never completing my education, and didn't even know if I was even academically capable, or smart enough. I had failed out of U.C. Davis, and struggled to pay attention during class. My eyes would glaze over and I would day dream no matter how much I tried to focus. Eventually, I stopped going because I thought maybe I was retarded. During the course of my incarceration, I would come to discover that I had a pretty severe case of attention deficit disorder, which explained a lot. Regardless, after

enrolling in the correspondence program, Ohio University began sending me assignments and I would work through them. Slowly at first, but as I grew more and more efficient and built up my study techniques and habits through sheer will and brute force, I grew terribly productive. I found a proctor for exams. By the time my sentence was up, I had earned close to 80 units behind bars. Thankfully, I had family that was able and willing to pay for that. Most don't, and federal Pell Grants for prisoners have long been eliminated. Existing state-educational programs in California prisons are obscene.

By the year 2001, after being "down" for about 4 years, I was housed within the California Rehabilitation Center in Norco. I was in the routine of staying up late well into the evening after lights out and listening to the radio with my headphones on. Late night was the only time when I could experience any stillness. One evening, I threw on my headphones and searched the dial. On a scan through the stations, I landed on KPFK 90.7, a Pacifica Radio affiliate broadcasting out of Los Angeles. The *Roy of Hollywood Show* was on-air. The voice played that midnight hour had a smooth and relaxing quality to it. I could tell the recording was dated due to the crackling and hollow quality of the sound. It drew me in. It was a recorded lecture of the beat philosopher Alan Watts, a popularizer of Zen Buddhism, Taoism and mysticism for Western audiences during the 1950's and 60's. He was talking about the city as organism, reading different buildings and organizational centers as like organs and the flows of peoples and goods through the streets and avenues as like circulative systems within the social body. He then began to describe mystical states of consciousness.

As I listened, I couldn't quite believe that what I was hearing was actually being spoken aloud. What I had experienced on the LSD, my schizophrenic episodes and my "psychotic

break” in the time up to and through my arrest and incarceration – the collapse of the subjective/objective boundary, my experiencing the self and world as a singular happening, “my madness” - was a rather ancient, human experience. It is foundational for many religious and spiritual systems, including mystical sects of Christianity and Zen Buddhism. I wasn’t the only person to have had this experience. Many seek it out. In fact, it had happened to innumerable people. I wasn’t alone.

As I sat that there on my prison rack in the dark, I began to openly weep. Uncontrollably, yet silently. I hid my tears from others within the dorm so as not to be perceived as weak, or as broken by my incarceration. It could invite attack. So much that had seemed disjointed in my personal experience, a rift between myself and the world, began to settle back into place, heal. There was an explanation of what had happened to me. I wasn’t insane. I had an experience that was inherently of value.

I awoke early the next morning almost desperate to learn what else I could from this source, KPFK. Democracy Now! With Amy Goodman was on. They were interviewing Noam Chomsky about the drive to invade Afghanistan after the September 11th attacks. I was overwhelmed with emotion, once again. All these gaps in understanding, dark spots in my mind began to be illuminated. The scale and breadth of the thought, its relevance to the real world. I was fascinated. I didn’t know that was something possible to do with a lecture, or a class room. My formal education had never approached this level of soul touching and healing. Questions I didn’t even know that I had were being answered and the world began to make a greater sense than it had prior.

That was it. A fire was lit within me. A deep desire to know and to understand. I was also angered. That what I had experienced, my madness, was something that was known to people. That it was something people have been talking about for a very long time. And when I talked to professionals about what was happening with me, they didn't know what I was talking about. No one recognized it. It was labeled mental illness, or as resultant from a substance-induced chemical imbalance. I was angry that there wasn't any institutional support or context to catch what was happening with me. And instead, I was in prison and not getting out for a very long time.

That anger fueled me. I began studying furiously. Not only college texts. But philosophy. Psychology. Social theory. I began studying about power, the prison, and politics. Days turned to weeks, then months of intense study. I developed a program and a discipline for myself to structure the chaos of my experience – I would wake up early before the rest of the dorm, meditate for half an hour, and then would read. I would go to chow, and then my work assignment. Out to the yard to exercise. Then, back to the dorm for more intensive study in the evening. I began transcribing whole passages from philosophical texts. I discovered contemporary thinkers, ordered a bunch of Noam Chomsky's books. Edward Said and Howard Zinn. A friend of mine, Jason, had a copy of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*. I asked to borrow it, but was intimidated. I didn't think I would understand it. But as I read and struggled through his references to Kant and Spinoza and others, I was utterly delighted that I could in fact make sense of it. I dove deeply into continental philosophy - read Nietzsche, Hegel, and Kant. I didn't understand everything, but enough. And I wrestled with the texts. I eventually discovered Fanon, and Foucault. I read Angela Davis. When I got tired, I would remember what had

happened to me. That instead of someone saying “ah yes. Mystical consciousness. We know what to do with that,” they called me schizophrenic. Or insane. I would pick the books back up. I would read more. Furious, fascinated and driven. To understand myself. To understand what had happened with me. To prove to myself and others that I was capable. But that grew less and less important as I understood what had happened to me better. I grew more and more interested in understanding the world I was inhabiting. The prison. How it fit with everything else. The months eventually became years.

Eventually, I got a job in the Literacy Lab’s G.E.D. program under Mrs. Patricia Scott as a tutor so that I would have access to a safe place to read and study all throughout the day. Away from the yard violence and prison politics. All day I read and I wrote. I applied a discipline driven by the suffering and violence around me, the horrific circumstance in which I was embedded, and I sublimated all that through intellectual activity. While preparing for a correspondence course exam one afternoon, I heard from behind me over the music in my headphones a banging and shuffling and felt the floor that I sat upon cross-legged bounce and reverberate underneath me. I ripped my headphones off and looked backwards over my shoulder, and a riot had “kicked off” between the Blacks and the Southsiders in the dorm. A Crip had a Southsider suspended in mid-air above his shoulders, and was in process of suplexing him headfirst into the ground not more than 5 feet behind me and I didn’t even hear the lead-up. I jumped up and scattered backwards, alarms wailed and cops came bursting in with pepper spray cannisters and batons for anyone not lying prone on the ground and got blasted. These were the conditions I was studying in. The social world I inhabited and worked within could always potentially explode in entropic violence.

It wasn't always like that. But often enough it was. There were times I had to put the books down and raise my hands to guarantee my own safety. And I also had to maintain a constant front for violence capacity to carve myself some space. After about five years though, people pretty much knew what I was about. I stayed to myself and wasn't really up in the mix of the yard, but I would fight if I had to. That was respectable enough for most convicts. I found my people, made my friends.

The passion that I found to know and to understand, to make sense of what had happened to me and the larger world in which I was embedded, has stayed with me all this time, up through this work. This work is the culmination of a twenty-year intellectual project that began with self-exploration, to understand what had happened to me psychologically, and grew towards an attempt to understand the social world I came to inhabit, the contemporary prison. Since my parole, I have completed my undergraduate studies, then went on to graduate school at Claremont Graduate University in order to pursue my PhD in Cultural Studies. I am careful with who I share the fact that I have been to prison. I do not want my writing and thought to be measured through that frame. I also don't want to be typecast as a "prison writer." But to talk about the prison, and to do so effectively in my case, requires self-disclosure. It requires talking about some of the worst things I have ever done, the most terrifying things that I have experienced - whether psychologically or institutionally. It requires a transparency. That's what I've begun to try and do here. When I first got to the yard, I remember thinking that the prison looked like an inverse mirror of where I had grown up. The racial numbers were upside down. From a predominantly white space to one in which the majority populations were of color. I made friends with some "Indians," their preferred

nomenclature on the yard, not mine. I had never met an Indian in my life. Why did I have to come to prison to befriend an indigenous person? Why were so many of the young Black and Brown men that I kicked it with on the yard treating their terms like a rite of passage? Something their father and uncles did, and their grandfathers before that? Old sets, old neighborhoods, not 20 miles away from Reseda, where I stayed. These were some of the first questions I had about the prison so many years ago. Not that I was totally naïve, either. I had some sense of the racialized and class disparities structuring the criminal justice system coming in, but living within the culture of the prison yard, as home, is another thing entirely. These questions have been answered well by others, and this work is a further attempt to explore those questions, from a position inside the perimeter fence. But it is more than that. It is a giving witness. And trying to develop a theoretical framework that makes sense of an interrelationship - how daily life on the yard is constituted by larger dynamics within civil society, and inversely, how civil society is itself constituted through the prison and its internal forms of violence, as well.

One evening at CRC near the end of my sentence while getting some hot water from the fountain at the front of the 100-man open dorm I was housed within, my friend Jerome - a skyline blood shot-caller from San Diego that saw me studying and working on academic stuff all the time - came up to have a few words.

“You know Timmy, one of my O.G. homies at Calipatria told me that I would meet the guy that’s going to tear all this down, someday. Maybe that’s you,” he said.

I don’t believe that any one person will dismantle the entrenched, overwhelmingly powerful and rapacious prison regime. That’s just not how movements for justice work. It will

take an organized and concerted movement, a series of activisms engaged in all kinds of struggle, over years and years. It will require the social, abolitionist movement that already exists; that is active and doing essential work toward the dismantling of the carceral monstrosity and struggling every day, and growing. But I do think by telling my story, and doing the best I can to relate what was happening on the yard and some of our shared experiences as inmates bound within - through lenses of the particular theorists that I will deploy throughout - that I can contribute something to that effort. Maybe I can help to make clear an additional perspective on what the prison is for and how it operates that will give us some tactical advantage; help us to understand the role the prison plays in the social formation, and be more clear-eyed about its death logics. A view from inside the thresher. Perhaps some of our stories will matter. Our terror and our pain. Our loss, our scars and our deaths. Perhaps this work will allow me to engage with that of others around the prison, and allow me to deepen and extend, if not make more specific, some claims about the contemporary prison in the United States. It is my hope that my voice, as well as the experience of others that I try to express here - who cannot speak themselves for a variety of interconnected reasons - can warp some bars; make flow the solidity of these excessively brutal, monstrous and perverse sites of domination, torture and human sacrifice. Hopefully this work can be some small contribution towards the disappearance of the prison as the primary mechanism by which we deal with "social problems" - racism, mental illness, drug addiction, economic marginalization or anything else - through subjecting human beings to technologies and institutions of social, biological and psychological death.

Introduction

This dissertation responds to a common analytic within scholarly and activist writing about mass incarceration that describes the function of prisons as warehousing populations made surplus to civil society through processes of racialized othering. While I draw on and align with the aspects of this work that critically examines aspects of neoliberal capitalism that work to ensnare particular communities and individuals within the prison regime, this dissertation extends that analysis by arguing that “warehousing” is an inaccurate and insufficient term to describe the function of contemporary prisons and, more importantly, the lived experience of people inside.

By contrast, I argue that people in prison are subjected to incomprehensible, brutal and murderous violence that is state-organized yet delegated to inmates, and is therefore disavowed. Because this violence is directed at very particular, largely racialized populations – the majority of the prison population being Black and Brown - abandonment to the contemporary prison and its thanatopolitical machinery is proto-genocidal. The primary function of the contemporary prison, then, is to *actively abandon a largely racialized, superfluous population within a forcefully bounded and state-totalized space to a steered machinery of delegated, proto-genocidal death production or thanatopolitical machinery.*

In order to make this argument, this dissertation brings together two modes of analysis into a methodology that I call *convict epistemology*. This methodology interweaves a deep engagement with the works of particular philosophers and scholars investigating questions of punishment, violence, politics and disease in relation to civil society with the experiences of

men within California prisons in the late 20th and 21st centuries. The latter combines journalistic and legal accounts of men's abandonment to different forms of violence within prisons as well as descriptions of some of my own experiences and observations from my tortuous eight years within California prisons from 1997 until 2005 as inmate #K73299. I argue that scholarly analyses of prisons are incomplete without a detailed and close-up understanding of the dynamics of the prison yard, without a view from its bloody insides. Instead, the *convict epistemology* I am arguing for, as a type of standpoint epistemology, asserts that any critical framework must be in deep dialogue and inter-relational exchange with the convict in order to see inside of the prison. As such, convict epistemology is in productive conversation with critical prison studies, abolitionist studies and also allies itself with a long tradition of prison memoirs, manifestos and other "voices from the inside."

Beginning with Michel Foucault's foundational work *Discipline and Punish*, this work employs a biopolitical lens, more particularly, thanatopolitics or the politics of death, to argue that the prison's racialized function in civil society is to kill some so that some others in white-supremacist sociality may live. Using journalistic accounts of real-life examples of prison violence and my own first-person narratives of some of the things I witnessed and experienced during my incarceration that signify something beyond themselves about the larger carceral formation, I read these events through particular concepts within biopolitical theory, psychoanalysis, critical race theory, philosophy and prison studies. This project examines the relationship between three structural layers: the prison as racialized death-dealing institution of civil society, the intricately organized codes, hierarchies, and rituals of the prison yard that

prisoners have developed to provide themselves with limited forms of protection and control, and the intimate view of the experiences of inmates caught within these systems.

In examining the interface between these layers, this dissertation argues that each and every inmate within the contemporary carceral perimeter is sentenced, is universally *abandoned* to suffer, an always-potential Hobbesian-style war of all-against-all – prison race riot (as well as lesser forms of violence, largely meant to prevent a riot’s instantiation) through the interaction of the four following principles:

1. The *imposition of scarcity*
2. Atop a forcefully *undifferentiated population*
3. That is barred the capacity to flee, or, the state enjoying a *monopoly over inmate movement*
4. Within conditions of *functional lawlessness*

As a result of these conditions, inmates are forced to enact or endure daily forms on violence, often as a conscious way of diverting or preventing more lethal and large-scale violence. The inmate-on-inmate nature of the violence allows the state to disavow its role in setting the operative conditions for this brutality to emerge through the foundational logics of carcerality itself.

Chapter Outline

Each section of this dissertation combines an engagement with philosophy and critical prison studies with a close examination of real events inside California prisons. In **Chapter One**, I argue for the need to extend the analysis made by Michel Foucault in his seminal text

Discipline and Punish when he traces a transition in the form of punishment in the 19th century - from a sovereign violence directed towards the body of the condemned, towards a disciplinary power meant to train docile bodies through the reformation of the soul. I will then closely examine two specific events that occurred within Corcoran State prison's Segregated Housing Unit (the SHU) in the 1990's - the guard-organized sexual assault of one inmate by another and the staging of guard organized "gladiator fights" between hostile, racialized inmate factions as punishments in excess of any court mandated sentence. I argue that these two punishments within the Corcoran SHU in the 1990's are exemplary models of carceral punishment that have transitioned beyond the nineteenth century system charted by Foucault into a new model of spectacular violence that deputizes inmates to perform the punitive violence of the prison, thus allowing the state-run prison to disavow both its role in the violence and the prison's larger social function.

Chapter Two relies on the research of L  ic Wacquant, Ruth Wilson Gilmore and others to further their arguments about the effects of neoliberalism by discussing neoliberalism's substantial, material effects on the prison yard, itself – its repurposing from a rehabilitative space towards a violence vortex and permanent disappearance site. It is within a context of state-organized indifference to a superfluous population that each and every one is rendered both potential victim and executioner within an emergent thanatopolitical machinery of inmate-on-inmate violence, a subpopulation culling tool meant to disappear a redundant class of human beings with no economically viable space to be returned to, post-carcerality. The engagement with scholarship from critical prison studies is complemented with an account of a

particular and violent event I witnessed a month before paroling, the throat-slashing of one inmate by another underneath an absence of any panoptic gaze.

In **Chapter Three**, I engage with Giorgio Agamben, in particular his reading of the state of exception and the Hobbesian state of nature as fundamentally coterminous. I problematize his reading to demonstrate that the murderous logics of the U.S. prison do not exist, as he argues, within the suspension of the juridico-political order, the “state of exception.” Rather, I argue that in times of juridico-political *normalcy*, the prison is the manufacture of an artificial state of nature and by inference, inmates are rendered as an iteration of savage type. The prison riot - a *literal* Hobbesian war of all against all - is the chief technology or thanatopolitical machine within the carceral cache for exposing inmate who have been rendered “savage” subjects to a series of death potentialities. In addition, I argue that the prison functions as defining, constitutive boundary of civil society itself, and it is the inmate, as concept, that does sufficient ideological work to anchor normative white-supremacist subjectivity within civil society through negation.

Chapter Four brings together the work of Roberto Esposito and an account of prison gangs as “subleviathans” to read the contemporary prison as an epidemiological intervention or mechanism, a recursive quarantine meant to contain and eradicate the “plague” of violent criminality and to disappear inmates as individual particles of “violence disease” contagion threatening civil society. As disease infects the individual body and undermines it, within this white-supremacist Hobbesian fantasy, savage subjects (inmates) threaten to breach the (prison) wall separating civilization from the state of nature and potentially undermine the well-being of the social “body.” Reading the prison through Esposito’s immunitary paradigm reveals

the prison as an inoculation, a smaller dose of state-sanctioned violence meant to prevent against a fantastical, community annihilative violence outbreak.

While the previous chapters balance an analysis of philosophical writing with journalistic and first-person accounts of life inside prison walls, **Chapters Five** and **Six** each focus exclusively on one of these modes. Chapter Five illustrates my argument through a first-person case study, while Chapter Six draws on the theoretical writings of Rene Girard.

Chapter Five examines the ways in which the sacrificial logics are maintained and enforced within the prison walls and onto the bodies of prisoners themselves. Through an account of one of my own violent experiences in which the line between personal agency and institutional compulsion were blurred through structural design, I illustrate the ways that the logics of the prison force inmates to enact violence against each other as a prophylactic against a greater violence and as forms of personal and yard-wide survival.

Finally, **Chapter Six** builds on the analyses of the previous chapters, bringing in Rene Girard's theorization of the social function of sacrificial violence to argue that from the perspective of civil society, any inmate is transmogrified retroactively through their very embeddedness within carceral space as a sacrificeable subject as a result of having been rendered as less-than-fully human, savage/contaminant threat; an individual particle of the violence contagion threatening the body politic. The prison then, when read through Girard's framework, is revealed as a sacrificial site, and it is this sacrifice of largely racialized human beings within the prison that allows the community of civil subjects within neoliberalized social space to cohere through displacing internal antagonisms generated under neoliberalism onto the inmate, who functions as a lightning rod, an attractor of sorts for all the varied hostilities

and insecurities roiling a violently restructured and white-supremacist social space. The prison as sacrificial stone.

Methodology

In this work, I will be developing some novel concepts and a theoretical framework to explain the contemporary prison as I have come to understand it. And I will be relating some of the things I experienced during the course of my incarceration that signify something beyond themselves about the larger carceral formation in order to do so. As I said earlier, this will largely be a theoretical work. But it must be recognized at the outset that even when *not* referencing some series of particular events, the contextualizing and larger theorization that I perform in chapters two, three, four and six is directly resultant and made possible through my lived experience within the carceral thresher. It is framed and deeply informed by walking the yard; needing to make sense of what happened to me, to all of us as inmate population. To better understand the why and the how of it all. Being incarcerated directed my analysis towards particular carceral objects and dynamics that I needed to better understand and come to terms with as most essential. That is, when trying to theorize the prison as a formerly incarcerated person, I am reflexively thinking it through a series of impactful experiences, visceral impressions, and affect states and trying to understand how they were made possible. What was happening there, in the prison? Why were things organized in that particular set of ways? How had the prison come to look and feel as it did then? And to perform this theorization and concept creation, I will be utilizing, stretching, applying and sometimes

challenging some particular concepts within Biopolitical theory, Psychoanalysis, Black Studies, Philosophy and Critical Prison/Abolitionist Studies.

That is, the experience of being incarcerated perhaps allows me (and others like me) to see the prison a little differently than many scholars thinking critically through the contemporary prison. A vantage just slightly askew and perspectival. Black feminists like Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks have described a “standpoint epistemology” (Collins, 1991, pp. 27-28). That knowledge is socially situated. That marginalized groups are embedded in oppressive social configurations and institutions in unique ways that make visible dynamics and motivations otherwise opaque to an outsider. That marginalized people, convicts in the case of the prison, are situated to ask essential questions about it that wouldn’t necessarily occur to even the most well-intentioned and conscientious researcher on the other side of the gun tower. Often, works critically engaging the prison describe all those varied political, social and economic forces co-constituting contemporary carcerality - why particular people, or even whole subpopulations, come to be incarcerated in the first place. We read about systems of racialized social control or class warfare. Some combination or lack of distinction between the two. The rise of the security state. White-supremacist reaction against the civil rights movement and the gains made in the 1960’s and 70’s through varied and concerted Black and indigenous activisms. The dismantling of the welfare state and the metastasizing of the penal apparatus as “the catchall solution to social problems” (2007, p. 5) to recapitulate Ruth Wilson Gilmore. Or as with L  ic Wacquant, ravenous and hyper-militarized police forces unleashed within “the nether regions of social and physical space to contain the disorders and disarray generated by diffusing social insecurity and deepening inequality, to unfurl disciplinary

supervision over the precarious factions of the postindustrial proletariat” (Wacquant, 2009c, p. 307). They are not wrong. And these theoretical frameworks are absolutely indispensable for coming to terms with the voracity of the carceral beast.

But quite strangely if one were to think about it, there is often no actual *prison* in these critical prison/abolitionist studies theoretical frames. That is, we can read and study all about the contemporary prison, develop an entire critique of it without ever venturing inside and taking account of the prison’s internal logics, material happenings, and/or procedures. Theoretical analysis runs up against the electrified perimeter fence and stops there, like surging waves held by a sea wall. As if what happens inside of the prison, what it actually *does*, is superfluous to a comprehensive critique of it. The prison itself then, the yard and the cell block, is like an opaque and Blackened box that we can’t easily or don’t often see into. What happens on the yard is *undertheorized* in abolitionist discourse and the implicit assumption of such a purely external approach is the possibility of rendering transparent the social function of the contemporary prison without really knowing what happens inside of it. My intervention proceeds from the assumption that that’s a mistake. Or, at the least, that a purely external theoretical approach potentially leads to an incomplete analysis. Instead, the *convict epistemology* I am arguing for, as a type of standpoint epistemology, asserts that any critical framework must be in deep dialogue and inter-relational exchange with the convict in order to see inside of the prison. Not simply to understand what human beings are made to suffer; this is not a piece of disaster tourism meant to provoke a mere liberal pity, or sentimentality. Instead, and much more essentially, any analysis of the contemporary carceral *has to take account of dynamics on the prison yard in order to render transparent the prison’s larger*

societal function. I argue that we can't fully understand what the prison is doing on behalf of civil society, its thanatopolitical mandate to kill some so that some others may live (Foucault, 1978, pp. 137-138), without a view from its bloody insides. Any theoretical analysis of the contemporary prison that stops at the fence is lacking the essential perspective of those who have witnessed its operation up close and learned something from it. And is, at the very least, potentially susceptible to prioritizing the wrong things, at least from an incarcerated or formerly incarcerated person's perspective. Or launching investigations from a position just ever so askew with regards to understanding what the prison hopes to accomplish. Further, if we don't take account of what the prison does to those human beings bound and splayed within its interior, how it works, then as institution, we don't adequately understand why it need be disappeared from the face of the earth. That is, what happens within the prison is one of the strongest arguments for their abolition. A clear-eyed view of how it produces its unique forms of death and agony. For prison abolitionists to fail to take account of internal-to-the-prison logics, as developed through a convict standpoint epistemology, is therefore to tie one hand behind our backs in our shared, abolitionist struggle.

I don't mean to equate the experiences of convicts with those of Black feminists through adopting the concept of a standpoint epistemology and articulating it towards the incarcerated experience. Instead, merely to illuminate a homologous structure of experiential understanding. *The convict understands the prison differently*. There is a rich analysis in having been made subject to the carceral. Our attention, within the prison and without, flows to different objects, dynamics and processes as being most essential, revelatory and impactful for rendering transparent carceral formations. For instance, I will be spending a lot of energy

thinking through and theorizing inmate-on-inmate violence. Group assaults. Intra-racial disciplining. Prison gangs. Race riots. And my engagement with these topics mirrors the incarcerated experience, as these were our dominant, daily concerns as inmate population. And although occurring within the prison as Blackened box and seemingly of little interest in ongoing critical or abolitionist discourse – in fact, often studiously ignored so as to escape the potential demonization of the convicted as somehow “other” because sometimes “savagely” violent – these dynamics and objects help to elucidate what the prison is doing at a *societal* level. We have to come to terms with a violence that saturates carceral space. Not simply guard to inmate, but both inter- and intra-racial violence amongst the inmate population, itself. The answers to the question “what are prisons for?” And “what do they do?” are not as simple as they seem, run through the violence of the yard, and are profoundly more vulgar, more barbaric than is recognized in dominant discourse. The prison is no warehouse, statically storing people. And having felt the prison continually strip away at my humanity has taught me something of carceral desire - the collective, libidinal energy circulative in civil society invested and organized around seeing me, and those others who were beside me, *suffer*. That is to say, what I theorize throughout this work as most essential to understand about the contemporary prison – inmate-on-inmate violence, race riot, the racialized taboos and injunctions that constitute the obscene, informal law known as “prison politics,” etc. - was only brought to my attention as a formerly incarcerated person. It has to do with the daily experience of being locked up - the fears and concerns that our daily lives were largely organized around. How we resisted imminent violence, lack and death. And without the experience, it is significantly less likely that these dynamics would have registered as most essential to theorize in order to

render transparent the prison's operations at the level of civil society. A function both misunderstood and entirely appalling, near inconceivable in the scale of its organized monstrosity.

Literature Review

This dissertation is made possible not only through my experience as a formerly incarcerated person, but through my engagement over a number of years with a series of thinkers and texts that take the contemporary prison as their primary research object. These texts form the foundation upon which this work is built and extends from, and they have enabled me to think the prison and my experience within the carceral thresher in a set of very specific ways - namely, as through a critical prison and abolitionist perspective. In addition, this work is aspirational – I hope that the arguments I develop herein will contribute to and be placed within a series of already-ongoing conversations around the prison with regard to its very institutional necessity. That is, a series of extant texts work toward destabilizing the common-sense assumption that the prison is a “necessary” institution to maintain social order, a concept dripping in white-supremacist and reactionary ideology. And even if not explicitly cited in this dissertation, these particular texts and their authors have nevertheless seized me as absolutely essential and have oriented me in my current theoretical direction. In other words, these works form the foundational assumption from which my work proceeds, and without them, as an excon, I would have been absolutely lost – drowning in terms of trying to make sense of what had happened to me, where I was, and what I could hope to do about it. I

owe a deep debt of gratitude to these thinkers and this section will make my reliance on their work more explicit.

I have grouped these texts, as conditions of possibility for this dissertation, under three general categories of scholarly work that take the prison as their object: 1) prison abolitionists, 2) voices from “the inside,” and 3) critical prison studies and critical criminology. These divisions are rather permeable as there is often significant overlap between any of the three domains – an abolitionist developing a critical prison studies-style analysis for instance or a voice from the inside as an abolitionist, etc. Nevertheless, I find these categories generally procreative in order to draw out not only the shared and essential assumptions underlying a particular set of works, but to help elucidate my critical abolitionist “common-sense” and fundamental assumptions.

Prison Abolitionists

The notion of police and/or prison abolition is enjoying a bit of a cultural moment in the aftermath of the extrajudicial police executions of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, and the subsequent nationwide protests that rocked the country from coast-to-coast in the summer of 2020. Many mainstream media pundits and the public at-large have demonstrated an increased and genuine curiosity around the platform. What is prison abolition? Is it a feasible alternative to hyper-militarized policing and “mass incarceration?” Whether mainstream pundits enunciate positive or critical positions around the concept, it is a testament to abolitionist thinkers and organizing the degree to which it has infiltrated mainstream discussion at all, and speaks to the movement’s (tenuous) foothold in the public imagination. A collection of scholars, activists, and journalists have been thinking a prison abolition framework for a number of years, and most of

the extant scholarship on abolition comes to us through the disciplines of American Studies, Black Studies, Critical Prison Studies and sometimes straightforwardly Abolitionist Studies (which is concretizing as a distinct field), and they deploy varied analytics and methodologies to make the argument that not only should the prison be disappeared from the face of the Earth (abolition as a project of negation), but also that a range of social institutions dedicated towards enhancing human flourishing and community should come to replace it (abolition as a re-envisioning of the possible, or a constructive project of working to build another world). These works often deal with questions of (neoliberal) economics and state politics, as well as (white-supremacist) cultural politics and forms that have called forth the contemporary prison in its current hypertrophied manifestation as *the* predominant system of racialized social control for those subjects rendered superfluous under neoliberal, racial capitalism.

Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Angela Davis and Dylan Rodriguez are my “big three” prison abolitionists. They, perhaps more than any other thinkers and activists, have occupied space in my head for many, many years through no fault of their own. Not only through their texts, but through their public lectures, podcast appearances and various multi-media interviews. Gilmore’s *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis and Opposition in Globalizing California* (2007) traces how “resolutions of surplus land, capital, labor, and state capacity congealed into prisons” and it also suggests “how alternative uses of the resources of everyday life might otherwise have been organized. It is thus a book for everybody who is fighting against racism, old or new, for fair wages, and especially for the social wage (in sum, for human rights)” (p. 28). I cite Gilmore repeatedly throughout this dissertation, most often in chapter two (but not there only) in order to trace the relation between the neoliberal revolution in the economic register,

and “a prison-building and -filling plan that government analysts have called ‘the biggest... in the history of the world’” (p. 5). And her definition of racism as articulated in *Golden Gulag* is the operative one that I will use throughout, namely that “racism, specifically, is the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group differentiated vulnerability to premature death” (p. 28).

In *Are Prison Obsolete?* (2003), Angela Davis asks us to consider the following questions: “How can we imagine a society in which race and class are not primary determinants of punishment? Or one in which punishment itself is no longer the central concern in the making of justice?” Through holding decarceration as organizing principle of our thought and collective forms of action around the contemporary prison, Davis argues that we will be better enabled “to envision a continuum of alternatives to imprisonment—demilitarization of schools, revitalization of education at all levels, a health system that provides free physical and mental care to all, and a justice system based on reparation and reconciliation rather than retribution and vengeance” (p. 107).

To try and relate the influence that Dylan Rodriguez’s *Forced Passages: Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime* has had not only upon this work but on my worldview more generally would require me to quote the book in its entirety. Nevertheless, the following passage articulates something about how my engagement with *Forced Passages* has shaped not only this dissertation, my intellectual project and my scholarship more broadly as a formerly incarcerated person:

Imprisoned radical intellectuals densely articulate...the proliferation and extension of the prison’s regimented technologies of domination into the everyday systems of social formation. The allegedly excessive, exceptional, or abnormal violence of the prison regime’s violence is, within this political–

intellectual lineage, reconceptualized as a fundamental organizing logic of the United States... as such, this is a body of “radical” praxis in the etymological sense of the term, as a political labor that emanates from and is directed toward transforming or destroying the “roots” of a particular social formation, engaged in critical opposition to its constitutive logics of organization and historical possibility. (p. 7)

Whereas most readers may engage this passage as a *description* of a particular lineage of radical political thought emanating from within and around the prison, as a formerly incarcerated person, I read the above passage quite differently. That is, as a *challenge*. As an excon/scholar, this dissertation strives not merely to understand and to reference this lineage of radical thought and praxis, but to *contribute* to it through engaging in “critical opposition” to the prison’s (and the broader social formation’s) “constitutive logics” as I have come to understand them, largely through having been carceral embedded for the better part of eight years. Further, this work takes Rodriguez’s assertion that:

...overwhelmingly poor, Black, and Brown “common prisoners” remain broadly unrecognized by the activist public... Such politically unrecognized captives compose the vast majority of those who have become activist and political intellectuals *while imprisoned*...the unrecognized imprisoned activist is interpellated by the political influence and mentorship of her or his peers and predecessors... as well as the pragmatic urgency of self-education for legal defense and spiritual self-defense. (p. 5)

Rodriguez describes here my own process of radicalization while incarcerated as a “common prisoner,” and this work is born not only from a series of conversations and shared experiences with other inmates, as well as some direct actions alongside of my comrades while locked up (to be described in some future work), but also from a “pragmatic urgency of self-education for... spiritual self-defense” within the annihilative conditions of the carceral thresher. It was within prison that I was exposed to other imprisoned intellectuals and their written work and

began to explore my own intellectual and critical capacities as urgently demanded by my condition as an incarcerated person, a “common-prisoner.”

In *Resisting State Violence: Radicalism, Gender and Race in U.S. culture* (1996), abolitionist Joy James offers a critique of Foucault’s *Discipline and punish*, arguing that the text “vanquishes historical and contemporary racialized terror, punishments, and control in the United States; it therefore distorts and obscures violence in America in general” (1996, p. 24). Further, “by examining erasure in body politics, lynching, and policing; penile executions in torture; in terror in U.S. foreign policy – issues that Foucault overlooks in this discussion of the history of policing in the United States – we find visceral spectacles of state abuse” (p. 24). My work engages James’s critique through conceptualizing a specific extralegal form of punishment within the carceral interior, thanatopolitical machinery, in order to support her claim that Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* does more to obscure the actual functioning of the contemporary prison as death machine than to reveal it - specifically, in regard to targeting those largely racialized (sub)populations who are deemed superfluous to capital through carceral state logics. James has also edited a couple of essay collections, including *Warfare in the American Homeland: Policing and Prison in Penal Democracy* with essays compiled therein from Frank B. Wilderson, Dylan Rodriguez, Joy James herself, Marshall Eddie Conway, Dhoruba Bin Wahad, Jared Sexton, Marilyn Buck, Laura Whitehorn and others beside that have all been instrumental in crafting my abolitionist orientation and the perspectives that underlie this work.

Prison abolitionists have also dedicated significant energies towards understanding and critiquing a series of suggested popular reforms to the contemporary prison and militarized

hyper-policing that often enjoy bipartisan political consensus and are heavily promulgated by both varied non-governmental organizations and media figures. As Kay Whitlock and Nancy A. Heitzeg argue in their book *Carceral Con: The Deceptive Terrain of Criminal Justice reform* (2021):

The impacts of every major new wave of criminal justice reform remain with us for generations... these reforms affect what is happening now and will happen in the near future, and they establish the foundation for what comes next. The world-making efforts of bipartisan reform reaffirm racial, class, gender, and ableist hierarchies (and their intersections), strengthen structural inequality, and increasingly replaced social welfare and the concepts of civil and human rights with privatized philanthropy, advocacy, and services. (p.20)

In light of this, they ask us to consider the ways in which many popular so-called reforms actually widen and strengthen carceral nets so as to round-up ever greater numbers of criminalized people within them, and how they also function to keep people under varied forms of carceral control for longer and longer stretches of time. Recognizing that criminal justice reform has historically functioned to expand the social role and entrench the power of the prison, that the prison itself is a historical reform, they invite us to

reject reformism as an adequate response to the inequalities and brutality of the criminal legal system... That does not mean rejecting every reform measure out of hand: some reforms can help reduce immediate harm without putting more resources into an expanding system. (p. 22)

In *Prison by Any Other Name: The Harmful Consequences of Popular Reforms* (2020), Maya Schenwar and Victoria Law further critique the notion of prison reform from an abolitionist perspective by arguing that most popular reforms – house arrest and electronic monitoring, varied forms of “treatment” centers, probation, community policing, etc. - are not actually up to the task of remediating the incomprehensible harm, violence and injustice of the

contemporary carceral system because they are nothing more than a reproduction of the same carceral logics in differing form:

Innovation, in and of itself, is no guarantee of progress. In so many cases, reform is not the building of something new. It is the re-forming of the system in its own image, using the same raw materials: white supremacy, a history of oppression, and a tool kit whose main contents are confinement, isolation, surveillance, and punishment... at the same time, these popularly embraced alternatives don't challenge the underlying notion of criminality or racist fears of who constitutes a criminal. Instead, the word "alternative" simply becomes an indicator for another place to put people whom society has deemed undesirable. (P. 18)

In *White Reconstruction: Domestic Warfare and the Logics of Genocide* (2021), Dylan Rodriguez further argues against the notion of prison reform as itself an essential and core logic of white-supremacist domination as rooted in anti-Blackness and racial-colonial violence or "White Being" as "civilizational" project:

Mass incarceration reformism endorses an expansion of the anti-Black, racial-colonial state's policing power as a condition for rationalizing and reforming state carceral power. The expansion of policing power, in turn, further mobilizes the logics of carceral state violence beyond the discrete physical sites of prisons, jails, detention centers, and juvenile facilities... To end/reduce "mass incarceration," in this reformist telos, is to strategically refine the technologies of criminal justice rather than to address their roots in dynamic, historical regimes of anti-Black surveillance, punishment, displacement, and carceral state violence. (p. 201)

Mariame Kaba's writings have also deeply influenced this dissertation. In *We Do This 'Til We Free Us* (2021), a collection of her essays, articles and interviews, Kaba relates a set of experiences as an on-the-ground organizer alongside of others engaged in struggle against anti-Black police violence and the carceral regime more broadly. She counters a normative common-sense which sees policing and prisons as fundamentally necessary to maintaining social order; that is, reformism as the absolute horizon of possibility. In fact, she argues that it is not abolition that is an impossibility, but reform itself as ideology:

... we must reject all talk about policing and the overall criminal punishment system being “broken” or “not working.” By rhetorically constructing the criminal punishment system as “broken,” reform is reaffirmed and abolition is painted as unrealistic and unworkable. Those of us who maintain that reform is actually impossible within the current context are positioned as unreasonable and naïve. Ideological formations often operate invisibly to delineate and define what is acceptable discourse... This is in the service of those who benefit from the current system and works to enforce white supremacy and anti-Blackness. (p.13)

It should be noted that in this dissertation, I take California men’s prisons as my primary object of analysis. I do so because that’s the type of institution I was incarcerated within and know best. And further, as an excon and a scholar, they are what I have something unique to say about having been inside of a few of them. But there are many other types of prison disfiguring our nation’s landscape - immigration detention centers, juvenile facilities, women’s prison, jails, mental health facilities, federal lock-ups, etc. And many other peoples and varied populations are deleteriously impacted through carceral voraciousness besides those in men’s state prisons. Both Angela Davis and Mariame Kaba have written extensively about Black women and women of color’s experiences around policing and the prison, and Andrea Ritchie’s *Invisible No More: Police Violence Against Black Women and Women of Color* (2017) centers the experiences of Black women, Indigenous women and women of color with the criminal justice system. Through a series of case studies, Ritchie demonstrates that police regularly expose women of color who have been subjected to varied forms of violence to *further* state-sanctioned forms of violence, brutality and criminalization. Resultantly, she argues, Black women, Indigenous women and women of color we are in dire need of abolitionist alternatives to policing and the prison in cases of their victimization:

...the development and support of alternative, community-based accountability strategies that prioritize safety for survivors; community responsibility for

creating, enabling, and eliminating the climates that allow violence to happen; and the transformation of private and public relations of power.... are essential if we are to move away from reliance on law enforcement-based approaches to violence; achieve true safety for survivors of domestic violence; and, ultimately, end violence against women of color in all its forms (p. 200)

Relatedly, in *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America's Prison Nation*

(2012) Black-feminist and abolitionist Beth Richie relates the stories of six women violently victimized by men and their subsequent engagement with contemporary policing and the prison as third-party mediation apparatus to abuse and conflict in order to argue that:

... these women's experiences ... highlight the dangers of relying on mainstream state institutions to solve complex social problems, in particular those embedded in race, class, gender, and arrangements regarding sexuality in contemporary society... women of color from marginalized communities who experience violence are made more vulnerable by the operation of a prison nation. (pp. 16-17)

Trans and queer communities, particularly low-income trans people of color, are disproportionality targeted, harassed, surveilled and subjected to varied forms of discrimination and violence at the hands of police. And trans and queer inmates inscribed within the carceral thresher are subjected to interlocking forms of repression, brutality and state-organized forms of violence. Therefore, trans and queer social justice activists and scholars have a deep investment in organizing against and rolling back the power of a carceral state that predatorily lays waste to their communities. In their essay "Building an Abolitionist Trans and Queer Movement with Everything We've Got," found in the collection *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex* (2015), Morgan Bassichis, Alexander Lee, and Dean Spade argue that:

The violence that transgender people— significantly low-income transgender people of color— face in prisons, jails, and detention centers and the cycles of poverty and criminalization that leads so many of us to imprisonment is a key

place to work for broad based social and political transformation. There is no way that transgender people can ever be “safe” in prisons as long as prisons exist... Building a trans and queer abolitionist movement means building power among people facing multiple systems of oppression in order to imagine a world beyond mass devastation, violence, and inequity that occurs within and between communities... *Struggling against trans imprisonment is one of many key places to radicalize queer and trans politics, expand antiprison politics, and join in a larger movement for racial, economic, gender, and social justice to end all forms of militarization, criminalization, and warfare.* (pp. 31-32)

One of the assumptions that prison abolitionists work against is the notion that the massive expansion of the prison system in the United States throughout the 1980s and 90s is largely a “conservative” or a republican party project. In *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America* (2014), abolitionist Naomi Murakawa demonstrates that the establishment of the contemporary prison regime in the United States enjoys longer historical roots and is largely a product of civil rights-based liberalism working in tandem with conservative, Nixonian and Reagan-style “law-and-order” strategies so that:

... lawmakers constructed the civil rights carceral state, in which liberal notions of racial violence and agendas for race neutral machinery actually propel development of a punitive carceral state.... Crime policy and carceral expansion were not reactions against civil rights; they were the progeny of civil rights as lawmakers defined them. (pp. 3-4)

In other words, as Murakawa argues, liberal “aspirations and good intentions could not contain carceral machinery” (p. 22), because:

With each administrative layer to protect African Americans from *lawless* racial violence, liberals propelled carceral development that, through perverse turns, expanded *lawful* racial violence. This history matters because many 21st century proposals – calls for less prosecutorial discretion and more judicial discretion, for clear written standards to initiate stop-and-frisks, and for more police training to stop racial profiling - remain locked in the same perilous if well-intentioned pursuit of administrative perfection. (p. 26)

Another prison abolitionist that this work strives to be in conversation with is Dennis Childs. And in his book *Slaves of the State: Black Incarceration from the Chain Gang to the Penitentiary* (2015), he argues that “Black Atlantic and New World mass interment, enslavement, and genocide were and are produced as much through the mass reproduction of *living death* as through the production of biologically expired bodies” (p. 32). This dissertation conversationally engages with this more expansive notion of carceral *genocide* which accounts for notions of death beyond the biological within the prison as death-making institution. The prison, as I theorize it, realizes *three* forms of death, not one – 1) biological death, 2) social and/or 3) subjective death (madness). To truly come to terms with the breadth and scale of the prison’s thanatopolitical operations and mandate then, to kill some so that some others may live, all three forms need be taken account of. For as Childs convincingly argues:

To limit our conception of thanato- or necropolitics to biological death counts is to negate the genocidal reach of imperialist sovereignty in its protean methodologies of killing. (p. 45)

And it is also to minimize the genocidal operations of the contemporary prison regime in which largely racialized, rendered superfluous populations are abandoned to social, subjective and/or biological death within the prison as subpopulation culling tool and permanent disappearance site. There are myriad ways that the prison “bodies” people, each one more disavowable than the next.

Voices from the Inside

I am certainly not the first person to narrativize my experiences as a formerly incarcerated person. Nor am I the first scholar to take the prison’s interior as an object of

analysis and theorization. I am not even unique in attempting to synthesize the two positions, as an incarcerated or formerly incarcerated scholar attempting to make some novel claims about the institution's larger societal function and purpose; the prison's interrelation with normative subjectivity and as foundational institution making our particular civil society in the United States, as we live and conceive it, possible at all. For instance, there is a long tradition of imprisoned Black radicalism and theorization that runs through George Jackson's *Blood in My Eye* (1990) and *Soledad Brother* (1994), Angela Davis' *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* (2021), Assata Shakur's *Assata: An Autobiography* (1997), and Mumia Abu-Jamal's varied prison writings and recordings. In *The New Abolitionists: (Neo)Slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings* (2005), Joy James brings together several other voices of imprisoned abolitionists including that of Bill Dunne, Raymond Luc Levasseur, Susan Rosenberg, Little Rock Reed, Viet Mike Ngo, Antonio Fernandez and Tiyo Attalah Salah-El. And Joy James herself explains some of the novelty of prisoner-abolitionist arguments as enabled through their very positionality, that is, as writing from within carceral sites as captives, what she calls "penal-slaves:"

Contemporary insurrectionist penal-slave narratives... can question the very premise of rehabilitation, indicting the state and society, contextualizing or dismissing individual acts of criminality by nonelites, the poor and racialized, to emphasize state criminality or the crime of elites. Some prison narratives issue calls for dissent for a greater democracy. Dual narratives – those of the petitioners and those of the antagonist to state authority – shape political discourse. The narratives are in dialogue. As they debate with each other, they are differently weighted – some abolitionist (neo) slave narratives are considered more "respectable" and more "valued." Yet, when they emanate from the site of the noncitizen, from men and women in cages, regardless of their outlaw and disreputable status, they illuminate past, present, and future possibilities for the reinvention of democracy. (p. xxxii)

Further,

New abolitionists shape and contest (neo)slave narratives, and penal democracy. Their projects suggest that in America, as in its Athenian progenitor, there is no free space, as we know it, without penile or slave space, as we fear it. (p. xxxv)

This dissertation is to be located firmly within that lineage of ongoing “dialogue” and “debate” between prisoner-abolitionists. I identify as one, and this work begins from the assumption that there is no free space without penal space as James enunciates the parasitic relation, and this work is, in part, a further attempt to refine and give theoretical form to that very existent, “abyssal divide” (de Sousa Santos, 2007, pp. 45-89) between United States’ civil society and the prison so as to contribute to the theoretical project that intends to contribute towards its annihilation.

In *The curious Eclipse of Prison Ethnography* (2002), L  ic Wacquant argues that there is an absolute dearth of ethnographic research and data on the contemporary prison:

...observational studies depicting the everyday world of inmates all but vanished just as the United States was settling into mass incarceration and other advanced countries were gingerly clearing their own road towards the penal state. *The ethnography of the prison thus went into eclipse at the very moment when it was most urgently needed* on both scientific and political grounds. (p.385)

This dissertation, though more of a theoretical work grounded in a set of personally impactful experiences while incarcerated than a traditional autoethnographic account, nevertheless attempts to remediate that lack. That is, I attempt to theorize internal logics through a set of often violent, regularized happenings within the contemporary prison; inmate-organized culture and “everyday life” within the prison, but through a (largely biopolitical) theoretical lens that examines the forces that make them possible. It is, in other words, my attempt to answer Wacquant’s call for more access to the inside of carceral spaces in ways that I am academically trained to do so.

To demonstrate what Wacquant has in mind in terms of indispensable prison ethnography, he begins his article with a visceral account of the inside of the Los Angeles County Men's Central Jail (MCJ) as he experienced it. And what he describes— the sites, the conversations, the feel, the sensory impressions of it all – were all deeply familiar when I read it. Wacquant, after all, is an attentive researcher and writes beautifully, passionately and compellingly. His account of the interior of the Los Angeles County jail was not my first time getting a feel for the visceral horrors of the place. Instead, Wacquant stoked and activated my *memory* of it. Wacquant's ethnography is, after all, based on his visits to the Los Angeles County jail in August of 1998. I was there in that exact facility, embedded and splayed in those self-same atrociously inhumane conditions, one year prior to-the-day in August of 1997. When Wacquant describes those most dungeon-like portions of Los Angeles County Jail, I had been there in the midst of a psychotic break, fighting for my biological life, my spirit and my mind. And as I read his account, I did not do so purely as an academic. Another readerly position vied for precedence - I was split then, reading through two sets of eyes and two sets of experiences. Yes, as a scholar, but also as a former inmate and an excon. And my affective, emotional and psychological – even my theoretical – experience and response to the text was radically different than I imagine that of most other scholars who have never done any significant stretch of carceral time. To say it plainly, reading Wacquant's ethnography of "the county" detailing the time period in which i was there was terrifying. I barely made it out of that death-pit, after all. And I was flooded with memories of that place like some nightmare that you can't *ever* shake off. Even twenty-five years after my time in LA county, while reading his description, I couldn't shake the feeling that at any moment and without warning, there would be a knock on my

door. That I would be rendered back in. Wacquant talks about leaving the county, and I quote the passage at-length because I think juxtaposing my experience as against it is essential to elucidate something about my positionality as a scholar:

I am like numb coming out of this long afternoon inside MCJ, and I drive silently straight to the beach [of Santa Monica], to wallow in fresh air and wade in the waves, as if to 'cleansed' myself of all I've seen, heard, and sensed. I feel so bad, like scrambled eggs, that I chafe at writing up my notes until the following Tuesday (but my memory is seared by what I've seen and I've got detailed scribbles in my little phone message pad). A sentiment of embarrassment, of 'dirtiness', to have infringed on the dignity of human beings by the mere fact of having been there and seen that place, and thus to have treated its denizens as one might the occupants of a zoo. But it takes that, it is indispensable to go see, touch, feel. What a difference it makes! Every time my mind drifts back to it, it seems like a bad movie, a nightmare, the vision of an evil 'other world' that cannot actually exist (Field note from my first day in MCJ, 28 August 1998). (pp. 381-382)

There is a difference between being inside of that god-forsaken jail as an ethnographic researcher outside of the cell, and being inside of one. That difference is affective, psychological, physical and *scholarly*. Being inside of jail culture as an inmate, or not. And that difference grounds the very theorization I develop here, the objects I see, or even consider as worthy of interrogation. I live off of Topanga Boulevard in Los Angeles; Santa Monica is right over the hill from my house. And I have gone to that same beach innumerable times and attempted to wash off all I've seen, heard, and sensed of incarceration; tried to return or even to remember some normalcy, some "me" that existed prior to my time in that torture pit. But that's gone. There is no prior me to return to. There is no "cleansing" from the stink of that place possible for any of us that did significant stretches of time. Instead, carceral sites have deeply impacted me down in my very core, warped and shaped me. All of us. Being in the county for a day or two as an observer as against being there for months as an inmate, or *years*

is a tangible difference. To borrow Wacquant's language from the above quote, to truly get at what the prison is doing, "it takes that... what a difference it makes!" This theoretical work does not emanate from the observer of jailed human beings like animals in a zoo. It comes from the caged animal. As one of many tens of thousands trapped within those stifling, nightmarish conditions whose dignity was actively being infringed upon through the observation. As a nightmare figure from an evil "other world" that cannot actually exist, but I know it does. At the end of my chapter one, I describe the jail tier that I was housed within as that nightmarish other world, a tier that Wacquant himself might have walked in 1998. But no matter his attentiveness and skill as an ethnographer coming from the outside into our inmate community, he could never capture, let alone even see the hidden and monstrous dimensions of carcerality as I describe some of it herein. We would never have shown him. And he wouldn't have understood it even if we did so without a thorough explanation, a "schooling." And this in no knock against Wacquant. His work constitutes an essential pillar of this dissertation, and he is one of my greatest teachers, providing some contextualization for experiences that I lived. It is merely to argue for the absolute essentialness of the convict's standpoint to render further transparent carceral death/annihilation logics, to compliment that outsider or external position.

And that double consciousness, as an excon and as a scholar, informs my reading of a series of texts that relate historical, autobiographic and biographic accounts of and around the prison. It's how I read *Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and its Legacy* (2016) by Heather Ann Thompson. It's how I read *Angels with Dirty Faces* (2016) by abolitionist Walidah Imarisha. She describes how family members react when their kin are sentenced to prison, and I thought of my own family. The families of friends that I was incarcerated with:

I know so many family members who have stood by their incarcerated loved ones for decades. Unwaveringly sending much needed packages, traveling hours for visits, accepting exorbitant collect phone calls. They redefined words like commitment, sacrifice, and love. (p. 52)

And I also thought of those comrades I was locked up with who never got visits. No respite, no temporary break from the prison to eat an ice cream and receive some familial affection and receive any care or even human tenderness:

But sometimes blood family step back when the police knock at the door, or they wander during the trial, or they run after the sentence is handed down. They collapse under the biggest loss, already on the ropes from continual body blows. They drift through years that move so slowly behind bars, and so quickly out here. They run from the shame society force-feeds them, as if prison is a contagion, a plague; as if the whole family - the whole house – must be quarantined to stop the disease from spreading. (p. 52)

Plagues everywhere, and contamination. It's inside the prison as I describe it in detail in chapter four, and without. Affecting inmates. Our families. Even guards and custodial authority. We all have the stink of that place that won't wash off.

And when I read the following passage from Albert Woodfox's *Solitary: My Story of Transformation and Hope* (2019) in which he describes some of the culture, the architecture and feel of the prison, my experience was also one of recognition. For instance, I know the assaultive unbearableness of the constant noise of carceral space as he describes it, a low-intensity and constant torture. I know it as literally madness inducing:

Living in concrete you get used to noise. Sound bounces off the floors and walls and echoes. When someone on the tier cracked you'd hear him cry or scream. Some guys would moan for hours or days. Televisions were always on and the volume was high. You heard every voice yelling up and down the tier.... When guys argued you'd hear it. When someone's cell was shaking down you'd hear it. When prisoners stood in front of each other's cells and talked they had to yell to be heard; you'd hear every conversation... (p. 175)

I am also familiar with the state-imposed burden of needing to account for all the other inmates you happened to be locked up with, the precarity of that. The potential danger that you are always exposed to as an inmate, and how things could so easily and unpredictably spiral out of control and drag you in, no matter what you intend, actually do, or even hope for. It was our everyday state:

I had to fit everyone on the tier into my life. Dealing with 15 personalities 24 hours a day, my own and 14 others, was always draining and exhausting. Every time somebody new came on the tier I had to learn his personality, likes, dislikes, and what set him off. At first, the tier goes quiet for a while until the guys figure him out and see how he's going to act on the tier, whether he will blend in or make trouble. Some of these men were damaged people, with no sense of honor, no sense of decency, no moral values, no principles. Prison is a very violent place. There was always the threat of being attacked. There were prisoners who were paranoid, who stored urine and shit in their cells to use as weapons. There were prisoners who threw hot water or human waste on someone in another cell in anger or revenge. There were psychopaths who attacked others for no reason, they just felt the need to stir up trouble. (p. 175-176)

And as I read the above passage, my memory of being in Chino State Prison in administrative segregation was activated, and I wanted to add to Woodfox's account – some inmates boil baby oil with “stingers” in their cells. too. That way, when they throw the oil at other inmates or guards, it sticks to the skin and burns better, because you can't get it off. It burns *through*.

Seeing my experience out here as written by someone else, in the free world, does something transformative. It helps me to recognize that I am not alone in my remembrance of these things, these dynamics, which we, as excons, tend to deal with and process in isolation. For a bunch of interconnected reasons, institutional and personal. All of these horrors. There are others who remember them too. And this work strives to be in conversation with all those prison writers who remember such things. As well as with those who weren't necessarily locked

up, but write of carceral indignities and trauma from the perspective of being those family members who had to come see us as trapped within these conditions of natal alienation like Imarisha, and suffer from it. They know it better than most, too. And hopefully, some other excons will read this dissertation and see their experiences in it, as I did with *Solitary*, in *Blood in the Water*, and in *Angels with Dirty Faces*. And like my experiences with those texts, maybe they will be able to add something to my accounting as I narrate it here, too. An experience that we can all tell more about. This dissertation is in ongoing conversation with them. Whether “free,” or not. Whether that text they are thinking about is written yet, or not.

Another set of voices from the inside that have been deeply influential for this dissertation are those associated with the field of convict criminology. As Jeffrey Ian Ross and Stephen C. Richards wrote in *Convict Criminology* (2003):

The exconvict professors have endured years of lockup in penitentiaries and correctional institutions, lived in crowded, noisy, violent cell blocks, and emerged to complete graduate degrees and become professors of sociology, criminology, criminal justice, and related disciplines. They have an intimate knowledge of “penal harm,” which they carry in their heads and hearts, and in some cases wear as scars and tattoos up on their skin... they are people with something to say, with an anger that will not betray them. They do not write merely for vitae lines, promotions, or tenure. They write so that one day the ghosts will sleep. (p. 6)

And further,

The dramatic expansion and arrests, convictions, and the rate of incarceration guarantees that the number of professors with profound and traumatic firsthand experience with the criminal justice system will continue to increase. In addition, some of the most important members of our growing group are prominent critical criminologist who, though not excons, have contributed to both the contents and context of our new school. This growing pool of talent, with its remarkable insight and resources, is the foundation of our effort. (pp. 6-7)

Those Convict Criminologists who have most deeply impacted my work include the late John Irwin and Jeffrey Ian Ross, who has through great generosity of spirit provided me some counsel while writing this dissertation around how to navigate the professional demands of academia purely in recognition of the fact that I'm an excon and wanted to offer what assistance he could. Stephen C. Richards, Edward Tromanhauser and Charles M. Terry's work and thought resounds in my own. As does that of Greg Newbold, Charles S. Lanier and Richard S. Jones. The work of Bruce Arrigo, that I will discuss further in the critical criminology section that follows. All of these convict criminologists are lights that have shone the way and demonstrated to me and others that, as excons, it is not only possible to produce some great research and theory, but that there also existed a place for us in the university. In addition, that we could help to generate some uniquely incisive critiques of the prison through the experience and standpoint. Further, although I am not a criminologist, not even a social scientist but trained within the humanities-based discipline of cultural studies and lean heavily into political-philosophy, it should be recognized that my methodology, what I am calling here convict epistemology, is inspired by the very notion of convict criminology. Its naming an intentional tip of the cap to convict criminological scholars and their trailblazing work in the fields of critical criminology-carceral studies. But I do want to say, to other excons like myself, university administrators and those who might engage our work, just because we were in prison does not mean that every excon necessarily needs be ghettoized within the discipline of criminology. Nor do we necessarily dedicate our entire research agendas towards the prison. We have things to say about all kinds of stuff and differing disciplinary frames through which to examine these differing objects.

Further, in 2021, the Convict Criminology network published a new volume of collected papers. *Convict Criminology for the Future* is edited by Jeffrey Ian Ross and Francesca Vianello and examines seven interrelated themes: the historical underpinnings of convict criminology, adaptations to prison life, long-standing challenges for prisoners and formally incarcerated people, post-secondary education behind bars, the expansion of convict criminology beyond North America (Italy and South America, in particular), conducting research in a typically precarious and closed institution, and future directions for the network. Convict criminology is an ongoing conversation, and my hope is that this dissertation will be read as a contribution in dialogue to that ever-accumulating body of scholarship which continues to inform my own.

Another grouping of voices from the inside that have been influential in the formation of this dissertation include Terry Kupers, Lorna A. Rhodes and Joshua Price. Both Kupers and Rhodes address “prison madness,” how those inmates with significant mental health concerns are handled by the prison, and theorizing the prison itself as a pathogenic institution or as a madness production factory. As Kupers argues in *Prison Madness: The Mental Health Crisis Behind Bars and What We must Do About It* (1999),

A much greater number of mentally ill people are being sent to jails and prisons today, where their condition deteriorates on account of the harsh environment and inadequate mental health services; and the harsh conditions and brutality of life in prison are making previously very sane prisoners suffer psychiatric breakdowns. (p. 18)

I went to prison mad. And while I was there, I heard and saw many inmates broken psychotic. My friend Smiley. And Ken. Kolai. My friends John and James came in “crazy,” their language, and could barely program. And it was all just kind or routinized, an accepted and normative phenomenon when doing time. Unlocatable screams from somewhere, anywhere in the facility

in the middle of the night. An inmate trying to jump off a tier. Or attacking someone else at random. Smearing shit all over themselves, or the walls. In her prison ethnographic work *Total Confinement: Madness and Reason in the Maximum Security Prison* (2004), Lorna A. Rhodes explores “the links and tensions between madness (psychiatric and otherwise) and reason (the presumed rationality of people and systems) as they are contained and expressed in conditions of total confinement” (p. xii). Through a series of conversations with inmates deemed to be “mad,” incorrigible or even sociopathic as well as with those custodial agents tasked with managing, controlling and administering to them, Rhodes notes that:

The kind of control exercised in these maximum-security settings is technologically sophisticated and planned down to the smallest detail. The myriad elements of housing design, placement, and daily routine shaping these prisoners’ situation rest on the assumption that rational practices underlie the operation of “the system.” ... But perhaps the institution carries a secret: that it is, under those surface appearances, profoundly irrational... the “system” itself may be mad. These prisoners are entangled in institutional contradictions within which they become - and suffer for becoming – the extremes and exceptions that mark the limits of the rational. (p. 5)

As mentioned above in my discussion of Dennis Childs’ *Slaves of the State*, one of the things I’m attempting to do in this dissertation is think through what we mean when we say, as abolitionists, that the prison is a genocidal institution. And I will argue that the prison is a machine for the production of not just one form of death, but three: biological death, social death, and subjective death or *madness*. The loss of the self and the loss of a shared, rational world. That’s what happened to Smiley and Ken, the prison subjectively killed and disappeared them. And if they weren’t in prison, they simply wouldn’t have been subjected to those pressures, wouldn’t have been exposed to events that drove them insane. As a result, that very carceral-state imposed madness made them ever-less-likely to escape the prison’s clutches. It is

as through thinking these things I witnessed within the prison through the work of Kupers and Rhodes that this work will attempt to track the manufacture of subjective death/madness through exposure and abandonment to the prison's inhuman and annihilative conditions. The prison itself as a madness production factory bounding inmates ever-tighter to the prison circuit as the prominent site for managing and confining the mentally ill outside and way from civil society in the period of neoliberal reorganization, developed more fully in chapter two.

And Joshua M. Price in *Prison and Social Death* (2015) develops that third element of tripartite carceral genocidal death machinery - the social death inflicted upon all inmates through inscription within the carceral thresher. Price and his research team conducted a series of interviews of 150 incarcerated and more than twenty formerly incarcerated people between the years 2004 and 2007, and these voices from the inside led him to develop the concept of "prison social death." According to Price,

... the term "social death" comes from Orlando Patterson's analysis of slavery... (and) social death comprised three aspects: the slave was subject to systematic violence, to generalized humiliating treatment, and to "natal alienation" ... While people's experiences vary significantly, the interviews I have conducted consistently revealed three basic qualities of incarceration: generalized humiliation, institutional violence, and natal alienation. The conjunction of the three yields the peculiar contours of social death. (pp. 5-6)

Social and subjective death (as Kupers, Rhodes and Price help me to think them), as well as biological death, compose the contemporary prison's three modalities of genocidal death production, as Childs conceives it in a more expansive, yet precise form. That is, carceral genocide as the permanent disappearance through social, subjective and biological death of rendered-superfluous, largely racialized subjects from white-supremacist civil society.

I would also like to put this dissertation in conversation with the scholarship of David Skarbek. He has written two works about the prison, *The Social Order of the Underworld: How Prison Gangs Govern the American Penal System* (2014) and *The Puzzle of Prison Order: Why Life Behind Bars Varies Around the World* (2020). And within them as well as through a series of articles, Skarbek has written extensively about prison gangs. I find his conclusions compelling, in fact, to be in deep correspondence with my own as garnered through lived experience within the prison as myself a “wood” prison gangster. And in his article entitled *Prison Gangs, Norms and Organizations* (2012), Skarbek argues that “Prison gangs engage in violence, but their actions are not arbitrary or irrational” (p. 107). For a couple of reasons. First, prison is a scarce space that has radically increased its population density over the last couple of decades:

... a growing population increases the scarcity of physical space and other resources.... conflict increases when facilities become more crowded. These conflicts reflect a need for more effective governance mechanisms. (p. 99)

And because prison space is scarce, illicit markets self-organize to remediate inmate lack.

Throughout this dissertation, I argue that the lived experience for any inmate in state prison is functional lawlessness. That is, in part, because custodial agents do not mediate nor rationalize the exchanges between inmates within these illicit market economies. It is within this vacuum of functional law that prison gangs are called forth so as to “mediate conflict in the face of changing inmate demographics... inmates created protective associations—prison gangs—to serve this need (p. 103).

... most of the inmate economy operates in contraband markets. These markets provide an important source of economic goods to “virtually all prisoners” (Irwin, 1980, 206–212; also Williams and Fish, 1974) and are the basis of the informal inmate social system (Kalinich and Stojkovic, 1985). (p. 105)

That is, prison gangs serve the “need for extralegal governance in the inmate social system” (p. 96) or “greater governance to secure property rights” (p. 101) within the yard’s illicit economies, lacking a functioning governmental structure as third-party mediator to disputes.

This dissertation is meant to be in conversation with all of the above-named voices from “the inside,” whether that of the incarcerated or the formerly incarcerated themselves, those who have witnessed the prison’s operation up close including friends and family of system-impacted individuals or scholars whose work engages the interior of the prison in critically effective and insightful ways - often through interviewing and engaging with prisoners directly. And this dissertation is also meant to be in conversation with researchers and theorists within the fields of critical prison/carceral studies.

Critical Carceral/Prison Studies

There are a series of what I am calling *external analyses* of contemporary carcerality that have made this dissertation possible. They describe all those varied economic, political, social and cultural forces that have given rise to the contemporary prison in its expanded and grasping recapitulation at the end of the 20th century through the contemporary moment, and further, describe how the institution has come to function as the predominant apparatus of racialized social control within the neoliberalized United States. Many of the works that I have referenced so far relate such an external analysis of the contemporary prison, including *Gilmore’s Golden Gulag*, *Rhodes Total Confinement*, *Rodriguez’s Forced Passages*, *Davis’ Are prisons Obsolete*, *Childs’ Slaves of the State*, *Murakawa’s The First Civil Right*, and others besides. And these works taken together have helped me to contextualize where the contemporary prison has come from and precisely who gets locked up and why. But there are

an additional set of texts I haven't yet named that have helped me to think through the external dimensions of carcerality, why it exists and its social function more broadly.

My chapter two does my own external contextualization work to understand the changes wrought to the contemporary prison yard under neoliberal reorganization; the rewriting of the contemporary prison as a thanatopolitical machine. And to do so, in addition to Gilmore's *Golden Gulag* as referenced above, the chapter relies heavily on the scholarship of L  ic Wacquant, in particular his *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (2009). To do justice to the degree of influence that work has had on this project would, as with Rodriguez's *Forced Passages*, force me to cite the book in its entirety. I will abstain from doing so here, as it is sufficient merely to recognize its weighty influence, as quotes from that text abound in chapter two.

Critical criminologists David Garland and Jock Young have also contributed to my external analysis of the contemporary carceral as found in chapter two of this dissertation, and this work is meant, in part, to complement their findings from inside of the thresher. That is, to describe how the external forces and changes within "late modernity" that have called forth the contemporary prison overdetermine the practices, culture and material and symbolic realities of life on the prison yard, itself. In *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society* (2002), David Garland taps into two of the themes that I will explore in depth throughout, namely the prison as a quarantine site in chapter four and inmates as being subjected to "the ban," a notion I explore by engaging Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* (1998), in chapter three:

The prison is used today as a kind of reservation, a *quarantine zone* in which purportedly dangerous individuals are segregated in the names of public safety...

the prison-community border is heavily patrolled and carefully monitored to prevent risks leaking out from one to the other. (my emphasis) (p. 178)

And,

Like the pre-modern sanctions of transportation or *banishment* (my emphasis), the prison now functions as a form of exile, it's used shaped less by a rehabilitative ideal and more by what Rutherford calls an 'eliminative' one... Large-scale incarceration functions as a mode of economic and social placement, a zoning mechanism that segregates ... and places them behind the scenes of social life. In the same way, though for shorter terms, prisons and jails are increasingly being used as a *faut de mieux* repository for the mentally ill, drug addicts, and poor, sick people for whom the depleted social services no longer provide adequate accommodations. (p. 178-9)

In *The Exclusive Society: Social Exclusion, Crime and Difference in Later Modernity*

(1999), Jock Young engenders a wide-ranging analysis of those forces generative of the "late-modern" prison in order to explicate and condemn its exclusionary properties:

The great penile Gulag being constructed in the United States has taken liberal democracy to its limits; the incarceration of the majority of young Black men at some time in their life is an indictment which is as obscene as it is unbelievable... The creation of such an excluded population, it's size that of Philadelphia, with a penumbra the size of New York City, is as significant an event of the latter part of the 20th century as are the astonishing scientific achievements of space in biology... Indeed the American prison Gulag represents as much the crisis of late modernity as the Russian Gulag represented a clear sign to the world of the crisis of Soviet modernity. (p.190)

Another critical criminologist whose work this dissertation and attempts to conversationally engage is Bruce Arrigo. And in *Philosophy, Crime, and Criminology* (2006) he and Christopher R.

Williams assert that:

... scholars ...of crime have failed to recognize their role as potentially contributing to the broader ontological, epistemological, ethical, and aesthetical questions that philosophy more directly confronts... [To be clear, the disciplines continuing efforts to understand law... and to make justice necessitates that criminology, in some meaningful way, align itself to philosophical concepts, issues, and arguments. Regrettably... criminology proper has mostly failed to

contemplate let alone critically examine its conceptual underpinnings, that is, the philosophical cornerstones that support its purpose and potential... (p. 15)

And in *Revolution and Penology: Rethinking the Society of Captives* (2009), Arrigo and Dragan Milovanovic attempt such an alignment of critical criminology with the philosophical concepts, issues and arguments of Jacques Lacan, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Jacques Derrida and others besides. Taking the “postmodern” assertion that Reality is largely constructed through language, they argue that punitive prison is socially constructed through a set of harmful penological concepts and attempt to deconstruct them in order to build a new conceptual framework in its place.

This dissertation is itself a response to the call in *Philosophy, Crime, and Criminology* for deeper engagement between criminological and philosophical concepts. And while Arrigo and Milovanovic rely largely upon French theorists Lacan, Derrida and Guattari, my engagement is more directly with the biopolitical lineage of philosophical thought. That is, this dissertation is a critical examination of the prison’s “philosophical cornerstones that support its purpose and potential” and an attempt to develop some new concepts rooted in biopolitical philosophy – thanatopolitical machinery, the manufactured state of nature, the prison as immunizing apparatus, prison politics as inoculative, etc. - that critically engage the necessity of the institution through describing what it actually does. Giving names to carceral objects, logics and carceral procedures previously un-menaced because not properly named and conceptualized through a philosophical/theoretical frame.

Arrigo’s critical engagement with criminology extends through an edited volume of essays, *Social Justice/Criminal Justice: The maturation of Critical Theory in Law, Crime and Deviance* (1999) with contributions from various authors including Arrigo himself, Michael J.

Lynch and Paul Stetsky discussing Marxist criminology, and Nancy C. Jurik covering socialist feminist criminology. It also includes contributions from Jeff Ferrell on anarchist criminology, postmodern feminist criminology as discussed by Nancy A. Wonders, and Brett Stockdill covers queer theory and social justice, and many others besides. This dissertation is meant to be in conversation with these authors and their critical criminological/social justice approaches, too.

It is impossible for me to adequately relate the entire breadth of all those thinkers and texts covering the contemporary prison that have come to influence and shape this dissertation. Nevertheless, this review serves as a representative sample that has had a direct impact on my thinking and writing, as well representing a series of ongoing conversations, dialogues and debates that this dissertation strives to be a part of. It should also be noted that there have been other influences outside of the academic text that have come to shape my worldview and my critical engagement with the prison more broadly. For instance, the *Beyond Prisons* podcast hosted by Kim Williams and Brian Nam-Sonenstein has hosted many of the above-named scholars around the prison, activists, artists and journalists. Both Micah Herskind (micahherskind.com/abolition-resource-guide/) and Mariame Kaba (<https://transformharm.org>) curate excellent prison abolition resource and reading guides that I have returned to time and again. The abolitionist journalism at Truthout.org from people like Kelly M. Hayes, Maya Schenwar, and Victoria Law has kept me abreast with regards to contemporary happenings, events and activist actions around carcerality over the past several years. And this dissertation is meant to be in conversation with these journalist, artists, and activists, too. Through reading my own experience of incarceration as through a series of theoretical lenses, I hope that I can add to these ongoing conversations about what the

contemporary prison is doing on behalf of the white-supremacist civil society that has called it forth in all its delegated and disavowable, yet profound and monstrous violence as revealed to me as inmate, as discovered and articulated from a position inside of the thresher. I do so in order to contribute an insider's perspective on carceral death-logics and procedures to the larger abolitionist project motivating many of those thinkers, scholars and dreamers who have enabled this work - that of not only disappearing the annihilative prison from the face of the Earth, but also so that we may come to replace it with projects, institutions, logics and procedures that enhance human flourishing, creativity and potential rather than crushing it.

Abstract:

This chapter begins with a brief overview of Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, arguing that the genealogy that Foucault charts from the public spectacle of the sovereign's corporal punishment to professionalized institutions designed to rehabilitate the soul of the prisoner by disciplining their body needs to be extended to account for the function and organization of the modern U.S. prison. Furthermore, any analysis of the prison is incomplete without an awareness of the actual experiences of people inside its walls. Through the narration of several high-profile cases of guard-orchestrated inmate-on-inmate violence as well as accounts of several of my own experiences while an inmate, I argue that the following three logics saturate U.S. men's prisons in their entirety and overdetermine carceral function: 1) inmate-on-inmate violence that can be disavowed 2) the immobilizing of human beings within particular spaces as violence potentiality and 3) custodial monopoly over mobility.

Chapter 1 – Thanatopolitical Machinery and the Carceral Surplus Engine

What Was Old is Made New Again, But Peculiar...

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault (1995) draws attention to a radical transition in the form and object of criminal punishment in the 19th century. He illuminates this historical shift through comparison of two examples, first describing the 1757 public execution of Damians the attempted regicide as an exemplary model of sovereign power. In graphic detail, Foucault depicts the conveying of Damians to the main door of the Church of Paris where a large crowd was to witness the execution of the King's justice. Before them, Damians was drawn and quartered, hacked apart, thrown atop a fire and his body reduced to ash. A theatrical punishment directed towards *the body* of the condemned, this public spectacle was meant to demonstrate to captivated onlookers the power of the sovereign and its horrifying violence meant to discourage crime (pp. 3-6).

Foucault then jumps forward eighty years in time to draw our attention toward a set of rules for the House of Young Prisoners in Paris. This schedule regimented daily activities of prisoners from the moment of waking until "the prisoners must be back in their cells after the

washing of hands and the inspection of clothes in the courtyard” (pp. 6-7). It is the transition from an execution to a timetable that interests Foucault. From a public spectacle staged in front of the King’s subjects to a veiled punishment issued behind opaque walls. From a sovereign power of the sword, the power to *take away life*, towards a power intending to harness, organize or train criminally disobedient bodies - a “disciplinary” power. That is, a power to *foster life* or make it productive. Power was materialized through grabbing ahold of a different “object” as well. Sovereignty acted upon the body of the accused, a corporal punishment, with little interest in the motivations or character of the criminal, their internality. It had no interest in the distinguishing of criminal types. Sovereign power was, instead, interested in the *actions* of its subjects - what people *did*, not so much in who they were. Under disciplinarity, “the soul” becomes object of interest to power, and its reformation. The rectification of the character through penance and discipline. Along with disciplinarity emerges whole bodies of knowledge, new sciences attempting to determine what accounted for criminals as differently-typed human beings from the normative subject as well as a series of prescriptions for their rehabilitation and the saving of the criminal soul. Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish*, is primarily asking: what is it that happened here, in this transition? Why was “the ancient right to take life or let live” replaced by a power to “foster life or disallow it to the point of death” (Foucault, 1978, p. 138)? He answers that it represents a shift in the logic and application of power itself - from sovereignty to “biopower” - and a power to kill becomes a power to make live, but in a particular set of ways. Against arguments asserting that the transition from a corporal punishment towards the rehabilitative penitentiary was simply founded in a progressive decency, Foucault sees it having more to do with the impossibility of sovereign power within a

society grown ever-more complex as the industrial revolution takes hold. Disciplinary power, the point at which biopower is applied to individuals, is largely about manufacturing “docile bodies” (Foucault, 1995, p.138) - including those that can be rehabilitated towards eventual insertion within an industrialized factory system. Replacing the corporal and extractive power of the sword, an organizing and training power must shape and reform those criminally disobedient bodies – labor necessary to circuits of capitalist production - and a whole set of knowledges and disciplinary practices emerge to facilitate this process. The rehabilitative modern prison then, as itself a reform, was largely intended to displace a wasteful and inefficient sovereign violence in order to make useful those criminally disobedient bodies for their eventual reintegration back within a civil society desirous of their labor.

I began this chapter with a brief overview of this seminal text on prisons in order to situate my project in the gaps that are left between Foucault’s genealogy and my own theorization of power and the contemporary penal system drawn from my own experiences within it. I need to attend to *Discipline and Punish* as arguably the most-taught academic study of prisons and carcerality, and the only one that I encountered during my graduate coursework. Despite the elegance and novelty of Foucauldian concepts, it simply did not speak to my experience as inmate. And as far as I could tell, it seemed to have very little to do with the contemporary prison at all. Further, it was my distinct impression that someone could read and internalize the arguments presented in *Discipline and Punish* and walk away from the experience with just as little of an understanding of what happens on any contemporary prison yard as if they never bothered to read it. Foucault certainly explained *something*. And it was essential. Breathtaking in its scale, actually. But it wasn’t the viciousness and terror, the

absolute death-stranding of the contemporary prison as I understood it in really significant ways. The institution seemed to have moved beyond its representation as found within *Discipline and Punish* or collapsed away from those principles that Foucault first enunciated. Thus, a theoretical lacuna was revealed between a dominant strand of prison theorization (and thus, educated understanding of it) and my experience of incarceration. A space opened for potential inquiry and further elaboration in order to fill the gap between the two. The rest of this chapter will draw on examples of inmate-on-inmate violence, both from the accounts of other inmates as well as my own experiences, to illustrate my main argument that the following three logics saturate U.S. men's prisons in their entirety and overdetermine carceral function: 1) inmate-on-inmate violence that can be disavowed 2) the immobilizing of human beings within particular spaces as violence potentiality and 3) custodial monopoly over mobility.

“A Play Cast in Hell with No Angels...”

Eddie Dillard was a “first-termer,” convict slang for someone who had never been to prison before, when he was subjected to a guard-organized, repeated and brutal rape by another inmate deep within the terror pit that is the California State Prison at Corcoran Security Housing Unit (the “SHU”). A 23-year-old Black “gang-member”¹ from Compton who “looked [more] like a skinny teenager than a hardened convict at the time,” Eddie Dillard’s controlling case - the charge for which he was incarcerated in the first place - was assault with a deadly

¹ In reading accounts of the events described here, it is practically reflexive to describe the victims of state-organized violence as “gang members” so as to render human beings as something less-than-fully-human. If someone is a “gang member,” then they can’t be a victim, proper. But every human being within prison is rendered an iteration of “gang member” simply for being there, as described in detail in chapter four.

weapon (Arax & Gladstone, 1998f, p.1). For that crime, Eddie was housed within the notoriously violent maximum-security Calipatria State Prison in the Imperial Valley, opened in 1992 at the peak of California's prison-boom. While on the yard in "Calipat," Eddie was "written up" for kicking a female California Department of Corrections guard (c.o.) and transferred to another prison entirely, Corcoran, and sent to the SHU - the maximum-security 23-hour a day lock-down unit (Arax, 1998, p.2) where the California Department of Corrections (CDC) housed around 1800 inmates, the supposed "baddest of the bad" (Arax, 1996, p.2). "We are going to take the garbage from everybody else," said George Smith, warden of Corcoran from 1992 through 1996, while describing the SHU's mandate as well as betraying some of his dehumanizing, ideological commitments (Arax & Gladstone, 1998b, p. 4).

Corcoran State Prison and its SHU program, from the time the prison was opened in February of 1988 in the San Joaquin Valley cotton fields, was considered California's flagship prison, "a marvel of high-tech security" (Arax, 1996, p. 1) and the crown jewel of a booming carceral system. "Its purpose was not unlike that of a toxic landfill, taking the states most dangerous chemicals and mixing them into one confined chamber, hoping it wouldn't explode" (Arax & Gladstone, 1998b, p. 4):

Through a combination of isolation and high-tech design... (the Corcoran SHU) has emerged as an example of how to control inmates long considered uncontrollable. Before Corcoran opened in 1989, SHU inmates were scattered throughout the prison system in conditions that were often difficult to monitor and control... "Based on the new technology and the design of this prison, we are able to manage these inmates." Corcoran Lt. J.R. Andrews said. "It shows that this system really works." (Wilson, 1991)

Corcoran correctional officers and administrators had organized a very specific culture during the 1990's, and the prison's reputation for brutality - as "gladiator school" - was well-

known within convict circles. Everyone on the yards I traversed had heard the stories and feared the place – perhaps second only to Pelican Bay, another terror pit of almost incomprehensible brutality. To have done time within the SHU meant that you were prison hardened, to be respected by other convicts for having survived with dignity the most intense punishments that the carceral state had to offer. Guards stationed within the SHU were informally organized into a gang structure, calling themselves “Sharks” - not dissimilar from those inmate gangs they were meant to control in their adoption of an extra-legal brutality and a “green-wall” code of silence to enforce their unique brand of violent disciplining and corporal punishment on the tiers (Arax & Gladstone, 1998d, pp. 1-3). The Sharks would not look kindly upon any inmate, in particular a Piru gang-member like Eddie, who had kicked a female c.o. in another institution. As shark and former guard Roscoe “Bonecrusher” Pondexter used to say when greeting new arrivals fresh off of the bus: “Welcome to the Corcoran SHU! This is a hands-on institution. You’re in our house now. Whatever your life in prison was before, it’s over. Welcome to hell” (Arax & Gladstone, 1998b. p. 7).

In March of 1993, Pondexter was stationed in the Corcoran SHU and received a transfer order from his supervisor, Sergeant Alan Decker. One hundred- and twenty- pound Eddie Dillard was to be transferred into Wayne Robertson’s cell. Robertson was a two hundred- and thirty- pound “lifer” found guilty of murder and an infamous prison-rapist, a prison-hardened gangster with a thick “jacket” of documented sexual assaults including over a dozen rapes over the course of his incarceration and “boasted in official reports that he had raped unruly inmates as a favor to Corcoran staff” (Arax, 1998, p. 2):

I didn't know what wrong Dillard had done, but my superiors obviously wanted him punished. Everyone knew about Robertson. He had raped inmates before

and he's raped inmates since. He (Robertson) would always tell us, "If you have any loudmouths or any inmates you can't control and need to be taught a lesson, put them in the house with me." The Booty Bandit was just one of the tools of punishment that we used, Pondexter asserted. (Arax, 1998, pp. 2-3)

According to testimony from both Pondexter and Wayne Robertson himself before an eventual grand jury investigating the rape of Dillard, the "booty bandit" was gifted things like tennis shoes and extra state-issued food by custody for sexually assaulting inmates at SHU guards' behest (Arax, 1998, p. 2).

Eddie Dillard had been housed in the Corcoran SHU for about a week when he was extracted from his cell by Anthony Sylva and another c.o. and informed of his destination. Dillard pled with the cell-transfer guards on the way. "You can't put me in there. This guy's my enemy. He's a sexual predator." He knew Robertson, and in a previous prison they had come to blows after Dillard refused Robertson's aggressive, sexual advances. After that brawl, Dillard listed Robertson as an enemy in his C-file, which by California Department of Corrections own policy, should have precluded their being housed together at any future point. According to sworn testimony from Dillard himself, c.o. Sylva responded: "It's happening. Since you like hitting women, we've got somebody for you." On the way to Robertson's cell, Dillard said that he beseeched both Pondexter and Sergeant Decker that he shouldn't be housed with Robertson, but they remain unmoved. Dillard was locked into the cell with the "booty bandit," and once it was evening "lights out," Robertson attacked him. Eddie tried to fight back but was easily overpowered by the much larger Robertson. And although he banged on the cell door repeatedly and screamed for guard attention, it was disregarded and Eddie Dillard was brutally beaten and sodomized (Arax, 1998. pp. 2-4).

After several hours had passed, officer Joe Sanchez and other c.o.'s came by the booty bandit's cell. Eddie could not say directly what had happened to him since he was still locked inside with Robertson. To say "this guy just raped me" would be a violation of convict code, "snitching," and quite likely to result in Dillard's further assault or even murder - either at Robertson's hand or that of another inmate on the SHU tier who overheard. Eddie instead only intimated that he had been sexually assaulted, and further, told Sanchez that his life was in danger in hopes that guards would read between the lines and get him out of there. According to Eddie, c.o. Sanchez responded by saying: "you can hit a woman but you can't fight him back?" In obvious reference to the charge for which he was locked up in the SHU in the first place (Arax, 1998, pp. 2-4).

Sanchez and the other c.o.'s walked away. Abandoned in that degradation pit, Eddie was repeatedly and brutally raped by Robertson over the course of *two more days*. When the cell door finally opened after another 48-hours of unimaginable torment and sexual violence while pinned in a concrete cell the size of a small walk-in closet with his rapist, Eddie ran out and refused to go back in.

Six years later in October of 1999, after concluding an investigation in which Robertson himself admitted that he raped Dillard at SHU guard behest (Arax & Gladstone, 1998f, p. 2; Arax, 1999a, p.4), the state brought four Corcoran guards/Sharks to trial in Hanford, California - a farming community located about fifteen miles away from Corcoran state prison. The jury pool would be composed of individuals plucked from the conservative farm belt; a community deeply dependent on the prison as a source of stable employment. Most who lived within Hanford enjoyed deep communal ties with Corcoran guards, relating to them as "next door

neighbors and little league coaches.” Prior to the trial, the profanely powerful guards’ union, the California Correctional Peace Officers Association (C.C.P.O.A.), blanketed Hanford through multiple television and radio spots depicting frightening and violent inmates, more animal than human, and the guards assigned “the toughest beat in the state” to manage them. The union claimed they were not intending to poison any prospective jury pool, but as Ruth Wilson Gilmore argued as representative for California Prison Focus, “the guards union is trying to do a snow job on the central valley with its TV and radio ads” (Arax, 1998a, p. 2).

When asked about the sexual assaults, the “booty bandit” described events as he recalled them. He said that Dillard immediately began complaining to officers that “I’m not supposed to be in here” after being placed in his cell and that “his life was in danger.” He went on to add that “[Sanchez] and Pondexter started laughing like it was some type of joke, and they walked away.”

“What happened next?” asked the prosecutor.

“I sexually assaulted him,” Robertson testified.

“Sodomized him?”

“Yes.”

“How Long?”

“All night,” said Robertson (Arax, 1999d, pp. 2-3).

Roscoe “Bonecrusher” Pondexter also took the stand and testified against the sharks: “I wondered why [Dillard] would be in the cell with Robertson... It was just glaring that he would be in there...” (Arax, 1999c, pp. 1-2). In response to these testimonies, the Guard’s defense team argued that despite Robertson’s well-documented in-cell assault history and the listing of

him as a known enemy in Dillard's c-file, guards couldn't have possibly known in advance that Dillard would be raped. They further argued that guards could not be held responsible for the barbarous actions of individual convicts towards one another. And relying on a tried-and-true tactic familiar to anyone who has watched any of the recent trials around police killings over the last several years, the defense team put Dillard's character on trial. They impugned him as if someone who had previously committed a crime could never themselves become a victim of one. "The only gainful employment Eddie Dillard ever had was as a drug dealer... he is a liar and a violent predator," argued one defense attorney (Arax, 1999b, p. 2).

Dillard would eventually take the stand. Through tears, he described the all-consuming terror and trauma to which he was subjected, and the overwhelming indifference from agents of the state. During cross-examination, the guards' defense reflexively argued that "any sexual activity between the inmates was consensual" (Arax, 1999e, p. 3). After two days of deliberation, the Hanford County jury acquitted the four guard/defendants charged with organizing Eddie Dillard's rape on all counts. In a statement to the press immediately after the acquittal, one of the charged officers stated:

I am very bitter. I'm very upset... this has effectively ended my career... and for nothing... the entire Department of Corrections and especially my friends at Corcoran State Prison, we are vindicated. (Arax & Chon, 1999, p. 1)

Eddie, who refused to speak to reporters after the verdict but allowed his wife to make a statement on his behalf, expressed through her that the verdict did not surprise him.

"Convicts – even after paying their debts to society – are never believed by the public" (Arax & Chon, 1999, p. 2). And in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times* five years after the conclusion of his incomprehensible agony, Eddie said: "It's not something you can forget. That shame kind

of holds you... It's like your life is on the line. It feels like you're being killed. Just slowly" (Arax, 1998, p. 4). As it seems to me, Damiens while being drawn and quartered might have said the same.

Gladiator Days

"The integrated yards are doing just exactly what they were intended to do..."

-Corcoran Associate Warden Gary Lindsey, 1989 Internal memo

"Corcoran was a very functional institution. It was not out of control. It was never out of control."

-Corcoran Warden "Mushroom George" Smith

Calling the exercise area of the Corcoran SHU a "yard" is entirely disingenuous as it is a concrete walled-in chamber, half of a basketball court in size and topped with razor wire, secured by a gunner's catwalk above the pit. It was April of 1994 when 25-year-old Preston Tate, another young, Black "gang member" from South Central Los Angeles was released by guards into the Corcoran SHU pit only to have his head blown off by a California Department of Corrections (CDC) gunner. Like Eddie Dillard, Preston Tate had "caught" a SHU-term for fighting with guards on another yard (Arax, 1996, p. 5-6).

Shortly after Preston was released onto the SHU yard with his cellie, two inmates from a rival Hispanic faction were released into it as well, and the four were locked in the cramped, inescapable space together. Hispanic and Black factions had "green-lit" one another in the Corcoran SHU - convict slang for having entered a state of active hostility - and this fact was known by everyone in the institution, custody and convicts alike. Therefore, when guards released two Hispanic inmates into the SHU yard with two Black inmates it was assured that

they would attack one another “on sight;” in fact, that they were required to do so by prison politics - the convict-generated informal law structuring daily, lived experience for those individuals bound within the carceral thresher. They indeed would attack one another on first sight or face a battering from “their own people,” maybe be killed. It was so well known that releasing certain racialized factions into the pit together would lead to a fight that Guards within the Corcoran SHU were in the habit of filling out incident reports before these brawls had ever happened.

Observation video from SHU security cameras gives witness to Preston Tate and his Black cellmate as they brace for an oncoming attack from the Hispanic inmates. Also watching and waiting outside of the Black and white video frame, a gunner from the raised platform armed with a gasoline powered “non-lethal” anti-riot wooden-block gun and a .9-millimeter carbine rifle (Arax, 1996, p. 3). The four men engage in a struggle and within seconds the block gun is fired, striking one of the Hispanic participants (Arax & Gladstone, 1998a, p. 4). Mere seconds later, a .9-millimeter carbine rifle shot with bullets designed to explode inside the body cracks out, striking Preston Tate and shattering the back of his head and killing him instantaneously. His lifeless body crumples to the floor and the three still-alive inmates collapse to the ground and assume the carceral-familiar prone position. Alarms sound. A couple of minutes pass as the blood leaks and saturates the concrete floor from the gaping wound where the back of Preston Tate’s head used to be. Guards eventually enter the pit, and unceremoniously drag the lifeless body of twenty-five-year-old Preston Tate from the “shooting gallery” (Arax, 1996, p. 6) by the arms and legs like a duffel bag filled with dirty laundry, or perhaps a sack of potatoes.

From 1989 to 1996, California Department of Corrections officials in Sacramento implemented an “integration policy” of rival gangs within the Corcoran SHU (Arax, 1997, pp. 2-4). Racialized, inmate factions in a state of active hostility were to be released onto the same narrowly bounded exercise yard simultaneously. The public facing justification for the policy of mixing known enemies - some in a state of active, murderous antagonism for generations both on the street and within the California prison system onto a cramped concrete yard was that if rival factions could prove that they could peacefully congregate together within it, then that would be a step towards demonstrating their fitness for return to “the mainline” (Arax & Gladstone, 1998a, p. 3-4). A way out of the SHU. Many SHU inmates had been held within it for any number of years, since the Corcoran SHU first opened, and were clamoring for some formal mechanism to escape its clutches. At the time, “showing that they can get along with their enemies is the only way gang members can move from the SHU to the main prison” (Arax, 1997, p. 3).

In practice, the integrated yard policy imposed by the State of California turned the Corcoran SHU into a slaughter box. All day and every day, rival groupings of inmates were pitted against one another and locked in, and everyday there were multiple, brutal fights - and guard shootings to terminate the fights. “We’ve got inmates whose grandfathers were enemies, and they’re never going to get along- not in the big real world and not in the little world of the SHU,” said whistleblower Lieutenant Jim Bolin. “The response that came down was we had no choice. Integration was mandated” (Arax & Gladstone, 1998b, p. 6). Despite the public facing justifications about a return to the mainline, internal documents smuggled out by whistleblowers in 1994 demonstrated that the state had an entirely different agenda. By pitting

known enemies into a shooting gallery and fighting them like dogs, the California Department of Corrections hoped “gangs would brutalize each other into submission.” That is, through subjecting captive human beings to recurring and incomprehensively vicious conflicts and exhaustive violence, the CDC hoped to break gang structure. Combined with the always-hovering and ever-present death-potential of an executioner’s bullet from a SHU Gunner, it was assumed that no human being could withstand such pitiless conditions for long; gang members would cease their activity and repudiate their affiliation. Robert Talbot, a lieutenant at Corcoran approached his supervisor to question the wisdom of mixing known enemies on the yard and was told: “You know the policy, if they fight every day, so be it. They’ll get tired sooner or later” (Arax, 1996, p. 3).

Under the CDC’s integrated yard policy, from 1989 to 1994, *Corcoran gunners shot fifty and killed seven inmates*, making Corcoran the deadliest prison in America during this time period (Arax, 1996, p. 1). In the Corcoran SHU’s first year, there were 1,500 inmate-on-inmate fights. The gas-powered block gun was discharged at inmates 662 times and the lethal .9-millimeter carbine rifle was shot 47 times. There were 204 *documented* inmate injuries (Arax & Gladstone, 1998b, p. 6). In 1989 alone, *SHU gunners fired the anti-riot wooden block gun at inmates 694 times, and the lethal carbine rifle fifty times* in attempts to suppress inmate fights that were occurring all day, every day as a result of institutional policy (Arax, 1997, p. 2). “We were having four or five shootings in an eight-hour shift,” Lieutenant Talbot said (Arax, 1996, p. 3). Day after day. Week after week. Month after month. Year after year.

After the killing of Preston Tate in 1994, Richard Caruso, a SHU gunner, grew disgusted with a yard-integration policy that guaranteed perfectly predictable and horrendous inmate-on-

inmate violence and unclear procedure for if and when he and other gunners were to deploy lethal force. They were blowing people up all the time, snatching lives and maiming men like state-deputized and indifferent assassins, and there was no agreement amongst them as a unit about when was justifiable to shoot. The uncertainty was taking a psychological toll on Caruso and leading to tensions amongst the guards themselves. After filing a series of complaints up through the chain of command about a lack of clarity around shooting policy that were uniformly ignored by custodial administration, Caruso, under the cover of night, smuggled varied internal documents from out of Corcoran prison to the FBI (Arax, 1996, p. 6).

Through testimony to an eventual grand jury, he and other whistle blowers, under great threat from individual guards as well as their gangster union, the CCPOA, revealed that Corcoran SHU guards were doing even more than instituting a misguided and ambiguous correctional policy. It was more profoundly abhorrent than all that. Guards were actually *staging* fights between rival inmate factions and particular individuals during “gladiator days.” SHU guards were “stacking tiers,” initiating cell changes so that known inmate-enemies would be housed next to one another prior to yard release in order to *guarantee* their placement in the SHU pit together in groups of up to twenty at a time. Guards were also in the habit of inviting other officers - administrators and guests from throughout the larger Corcoran facility - into the SHU to spectate the fights; inmate savages tearing one another to shreds like so many pitted animals, with one particular c.o., Pio Cruz, acting as “ring announcer” as with a professional boxing match. Guards were also in the habit of gambling with one another on the outcome of the staged fights, selecting their champions and fighting them repeatedly to see if they could be beaten. Particular guard’s favorite gladiators were thrown into the pit over and

over (Arax, 1996, p. 4). “I was written up six times for being in fights. Three of the six fights were set up by guards. They would come to me and criticize my performance. They would laugh at what had happened,” said Conrad Harrell, a former SHU inmate/gladiator (Arax & Gladstone, 1998b, p. 8). Important to recognize, each of those write-ups meant more time in the SHU and more months added to prison sentence. Further, as unbelievable as it is appalling, SHU gunners above the pit would terminate many of these staged fights by firing live rounds from the lethal Carbine rifle at the “aggressor,” defined as he who had won the fight *because still standing* (Arax, 1997, pp. 3-4). Sometimes, gunners shot the wrong inmate supposedly “by mistake,” as was claimed in the case of Preston Tate’s execution. Though the question remained whether or not Tate wasn’t shot for reasons precisely similar to those that led to the state-sanctioned rape of Eddie Dillard - his temerity to fight with guards and as extrajudicial punishment for having done so. “You have to understand, the prison was a zoo,” said Gary Gonsalves, the district attorney in King’s County, California from 1987 to 1995 who refused to bring any criminal charges against Corcoran staff after these accusations had come to light (Arax & Gladstone, 1998b, p. 7).

To be more specific with regards to Tate’s execution and the state’s justification for it, the original incident report filed by the gunner listed Tate as the “aggressor,” justifying the shoot as a “good shoot” according to the CDC’s *internal* shooting review board. Under investigative pressure and the leaking of the surveillance camera footage, the SHU-gunner who executed Tate changed his story from the official report, because he had to, and instead only then claimed that he had shot Tate by mistake and was actually aiming at one of the rushing Hispanic inmates (Arax, 2000a, p. 3). Upon further investigation into shootings within the

Corcoran SHU motivated by the Tate shooting cover-up, it was revealed that the California Department of Corrections' internal shooting review boards found that *every single shot fired in the Corcoran SHU was justified*, every shot a "good shot" whether "aggressor" or "victim" was hit. In all of these "justified" shootings, there was no weapon on any participant in the melee, nor was the threat of great bodily injury or loss of life present (Arax, 1997, pp. 2-3). Still, all "good shoots" (Arax, 1996, p. 5) *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes*, indeed.

With the testimony of whistleblowers Caruso and Lieutenant Steven Rigg who asserted, "I have reviewed every shooting review from Corcoran and have yet to find a clean shooting... you cannot use a firearm to stop a stand-up fistfight" (Arax & Gladstone, 1998e, p. 2), plus ten thousand pages of internal documents demonstrating not only the intent of the integration policy as to break gangs but the day-to-day decision making, procedures, and actions that led to the Corcoran SHU becoming the deadliest space within the national carceral system, the FBI brought eight guards to trial over the orchestration of gladiator fights and the shooting of so many damned people.

About halfway through the trial of "the Corcoran 8," the guards' defense team was granted an atypical request in a trial of this kind – to give the jury, composed of several individuals who "had a reason to lean toward the guards' side... including a juror whose application to be a state prison guard was pending" (Arax, 2000b, p. 3), a tour within the Corcoran SHU unit to see for themselves the "vile, violent and predatory" inmates that inhabited it (Arax, 2000c, p. 1). Twelve jurors, seven men and five women, entered that forlorn pit of human degradation and brutality and gazed upon naked, tattooed and filthy inmates staged in isolation cages like human animals in a perverse zoo. They heard the terrifying noises

of the prison, smelled it - the howling madness and the vulgarity of the SHU space. They witnessed for themselves the alien customs - the “kites” being fished back and forth from cell to cell. The screaming. They were leered at. Menaced by largely racialized human beings in the midst of an oppressive and humiliating captivity. Jurors came to perceive through the tour that the guards manning the Corcoran SHU –criminal defendants accused of orchestrating gladiator fights and executing inmates - had done anything but. Quite the opposite.

By the time the tour was over, the pre-trial rhetoric of the state prison guards union-that Corcoran officers walked the “toughest beat in the state” - had taken on an all-too-real dimension for jurors. The guards in military fatigues were the thin green line that separates “Us from Them.” (Arax, 2000c, p. 2)

Human beings who had been pitilessly fought like dogs and then shot from above while defenseless had instead been transmogrified as less-than-fully-human savages that civil society needed protection *from*. Their murder not murder at all – after all, to be a victim of murder, the victim must be a full human being – but instead, a self-defensive measure to keep a less-than-fully-human savagery contained.

During trial, a theme emerged not dissimilar from the one in the trial over the state-organized rape of Eddie Dillard. “It’s the inmates who decide when and how to fight... It’s their agenda, not the officers’” (Arax, 2000a, p. 2). After six hours of deliberation, as with the state-organized rape of Eddie Dillard, the jury acquitted the Corcoran 8 on *every single one of the 30 counts* for which they were charged. While being photographed after trial with smiling and relieved guard/defendants and their families, the Forman of the jury that had just acquitted told the press that even bringing the guards to trial was a “travesty of justice.” He further added, to drive the point home, that “the government’s case made me sick.” (Arax, 2000b, p. 1)

Thanatopolitical Machinery and the Carceral Surplus Engine

The guard-organized rape of Eddie Dillard and the orchestration of gladiator fights culminating in the execution of Preston Tate are two seemingly distinct events and varied types of punishment. Separate actors were involved - whether as perpetrator or victim, guard or inmate. They were different forms of violence. They led to different and independent court cases. Yet both events *transpired simultaneously and within the same space*, the Corcoran SHU, during peak years of California's unprecedented-in-scale prison expansion. When Dillard was raped in 1993, Gladiator Fights had already been taking place in the SHU for four-plus years, and were to remain so well after, thru 1995.

The rape of Eddie Dillard and the execution of Preston Tate were also symptomatic of an *ongoing set of carceral practices*. Eddie Dillard was not the only inmate raped. The "booty bandit's" c-file was thick with previous sexual assaults. A grand jury would, in fact, come to indict Sergeant Alan Decker for conspiring with Robertson in the rape of another inmate, Melvin Davis, in June of 1993 (Arax & Gladstone, 1998f, p. 4). In addition, Robertson was only "one of the tools of punishment that we used," according to Pondexter. Similarly, Preston Tate was not the only inmate shot and killed in the midst of a gladiator fight. Pulling the investigative string of his execution unraveled the recurring institutional practice of staging "gladiator days" that left 50 people shot, several grievously injured and seven dead. Is it possible that these two practices - state-organized rape and the staging of gladiator fights - occurred simultaneously and within the same space because they were conditioned by a shared logic? By reading the principles shared between them, is it possible to give form to a common and overdetermining structure?

Three logics come into view when we examine state sanctioned rape and gladiator fights as forms of punishment. In both court cases, the guards' defense successfully argued that they could not be held responsible for the vile and barbarous actions of reprehensible inmates. Thus, the first principle emerges: *the violence performed in both instances was inmate-on-inmate, and therefore could be disavowed*. Existing hostilities were harnessed, utilized, and *steered by custody* toward institutional ends as opposed to being punishments enacted directly by guards themselves. In Eddie Dillard's case, guards didn't rape him. Instead, they locked Eddie into a cell with a known rapist to express their domination and to exact retribution. Wayne Robertson, without doubt a morally reprehensible human being with his own agency and responsibility for raping Eddie and many others besides was grabbed-ahold-of and *extra-judicially weaponized as rapist*, rendered utilitarian within a framework of carceral desire animated by vengeance and extreme humiliation. Inmate-on-inmate rape was *steered* by custody to achieve transcendental, yet thoroughly institutional ends as opposed to simply being the expression of an individual desire/objective of Robertson.

Gladiator fights were also custodially-steered, inmate-on-inmate forms of violence. The rushing at one another within concrete, experientially collapsing space and the adrenaline-fueled gut punches, the strangling and the stomping were not issued from guard fists and boots. Instead, custody *harnessed and steered the flow* of existing hostilities between rival inmate factions - tensions emergent between racialized groups within preexistent and state-imposed conditions of scarcity and lack, and historical antagonism. Existing animosities between racialized inmate factions were harnessed, steered toward the thoroughly institutional and codified objective of breaking gangs, with the epiphenomenal benefit of

satisfying guards' collectively perverse desire to expose inmates to repeated brutalization and/or death. The selection of inmates that were to fight, the stacking of tiers to guarantee that rival inmates hit the yard together and releasing them into the pit to annihilate one another was a steering of existing hostilities within carceral space- convicts savaged one another for their own immediate reasons, but in service to a larger drive not simply organized by, but in fact constituting correctional policy.

Second, the rape of Eddie Dillard by Wayne Robertson as orchestrated by agents of the state relied upon the *pinning of particular inmates as violence potentialities to particular and confined concrete spaces from which no escape was possible*. To stage the rape of Eddie Dillard, guards relied on an individual cell system. Wayne Robertson within his cell, or his "house" as we inmates described them, was a particular location bearing a particular human being both materially and discursively transmogrified – his full-humanness reduced - to violence potentiality (this inmate *rapes*, and that is *useful*); imaginarily congealed by custody and (re)articulated as singular weapon – fleshly body and concrete fused into bio-mechanized torture apparatus - a utilitarian object or corporal punishment machine. The "Booty Bandit's cell" was articulated as weaponized space/thing and metamorphosed lawless - a phantom zone emergent deep within the space of the prison, at its core, where Eddie Dillard was subjected to rape as an *extra-legal punishment in-excess of his sentence*. Eddie Dillard was not formally sentenced to be raped, neither for his controlling case nor for kicking a female C.O. at another institution. Nevertheless, he was. And guards, as agents and representatives of the state, or its material embodiment, guaranteed and facilitated it through utilizing the booty bandit's cell.

The Corcoran SHU yard in which Tate was executed was also a space in which inmates were immobilized with escape made impossible, and contained particular inmates as violence potentialities: gladiators. Another rearticulated flesh/concrete fused and singular biomechanical weapon – the gladiator day/shooting gallery. The violence potentials tied to this space were of course fist-fights and hand-to-hand combat, as well as the whizzing death and/or maiming from the SHU-gunners rifle. To place an inmate within the SHU yard with foreknowledge of the enmity between racialized, inmate factions and an intentionally vague policy about if and when to deploy lethal force - thus generating occasion for the extra-legal deployment of violence at individual guard discretion - was to expose inmates to any or all of the above forms of violence and death-potential without CO's ever dirtying their hands. Or, as with the shootings, the creation of the conditions by which inmate-executions were preemptively justified. Spelled out, if inmates could always justifiably be shot for fighting, and guards themselves guaranteed that the fight would occur, then the execution of inmates by SHU gunners was always-already disavowable as “necessary,” a “good shoot.” Not a murder at all, but a gesture meant to “protect” those very targeted inmates that had been forced to fight in the first place. As with the rape of Dillard, all of this SHU-yard gladiator violence functioned as an extra-legal surplus; a machine-like engine composed of flesh and concrete, gasoline weapons, exploding rounds and electronic gates issuing punishment beyond what any inmate is sentenced by courts to endure or towards which inmates were *abandoned*.

Thirdly, both state-guaranteed rape and guard-organized gladiator fights required *custodial monopolization of mobility*: total control over the flow of inmate movement through carceral space and time. Inmate victims simply weren't allowed to exit these biomechanized

torture spaces. If SHU guards do not move an inmate, they stay permanently immobilized within isolation cells in a total lock-down. They must be combined, mixed like noxious chemicals for a violent reaction to occur. Prison guards, capillary instantiations of state power (Rodriguez, 2006, pp. 45-46), facilitated and exploited the flows of bodies throughout the prison - the propulsion and cessation of movement - towards extra-legal purpose. Eddie was inserted into an administratively ordered cell-move, a carceral flow of inmate bodies overdetermined by an unspoken custodial desire and embedded within a logic of retribution and domination. Carceral agents through their monopoly of mobility seized Eddie and then *abandoned* him, *immobilized*, to a particular violence potentiality in a particular and extra-legal punishment-space. Carceral agents then *withdrew*. The emergent biomechanical machinery called the booty bandit's cell went to work digesting inmate flesh.

Gladiator fights function similarly. Guards issue the call for yard time and the cell unlocks. Inmates step out of their cell into a lineup and are ushered by c.o.'s into the yard and the gate is locked behind them. Inmates are deposited into a carceral flesh flow, its terminus predictable and institutionally useful violence - breaking gangs through forced combat and attrition. SHU inmates, *abandoned* within this pit of swirling violence potential, steel themselves with clenched fists and gritted teeth as custody withdraws to observational posts above the pit to drink their coffee and place bets with their clean hands.

These three logics: *inmate-on-inmate violence*, the *pinning of particular bodies to particular spaces as violence potentialities* and *custodial monopoly over mobility* co-constitute a *thanatopolitical machinery*: an extra-legal, surplus set of punishments within the gun tower-secured perimeter fences of the carceral thresher. Thanatopolitical machines are composed of

barred, concrete spaces and weaponized flesh, electronic gates and steel cell doors. They require the flow of inmate bodies, are driven by a perverse and unspoken carceral desire and their function is to expose inmates to a spectrum of violence intensities, or a ladder of tortuous death-potentiality – its rungs social death (natal alienation, extreme humiliation and random and unpredictable violence), subjective death (madness, or deterritorialization from the strictures of carceral sense), and/or biological death. What I mean by “surplus” is that these punishments are extra-legal, they exist in addition to the punishment formally administered by the state. And because they are administered extrajudicially, those inmate-subjects abandoned to them, *through the very exposure*, are rendered as form of “bare life” or “flesh,” *outside of juridico-political inscription*. As the court cases over the rape of Eddie Dillard and the staging of gladiator fights demonstrate, inmates subjected to thanatopolitical machinery had no law to appeal to. As Hannah Arendt first taught us in *The Human Condition* (2018), full-humanness requires inscription within the juridico-political order to guarantee a set of rights and protections. Convicts exposed to thanatopolitical machinery are retroactively produced as not-fully-human then, or made flesh (Weheliye, 2014, p. 2) because suspended within a phantom zone or a wasteland outside of the law in which full-humanness is, in a very literal sense, retracted through exposure to a series of violent death potentials against which no remediation can be sought; our apparatuses of justice cannot even begin to *think* them.

What the state-sanctioned rape of Eddie Dillard and guard-organized gladiator fights plainly demonstrate is that it is not the state-mandated and explicit punishment - the amputation of familial ties and state-imposed isolation within conditions of deprivation - that primarily constitute the punishment program of prison. Nor is it the subjection to programs of

rehabilitation or discipline. It is not even the violence from guard to inmate or the humiliation at their hands that we were all made to suffer - degrading strip searches for instance, or being subject to a direct and total control. Not to say that these punishments weren't awful in themselves, and often illegitimate – cruel and arbitrary. The primary punishing mechanism animating and defining contemporary carceral practice, a disavowable corporal punishment targeting both inmate bodies and psyches, *is the repeated exposure of inmates to an extra-legal and surplus thanatopolitical machinery of inmate-on-inmate violence that has utterly subsumed carceral space.*

No inmate within that Corcoran hell pit was sentenced by California's courts to fight another inmate nor be raped by one, as punishment. Nor were those fifty inmates shot within the SHU sentenced to maiming, profound disability or death. Extra-legal punishment through exposure to thanatopolitical machinery is not surplus in the sense of marginal, nor is it incidental. Nor is it the work of wayward "bad apples," some prison-guard gang that has gone rogue. Thanatopolitical machinery, its logics evident in the guard-organized rape of Eddie Dillard and the staging of gladiator fights, constitutes *the core engine driving contemporary carceral practice.* Abandonment to a thanatopolitical machinery constituted of inmate-on-inmate violence in spaces outside of the law yet emergent at its very heart (within the prison) is the primary and dominant punishing mechanism of the carceral state. Further, it is through an abandonment to thanatopolitical machinery that subjects within the carceral state are rendered - the transmogrification of fully human beings into something less-than-human – inmates as bare life or savage flesh - through their very immobilization within emergent spaces

outside the law, subjected to extra-legal and horrific corporal punishments that express an obscene and unspoken desire animating carceral statecraft.

One should not pass over this lightly. The prison, as the end point of the law, is premised upon imposing initial conditions of scarcity and indifferentiation atop a captive population that guarantee the emergence of an inmate violence that, after its emergence, is isolated, cordoned off, weaponized and steered - a thanatopolitical machinery or *surplus engine* powering the prison in excess of the law, from which no remediation can be sought within the courts. The prison is the site in which *law reaches its limit and transgresses itself*, dialectically flips into its opposite, *lawlessness*, and instantiates space in which law is suspended in order to give materialization to an obscene, unspoken underside/unconscious desire of law itself – not the rehabilitation of offenders nor their disciplining towards eventual integration into a factory system or anywhere else within civil society post-carceral, but their *permanent disappearance from it through abandonment-towards-death*. The prison then, as the very culmination or telos of law, flips inside-out into suspension of law or lawlessness, only made visible through the spatial concentrations of these logics interior to the prison - nodal points like the Booty Bandit's cell and the Gladiator pit are exemplary examples - that echo, relay and further distribute the organizing principles of contemporary carcerality from within – *the annihilation of largely racialized, superfluous Black and Brown bodies through the mechanism of steered and delegated inmate-on-inmate violence within spaces both inside and outside of the law, simultaneously*.

And here is an encompassing point. The rape-cell and the gladiator pit are not mere exceptional and historical singular events, but are instead evidence - examples culled during the

period of carceral reconfiguration and amplification that began in the mid-1970's - of the emergence of a series of nested thanatopolitical machines that compose an extra-legal, surplus engine powering the contemporary prison that operate at the individual (i.e., Eddie Dillard and his rape, as punishment) and group (i.e., gladiator fights organized toward breaking prison gang structure) registers. Gladiator fights and state-sanctioned rape are localized and particular manifestations of a not merely historical, *but still to this day operative logic of abandonment to death* as it exists in varying degrees of intensity and hierarchically cascades throughout not two, but three registers within the prison - individual, group, and *population*. Thanatopolitical machines are nested and instantiate in particular practices and arrangements that demonstrate temporary stabilities and are composed of individual components and pieces - gates and locks, particular inmates as violence potentialities, razor-wire and electrified fences bounding particular concrete spaces and mobilizations of bodies that may be recombined, retrofitted and recalibrated into ever new and novel combinations. They are steered, and their operative, shared logic is the exposure of inmates towards a spectrum or laddering intensity of death potential – social, subjective and biological - for those less-than-human subjects made so retroactively through their very exposure to the carceral surplus engine.

It is not merely these particular machines and practices that constitute the thanatopolitical modality of prison punishment. *Instead, these three logics - inmate-on-inmate violence that can be disavowed, the immobilizing of human beings within particular spaces as violence potentiality and custodial monopoly over mobility - saturate the prison in its entirety and overdetermine carceral function.* In fact, within the contemporary prison, *they define it.* The state-sanctioned rape of Eddie Dillard is an exemplary model of a thanatopolitical machine at

the *individual* register, and staged gladiator fights demonstrate how they function at the level of racialized inmate *groups* (prison gangs). There is another register at which thanatopolitical machinery materializes in order to realize the unspoken and obscene carceral desire of inmate abandonment towards death that I haven't yet discussed – the level of *population*.

At the inmate-population register then, *the prison yard itself is an immense thanatopolitical machine*, subjecting the entire inmate population all at the same time to a very specific extra-legal death potential - the *prison race-riot*. For what, stripped to its most essential logics, is a prison yard? Said simply, it is the concentrating of a population culled largely from particular Black and Brown subpopulations within the nether regions of social space - deindustrialized and capital-abandoned “hyperghettoes” (Wacquant, 2001, pp. 103-108); the concentrating of human beings and pinning them to a particular geographic area - encircled and trapped inside of an electrified fence with custody assuming high ground above the trap through gun towers at all corners - and *refusing to allow captives to exit*. The state controls all flows to and from the yard, intake through buses and expulsion through parole vans. In addition, custody releases inmates for yard each morning and throughout the day, and retracts inmates back to cells in the evening. While on the yard, movement is steered and unidirectional, enforced through booming microphones from the gun tower issuing threat of murderous violence. If any inmate walks the wrong way on the track circling the yard, that inmate will be shot. Thus, we have established two of the three principles constituting a thanatopolitical machine: the pinning of human beings to particular geographical spaces from which escape is made impossible and a custodial monopoly over mobility. What about the third, inmate-on-inmate violence?

Atop this pinned and captive population barred the capacity to flee, the state intentionally imposes *initial conditions of scarcity*. Scarcity is written into the state-sanctioned punishment leveled at felons - a custodially-administered bare life. That's the point of prison. The diet within prison is subsistence level and inmates suffer a normalized, throbbing hunger. Movement and extension into the world is either entirely denied or greatly restricted. There is not enough tooth paste, toilet paper, soap or hot water. There is often a lack of clean drinking water. One is often freezing cold or sweltering hot; there are not enough blankets, pillows, or ventilation. One lacks safety. Everything is sharp edges and punishing concrete. Often, there is not enough sun light. Clothing is bare. There is minimal intellectual stimulation and little to no meaningful work. To quote L  ic Wacquant in *Punishing the Poor*, the inmate population is a "dispossessed and dishonored" category (Wacquant, 2009, p. xviii), there is no social esteem. There is a scarcity of human touch, communication, and bonds of affection are institutionally undermined. The prison yard is, in other words, networked by matrices of imposed material and psychological scarcities that intersectionally congeal atop and through both the bodies and psyches of inmates.

This state-imposed scarcity and experiential lack generates strategies of resistance amongst the inmate population in order to accrue fundamental material and psychological necessities for a properly human life, or something as close as possible to it, for those pinned within the electrified perimeter fence of the carceral thresher. Lack itself instantiates a drive towards escape from the prison's imposed, scarce existence. Individual inmates band together, forming racialized groupings in a collective strategy to enhance their capacity to accrue those necessary material and symbolic resources. Inmates clique up with people they know from their

own neighborhood, or from neighborhoods that they recognize. That look and talk like them, that share a similar set of cultural experiences. They clique with those whom they have kin relations, or that their kin may have relations with. The neighborhoods and communities *outside of prison, within civil society, are already racially segregated*. Inmate racialized groupings and the segregation of the yard *reflect and distills the informal segregation of the larger society* - are reified and discursively articulated as autonomous and racist monstrosities - but are merely a concentrated version of informal segregation as it structures the larger social formation, hyper-agitated within prison conditions of total oppression. It is no surprise that inmate groupings within the prison are racialized - although obscene, it is perfectly predictable. Informal racial segregation in civil society is obscene.

Inmates group with people who are most like themselves as collective survival strategy. Prison administration labels these groups "prison gangs." Black markets emerge, largely the purview and the territory of so-called prison gangs, as both field and strategy through which to remediate material and symbolic lack, a hunger of the stomach and the psyche. *Struggles, often violent, emerge between racialized inmate groupings over control of Black-market economies* largely organized around distribution of illicit drugs, tobacco and other forms of contraband in a zero-sum game. Sometimes those struggles grow so intense, so large that the yard is *consumed in violent struggle*.

The prison yard then, as thanatopolitical machine, is first and foremost the imposition of scarcity within a closed system atop a captive population, *thus guaranteeing the emergence of inmate-on-inmate violence in the form of racialized, inmate groupings struggling over material and symbolic necessities*. Consumptive violence of the prison yard is *manufactured* through

establishing the originary conditions that guarantee its inevitability, generating repeated opportunity for the carceral state to intervene, attack, and redistribute inmate bodies throughout the differential sites of pain/death distribution within the carceral system. Instead of recognizing the constitutive nature of this machinery, inmate-on-inmate yard violence's manufactured and staged dimension, carcerality is the discursive attribution for these collective struggles and forms of violence to an individual criminal essence or incorrigibility - a fundamental difference between inmates and civil subjects. As opposed to recognizing the violence emergent within carceral space as a perfectly human response to the prison's originary conditions, carcerality cites said incorrigible essence in order to justify further carceral intervention. The logic is the same as with Corcoran SHU gladiator fights – create conditions by which inmates were guaranteed to brawl, and intervention by the state – in that case, shooting them - was already justified. The yard violence orchestrated within the prison, then, is staged and rendered utilitarian. For it justifies not only the existence of the prison itself to contain its propensity, but also sets in motion machinery of carceral reuptake and intensification of punishment, or increased exposure to death potentiality - locking rendered-superfluous bodies and minds within an ever-intensifying agony circuit from which escape becomes less and less likely and death ever more probable: social, subjective and/or biological.

The mainline prison yard is properly articulated as a thanatopolitical machine so organized as to actively produce the potentiality of its own breakdown, a stabilized ambivalence. In other words, when any person is sentenced to prison in the state of California, what they are extra-legally *abandoned* to is the daily threat, if not imminent reality, of *prison*

riot. Any prison yard within the state's carceral cache is like a Schrödinger machine, with two vacillating potential states that it may collapse into:

1. Temporary stability generated through state-organized, yet entirely disavowed individual or small-group inmate-on-inmate violence; *inoculative or sacrificial violence (discussed in chapters four and six)*
2. Entropic prison race-riot, *or war of all inmates against all.*

Walking the mainline yard on any and every given day of my prison term that we weren't on lockdown, I would survey or "take the temperature" of the yard. At some early point in their individual, institutional histories, the yards were subdivided by force by racialized inmate grouping themselves, and these subdivisions are actively policed by the inmate population through time. I would take notice – are the Woods (white inmates), Blacks, Sureños (southern Mexicans), Paisas (Mexican nationals) and "Others" congregating in their respective areas? Are there any abnormal groupings, aggressive movements or body language being displayed? Are any racialized groupings looking uniformly in any particular direction? Is anyone moving too quickly or too slowly, any one group coming up behind another? Are convicts grouped in obviously defensive ways? An always-potential prison race-riot "pops off" unpredictably, so as inmates, we were all day and every day on the lookout for any sign of its "outbreak:"

For WARRE, consisteth not in Battell onely, or the act of fighting; but in a tract of time, wherein the Will to contend by Battell is sufficiently known: and therefore the notion of Time, is to be considered in the nature of Warre; as it is in the nature of Weather. For as the nature of Foule weather, lyeth not in a showre or two of rain; but in an inclination thereto of many dayes together: So the nature of War, consisteth not in actuall fighting; but in the known disposition thereto, during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. (Hobbes, 2009, p. 178)

Hobbes' reflection that war consists not merely of the battle, but in that stretch of time in anticipation of it captures well the foreboding, paranoid obsession and insecure anxiety as well as the numerous defense formations - individual and collective - such a state generates amongst inmates toward the looming prison riot. All carceral time is measured and unfolds in anticipation of entropic collapse, and inmate movement, attention and activity are largely organized around its always-potential emergence. How and where we walked, who we "kicked it" with, what we observed. How we projected our voices. What we could or couldn't say, and who we may or may not say it to. The taboos and commandments of prison politics were largely organized around erecting distances between racialized groupings so as to preempt conflicts that could lead to riot (discussed in detail in chapter four). Our "regulating," corporal punishments were reserved for those that violated these taboos (sacrificial violence, discussed in chapter six). Our obsessive exercise and cleanliness routines. Our daily lives in prison were entirely ordered around riot as our most fundamental concern, and this very "inclination" towards race-riot/entropic collapse has its own profoundly deleterious affective consequences whether or not the anticipated riot comes to pass as the exposure to such psychically strident space takes its toll through repeated exposure over time from which there is no retreat. The yard is "mandatory," after all. We were *pinned to that space*. And there is no hiding from the always-potential riot.

The mainline yard is maybe best described as a reality-collapsing machine or an imploder, the chief thanatopolitical technology of the carceral state because it ravaged an entire yard, building, or cell block - to use Hobbesian language: a *war of all-inmates-against-all*. Race riot is a population-scale case of inmate-on-inmate violence, the most devastating

thanatopolitical machine in the carceral cache, and every day one awakens to its emergent potential. And every day, one merely makes it through - avoids it until tomorrow when the collapsing board is reset. Years may pass rife with crippling anxiety, utter desperation, demoralizing depression - smaller-scale psychic and physical violence – plus, the need for individual and collective self-defensive posture in the face of this always-potential and total brutality. Madness takes some. Violence some others. In other words, the mere abandonment to always-potentially collapsing societal space generates its own matrices of psychological and affective brutalization, all punishments in excess of law. For no inmate was sentenced to exist under the perpetual threat of a social space gone mad and murderous. The everyday and all-the-time threat of riot was psychologically arduous, an experientially dominant punishment well in-excess of any court sentence. Inmate daily life is anchored and organized by the always-potential riot, who gives a shit what the cops are up to – how to avoid it. And if we can't, to be prepared in order to survive it. Across racial groupings.

And when a riot actually “kicks off,” it detonates – a phenomenological explosion of reality itself. I say this from experience, I've been in one. The entire social order structuring carceral space agitates, volatilizes in intensity, and explodes. Often without warning, dozens, perhaps hundreds of men rush at one another in adrenaline-blind fear and fury. Every person becomes an agent of death and mayhem. Convicts rush to unearth shanks buried strategically just beneath the surface of the yard soil in preparation for this very catastrophic unreality. Inmate-on-inmate violence set loose by this thanatopolitical machine includes brutal and repeated stabbings like automatons stuck in infinite loops, rusted-razor slashings, beatings with bare fists and group pummeling of the vulnerable. Stomping. Throats are strangled and choked,

bodies writhe and wrestle and bite, tear clothes and deep scratch flesh. Blood spills, spittle flies. Vomit. A California prison riot looks like a renaissance painting of hell in motion, dressed in blue with yellow and red streaks. Wood blocks thud upon discharge from gasoline powered hand-cannons as smoke bellows from gun towers - collapsing knees and ankles and issuing concussions; pepper spray cannisters whistle and spew further blindness and pain. Thuds from the gun towers unpredictably transmute into piercing and reverberating cracks as the gunner drops the block gun and assumes lethality - whizzing and indiscriminate death issued from Carbine rifle pierces flesh, erupting bones and ripping bodies and organs apart. Men kneeling atop others and viciously plunging sharpened metal into chest cavities and necks are blasted backward; those trying to run away - shot in the leg, the back, the neck. Death explodes and tumbles through the air with scoped precision at the speed of sound in haphazard direction, snatching life indiscriminately. It is indeed the case that one cannot see into the tower at the guard licking off shots, but this is not the opacity of panopticism. This unidirectional gaze is not meant to discipline and make docile bodies. It is to kill spasmodic ones. The dead-eyed, stupid and pitiless gaze of death itself; the reflection of light off plexiglass like a glimmer in the blind eye of a malevolent demiurge. Your life, mine and the lives of all those around us is forfeited, given up to chance. Do I fight back against this otherly-raced inmate attacking me and potentially get shot, or do I lay on the ground and let him stab me to avoid an executioners' bullet? Here lay inmate choice. The noise of screaming and violence and rifle blast grows so loud you hear nothing but still can feel the vibration of soundwaves against your skull and in your chest. A riot is experienced by those convicts suspended within it as the fabric of reality itself breaking down into pure 360-degree violence and chaotic terror and madness. Like all the

repressed violence in the world has always been right there trying to get loose, and it finally broke free. The prison's telos and ground state, a monstrous death visage. Mask off.

This isn't the SHU. The always-potential riot organizes daily life for every inmate on every single prison yard within the entire California prison panoply. All inmates are subjected to its potential. The mainline yard, as a thanatopolitical machine, produces the always-potential prison riot as the preeminent technology of social, subjective and biological death distribution at the population level of the prison. The explosion of riotous collapse is, on the one hand, a pruning of the prison population through biological death. Those killed are permanently disappeared and no longer a burden to the state, materially or otherwise – within prison or without. On the other hand, riotous collapse issues a series of corporal punishments buckshot-scattered throughout the inmate population that signify exposure to the population-level thanatopolitical machine, less-than-fully-human/savage status: maiming, scarring, bruising and puncture wounds; loss of eyes, limbs and teeth. Traumatization.

Beyond biological death and corporal punishment, a convict epistemology reveals the riot as the galvanization of the carceral surplus engine as circulation machine, the spinning of a series of custodial and bureaucratic wheels that sifts and scatters inmates throughout differential nether regions, the varied hellscapes of the prison. The grievously injured are assigned to medical wards where subjected to substandard medical care and neglect and humiliation to reify one's status as less-than-fully-human. Administrative Segregation and the SHU, well-documented madness-production technologies (Grassian, n.d.; Rhodes, 2004; Kupers, 1999; Price, 2015) are reserved for those "participants in a racial melee" bearing the markings of thanatopolitical exposure. Those charged with instigating the riot are transferred and seeded

to other higher-custody yards throughout the carceral system - a ratcheting up in frequency of exposure to death potentiality the higher the security-level any inmate travels. After release from the medical ward, grievously injured participants, but still breathing, will find themselves scattered and bound within administrative segregation or higher custody yards, as well.

Said differently, prison-riots initiate flows of inmate bodies throughout the space of the prison inscribing less-than-human/savage subjects *deeper within systems of carceral re-uptake*, “*catching more time*,” and *death intensification* from the mainline yard to the SHU, Ad-Seg or higher custody facilities. Creating the conditions by which the yard itself exists in an always-potentially-collapsing state is the chief thanatopolitical technology of the mainline yard meant to bind inmates to the prison as site of permanent disappearance - the issuance of more time, madness, great injury and/or biological death. But it is not the only mainline yard thanatopolitical machine. A thousand other nested machines whirr and pin particular inmates as violence potentialities to bounded concrete spaces and capture institutional flows of bodies; engaged, recombined, retrofitted and recalibrated into ever new and novel combinations - steered by custody and emergent within carceral clutches. The ever-present threat of rape. The one-on-one fighting. The group “regulating” or “disciplining” that occurs intra-rationally. All are thanatopolitical machines. All are made possible by the prison itself, what a prison is, in its very essence. And all justify carceral reuptake and death-exposure intensification. They emerge within conditions of imposed scarcity, sharing the logic of an inmate-on-inmate violence steered by custody - particular violence potentials tied to particular spaces, made possible through a custodial monopolization of institutional mobility. From top to bottom, from the level of the prison population itself, to the level of “inmate groupings,” down to the individual

inmate level - a series of *abandonments* or exposures to death outside of the law, and the withdrawal by guards and prison administrators to positions of relative safety and deniability, and the steering of these institutionally overly-determined forces towards further institutional ends – carceral reuptake and ratcheting up the frequency of death(s) exposure for rendered superfluous and racialized subpopulations that need be disappeared.

What is the contemporary prison, then? A stabilized and rendered-useful, annihilative chaos. A flesh blender. A nested chain or network of thanatopolitical machines composing a surplus engine that issues punishment in excess and subsuming of the law operating at multiple, hierarchical registers throughout carceral space, mutually reinforcing and informing one another; flexing and flowing into ever-novel combinations in order to distribute corporal and/or psychological pain and/or death - social, subjective, biological. The contemporary prison is absolutely transmogrified, completely written over and repurposed in the contemporary moment as prodigiously complex and interlocking thanatopolitical machine. At the population register, the dread prison riot kills. It punishes inmate bodies and minds, and sets in motion carceral flows that embed rendered less-than-fully-human/savage subjects throughout differential centers of carceral pain distribution and death - higher custody yards, total lockdown madness production labs like ad-seg and the SHU, additional court cases, and unmarked graves outside the walls of the institution. Gladiator fights are state-organized, group-register race riots that pit rival factions against one another and, in the process, reify inmates as racialized type. Similar to the population-level race-riot, gladiator fights redistribute digestible bodies throughout the carceral thresher and generate progressive reuptake and deeper inscription for longer and longer stretches of time, guaranteeing inmate-body disappearance

from civil society. A series of punishments issued against individual bodies – the threat of rape, extortion and beat down, steered by custody through establishing initial conditions of lack and indifferentiation (discussed in great detail in chapter four) that guarantee inmate-on-inmate violence’s emergence, weaponizing particular violence potentialities made useful towards custodial ends, and steered. The technology of the always-potential prison riot as chief thanatopolitical technology sets an operative and organizational framework which cascades throughout the entire space of the prison materializing in a series of nested forms throughout the differential regions of the carceral hellscape.

Contemporary prisons are often described as performing a “warehouse” function, even by some theorists that this work relies upon to craft this argument. It is my argument that warehousing is entirely too passive a term and functions as a placeholder in theory, masking an under-theorization. And it tends to disappear something essential. The prison is no warehouse. We weren’t passively stored there. We were subjected to incomprehensible, active, state-organized yet delegated to inmates - and therefore disavowed – brutal and murderous violence. Because this violence was directed at very particular, largely racialized populations – the majority of the prison population Black and Brown - abandonment to the contemporary prison and its thanatopolitical machinery is straight up proto-genocidal. The primary function of the contemporary prison, then, is to *actively abandon a largely racialized, superfluous population within a forcefully bounded and state-totalized space to an active and steered machinery of delegated, proto-genocidal death production*. To read the prison through a biopolitical lens becomes essential then, for the primary mechanism through which those racialized subjects who are “allowed to die” in the United States is within the prison. Said

simply, without knowledge of what happens on the yard, the prison looks like a warehouse. It is a death machine. Without this theoretical link, it is impossible to adequately think the breadth and scale of the carceral function - its role in guaranteeing the coherence of the white-supremacist, neoliberalized American project through the exposure to death of a largely racialized, rendered less-than-fully-human life so that full subjects of white-supremacist sociality may live. An external theoretical approach links up with the convict epistemology as I have modeled here in the recognition that when someone is sentenced to prison, and we know from such external approaches that those sentenced to prison are disproportionately people of color, this is what happens to them (us) once entombed within the prison's opaqueness. Human beings are shoved within the grinding gears and teeth of a monstrous thanatopolitical machinery. A theory of how the prison kills. And for this reason alone, as institution, need be disappeared from the face of the earth. There is no reforming a death machine and anyone who suggests as much collaborates with its refinement and extension. Abolition is the only way out as you can't reform a death camp.

It is peculiarly normalized in our culture that when someone is sentenced to prison, what they are most concerned with is how to survive it. Not the time away from family and friends, nor the rigidity and sparseness of the prison - that is, the punishment they are *actually* sentenced to. It is the state-organized and emergent surplus. The primary concern is the inmate-on-inmate violence. The newly sentenced are afraid of being raped. Extorted. Beaten. Swept up in a riot. Killed. And it's not an unreasonable fear. They will be subjected to some, if not all of that. Guaranteed. And as a society, we largely accept this as "just the way it is" in prison. Fault for these annihilative conditions is most generally not attributed to the organizing

conditions of the prison as established by statecraft - the principles that guarantee the emergence of violence within a *totalized and state-controlled space* - but are instead attributed to the incorrigible nature of inmates themselves, as fundamentally differently-typed human beings. Savages. That's what those jurors in the trial of the Corcoran 8 saw during their tour of the Corcoran segregated housing unit. A disavowed, state-organized and directed violence rendered inmates as fundamentally *un-murderable*. This dissertation argues that surplus punishments are not merely an excess or marginal, but they are fundamental - the primary punishing mechanisms of contemporary carceral practice. And they are the mechanisms through which differently typed, less-than-fully-human/savage inmates are made to appear where economically abandoned subpopulations and otherwise rendered-superfluous people used to be. An appearance necessary so as to generate the very indifference that allows human beings to be disposed of. And all inmates within prison are subjected to this thanatopolitical machinery to varying degrees of intensity. *All fights in prison are gladiator fights. All rapes in prison are steered and orchestrated by the state. All murders in prison are, in a sense, state-sanctioned.* They simply wouldn't have happened without the existence of these institutional monstrosities and the bounding of human beings within them. And it is all rendered utilitarian, within a framework not of warehousing, but of proto-genocidal disappearance. There is no reforming the prison. Its core engine, its driving force and *raison d'etre* as thanatopolitical machinery producing death iterations renders it utterly illegitimate on its face, despite its continual ideological attribution of responsibility to those (us) less-than-fully-human inmates for the incomprehensible terror and endless horror that it itself stages. Responsibility for

inmate-on-inmate violence need be laid back where it belongs, with a carceral state formation that guarantees its inevitability, organizes it, calls it forth.

In 1997 while awaiting sentencing, I was housed on “high power row” in Los Angeles County jail. It was located within a section of the jail known as “old county,” as opposed to the recently completed twin towers facility across the street in Downtown LA. The facility was filthy and decrepit, roach infested, with peeling blue and white paint and fluorescent tube lights covered by yellowed-plastic casings and metal grates that would flicker on and off all throughout the day and night, like strobes. There was no natural light in old county, and no windows. No ventilation. For yard, we were brought to the rooftop, enwrapped in chain link with razor wire and ominous, packed with men facing years and years in state prison. The air was thick with violence and charged electric, a spirit choke. I was never not hungry in county. The Los Angeles County Sheriffs who ran the facility kept the jail freezing cold, and it was always assaultive-loud with the screams of the mad and gangsters threatening or calling out to one another in inaccessible cells. “High-Power” meant I was being housed with those charged with the most serious of crimes - murder, attempted murder, manslaughter, robbery, assault with a deadly weapon, rape. Possession for sale of relatively large volumes of dope. Damn near everyone in high-power was Black or Brown, and damn near everyone was gang affiliated coming from impoverished neighborhoods all throughout Los Angeles County. There were very few first termers, if any, beside myself. I didn’t meet any. Several men on the tier were obviously insane and several more were in the throes of vicious and debilitating drug withdrawals. Or some combination of the two. Several were facing “life” and in the process of fighting their cases in court. Near every day it seemed, someone would come back from court

after having just received a life sentence to await their transfer to state-prison, their forever home. Their lives effectively ruined and stripped from them. Some attacked other inmates or guards immediately. Some became suicidal. Men trying to cut their own necks or throw themselves off the tier, with varying degrees of success. I myself had a “suicide watch” wristband on my arm for mentioning to my attorney that if I got 65 years, I’d rather kill myself than do the time. I wasn’t going to kill myself, but if I were, I’m not sure what the wristband accomplished except to brand me as mentally ill, a “ding,” in the eyes of other inmates. I was told by guards that if I took it off, that constituted a disciplinary infraction and I could receive more time. It was a hell-scape of totalized psychic torture, beyond comprehension for anyone having not been pinned and abandoned within that space.

Each cramped cell had cylindrical bars, two bunk beds made of metal sheet bolted into the side walls with paper thin plastic mattresses, and a stainless-steel toilet and wash basin against the back-center wall. Designed to house four men, each cell had six – a man assigned to each “rack,” and two “floor sleepers” due to overcrowding. There were twenty cells on my tier, and my tier was one of four in the cell block - Alpha, Baker, Charlie and Denver row. Overflowing with bodies. The cell block was so arranged that on each side were two tiers of cells, a lower tier and an upper tier, and they both faced inward toward a Sheriff “catwalk” that ran the length of the tiers behind plexiglass. The cells could not see into each other because they all faced forward towards the center catwalk. Not a full panopticon, because from within our cells, we could see whether the guard was on the catwalk and if we were being observed, but partial in that should the guard “walk the tier” he or she could see into any cell at any time.

As I was escorted to my cell on high power row for the very first time, shackled at the wrist and ankles in paper shoes and a blue jump suit, I could hear convicts yelling “man walking!” as I shuffled. At the time, I didn’t know what that meant. I would come to find out very quickly that was how we, as inmates, could let one another know when custody was approaching. The first man to see a cop on the tier would yell “walking!” and those within ear shot would pick up the call and repeat it, so on and so on down the tier, a relaying notification. If you had any contraband out, hide it. If you were doing anything you shouldn’t be doing, knock it off, because the Sheriffs were approaching. After the issuing of a “walking!” call, the tier gets noticeably quieter, as inmates are trying to hear what the cops are doing, where they are headed and to determine the intensity of their intervention. Is it one Sheriff leisurely walking, doing a run-of-the-mill cell inspection, or the “goon squad” intending to invasively search cells for contraband or perhaps extract an inmate? We made our way about three quarters down the muted tier, and eventually paused at the cell just before mine as one of the Sheriffs put key to lock to open my cell door. As we were paused there, I looked to my right inside of the neighboring cell.

Six young Black men in the four-man cell. Two sitting across from one another on bottom racks, leaning forward with elbows on knees. Three were standing in the insufferably cramped space. And one inmate was slumped forward doggystyle on his elbows and knees, bound at the wrists by what looked to be a torn bed sheet looped through the base of the toilet/wash basin. He had no shirt and his boxers were pulled down below his ass gathered in the crook of his knees. His buttocks were in the air and his face buried in his forearms. No one said anything. Just the sound of the bound inmate’s labored breathing as his rib cage spasmed,

expanding in and out. The inmate standing closest to the bound victim was facing forward, looking directly at us and frozen still as a statue, holding a thin six- or seven-inch-long spear of metal at his chest - perhaps a broken off part of a clothes hanger, thin. On the wash basin, a compacted length of toilet paper rolled into a cylindrical shape, burning gently. I would eventually learn that these were called "bombs," and if you had a length of toilet paper and a way to spark a flame, you could keep a fire burning for several minutes for cooking within cells or... other uses. Some of that inmate ingenuity that people on the outside make a fuss about that reifies some notion of devious, criminal intelligence. I made eye contact with the young Black man holding the piece. And he stared back at me, dead in the eye. And his communication was clear. This was not my business. I felt immediate fear and looked away. The cops were right there standing with me, it was impossible for them not to have seen the display, too. The bound inmate on the floor, and the standing inmate with his metal and flame. Why wasn't he trying to hide the weapon upon hearing the "walking" call echoing down the tier? The cop working the lock to my cell got it open; they escorted me inside, had me stick cuffed wrists back out through the slot in the cell bars and unbound me, and locked the cell behind me. And they withdrew from the tier without a word said to anyone in the neighboring cell.

As soon as the guards had locked the tier gate behind them, the noise next door began. My new cellmates rushed to the bars in order to get a better sense of what was happening. The sounds of struggle that would become so familiar. The dull thuds of forearm and fist into flesh. The squeaking of rubbered soles on floor which to this day makes me jump and look 'round me. The guttural groans. The thump of flesh against concrete and steel. And the screaming. It went

on like that for what felt like an hour. My cellmates began taking turns sitting on the bottom rack that shared a wall with the cell next door where the inmate-on-inmate torture was happening. If you went all the way up to the edge of it and leaned forward with your face into the bars and peered at the reflection in the plexiglass off of the sheriff's catwalk, you could see what was happening in the cell next door through a muted reflection. Could literally see the view that any sheriff walking the catwalk would see, but backwards, like a mirror. The view we were supposed to be denied. I took my turn. Not to do so would have come off to my cell mates as strange. It would have signified I was afraid to look, unfamiliar.

The inmate with the metal hanger was deliberately heating and slowly rotating the tip of the metal spear over the bomb. As he did so, the other two standing inmates in the cell were assuring that the bound inmate did not escape his wrist ties by holding him down, while simultaneously beating him round the ribs, the face and the thighs. They had a shirt wrapped around his mouth, and were pulling it back and upwards, gagging him. When the tip was glowing sufficiently hot, the inmate with the metal hanger drew it close and inspected its readiness. He then hunched over the bound inmate, put one hand to his shoulder and gripped tightly, then began to violently sodomize - to repeatedly anally stab the bound inmate with the searing metal shank. I flew back from the view, aghast as the screams of the victim echoed down the tier. I went to the back of the cell, trying to posture that I wasn't utterly terrified. With my vacancy, another of my cellies immediately took my place to get another look at the abominable scene unfolding next door.

The muffled screaming lasted for an excruciatingly long time. And throughout its entirety I kept wondering to myself, *where are the fucking cops?* Why won't they walk the god-

damned tier? I had been in this cell for an hour at least, and I hadn't seen a single cop since they had pinned me here. They had to have heard the screams. I actually prayed. Please god, send a cop. None ever came. One of many prayers that went unanswered.

At some point after the screaming had subsided, I went back to the view at the front of the cell. As I looked towards the still-bound inmate through the plexiglass of the catwalk, he caught my reflection. The torturers were taking a break, tired from the exertion. We locked reflected eyes.

“Help me, Wood! Help me!”

His voice was muted but forceful, pleading and desperate – directed towards me but quietly enough not to attract the Sheriff. He didn't want to be seen as a snitch by the other inmates on the tier. Tears of pain and unspeakable terror ran down his face. This was the first time I was interpellated as “Wood,” a white inmate-gangster. I know he meant me; he was looking directly at me. In addition, I was the only white man in the cell, on the entire tier from what I saw. And I responded to the hail, became a wood in that very moment, by saying the only thing I could say.

“I can't.”

I consciously tried to communicate with my eyes through that milky and dim reflection how authentically sorry I was that I couldn't help him. I was desperate for him to understand that. I think I was trying to cling to some humanity in that moment, have it recognized through his eyes. And I couldn't help him. I was immobilized in a cell. I couldn't yell out for the Sheriff because, even though early in my incarceration, I knew that to do so would be snitching and could get me killed. He himself wasn't yelling for the Sheriff for the same reason. He hoped I

would do it. I just said, “I’m sorry,” withdrew from the corner, from his gaze and his pleading, and back into the cell as far as I could get.

After I had pulled away from the view in the plexiglass, I turned to my cellie Moose, a Sureño from Anaheim, and I asked him,

“Why are they doing that to him?”

He informed me that we were on a “Crip tier.” In High-Power custody, Crips and Bloods were segregated. Whole cell blocks were either Crip or Blood. Moose told me that the inmate being tortured was from a Blood set, and had “disrespected” a sheriff prior. As punishment, Sheriff’s had initiated a cell change and abandoned the Blood, intentionally, in a Crip cell. Sheriffs hadn’t looked into the neighboring cell when they were escorting me onto the tier because they already knew what was happening within. They had facilitated and organized it. Where else would an inmate get a metal coat hanger from but a cop that brought his uniform or jacket into the facility on one? They knew what would happen if they locked a Blood gang member into a Crip cell and they weren’t walking the catwalk because that would defeat the purpose: the issuance of an inmate-delegated extrajudicial punishment expressive of an unspoken carceral desire.

“That’s what you get for causing problems with the Sheriffs!” said Moose.

And he laughed cynically. Partially at the absurdity of the situation, and partially because he was a psychotic in jail on an attempted murder charge for stabbing somebody with the cake knife at their own birthday party. And partially at my saucer-liked eyes reaction to what he said.

“Welcome to county, Wood!”

The captive being stabbed with a searing, broken off piece of coat hanger next door was caught within a custodially determined flow within a logic of extra-legal punishment, pinned within a particular space and left to a group of inmates articulated as violence potentials (Crip cell), and subjected to inmate-on-inmate violence to meet the perverse and extra-legal objectives of custody. This was my first experience with thanatopolitical machinery, though I didn't have the words for it then. It happened on my very first day on high-power row. Whole tiers weaponized, transmogrified as biomechanical torture machines of the exact scale and caliber of the rape cell to which Eddie was abandoned – Blood tiers to punish and abandon Crips to death, and vice versa. The capturing of bodies, flows and the monopoly over movement weaponized in order to stage horrific and perverse inmate-on-inmate violence. Both the torture victim and I, and everyone else on that tier and in that jail more generally, were abandoned to a spectrum of increasingly tortuous death-potentiality. He to the coat hanger, and me, to his screams. Differential deaths indeed and differing along a spectrum of violence intensity, his biological and mine the death of the capacity to help someone and a pressure towards subjective annihilation – madness - and the stripping away of something that makes us human. The capacity to help another human being. And the guards withdrew, to absent-god knows where, and let the thanatopolitical machinery eat. That day, and everyday thereafter for the entirety of my prison term, delegated and disavowable inmate-on-inmate violence in ever-novel iterations and combinations, processing and digesting superfluous flesh, killing some so that some others outside of the prison, within our white-supremacist sociality, may live.

I began this chapter with Michel Foucault and the attention he drew to the transition in the form and object of punishment in the 19th century. Sovereign power, a public display of

magnificent violence directed against the body of the condemned was transitioned into a disciplinary power grounded in biopolitical administration meant to organize, train, monitor, evaluate and examine in order to produce docile bodies. From a public execution to a timetable. And now, we arrive at the point. As Foucault asked, so may we. *What is it that happened here?* How did the prison, as a reform away from corporal punishment in favor of a disciplinary modality – the manufacture of “docile bodies” (Foucault, 1995, p. 138) and the shaping of souls - come to emerge as *a theatre for the staging of brutality* amongst inmates? How is it that the SHU yard became an indifferent rape and execution chamber of the state? What are those overdetermining forces that constitute nested thanatopolitical machinery, a surplus engine driving carceral practice - rendering thanatopolitical subjects that may be abandoned to death? What forces hollow the law inside-out, pushing the prison beyond itself and rewrite it as an extra-legal space of lawlessness in which its occupants may be killed by anyone else, at any time? Is this a return of sovereign power in some mutated and perverse form, the collapse of disciplinarity? Or is it something new entirely? Where the fuck was I?

To make sense of the transition from Foucault’s disciplinary power to the rewriting of the prison as thanatopolitical machine, we must explore the social and economic revolution that is neoliberalism, and its effects on the prison yard. And it is to an analysis of the effects of neoliberalism and its relationship with the prison that we now turn.

Abstract:

In chapter one, I argued that the primary punishments that any inmate is subjected to within prison is an extrajudicial thanatopolitical machinery of state-organized, yet disavowable forms of inmate-on-inmate violence. In this chapter, I turn to L  ic Wacquant, Ruth Wilson Gilmore and others to help explain that under neoliberalism, the production circuit between capitalism and the prison is torn asunder and a radical caesura is made to appear - the emergence of two circuits now disconnected. The production circuit of civil society remains biopolitically administered, while the latter emerges - the hyperghetto-prison circuit - always-already necropolitical and calling forth of a thanatopolitical machinery of inmate-on-inmate violence. America cleaved in-half along carceral lines between those who are made to live because economically "productive" and those who, within a context of radical and lethal indifference, are "allowed to die" through exposure to thanatopolitical machinery because rendered economically useless. The prison realizes its proto-genocidal disappearances of largely-racialized populations rendered-superfluous through three forms of death: social, subjective (madness) and biological. I end the chapter through relating an incident of inmate-on-inmate violence only made possible through neoliberal recalibration of the prison yard as abandonment site and the resultant lethal indifference of custody towards rendered less-than-fully-human inmate life.

Chapter Two - Perverse Indifference – Neoliberalism and the Transformation of the Prison Yard

When sentenced to prison, every inmate is abandoned to a series of punishments that are in excess of what they were sentenced to endure by the court. These punishments all taken together constitute a *carceral surplus engine* powering the contemporary prison and are composed of varied forms of inmate-on-inmate violence; nested *thanatopolitical machines*, flesh and concrete-fused punishment "tools" to quote former SHU guard Roscoe Pondexter, towards which each and every individual inmate is exposed. These inmate-on-inmate forms of violence emerge at the individual, group and population registers of the contemporary prison and do so perfectly predictably because overdetermined by the foundational logics of carcerality itself: the imposition of scarcity atop a captive and undifferentiated population within razor-wire bounded spaces, with the state possessing a monopoly over inmate movement. That is, thanatopolitical machinery/inmate-on-inmate violence is called forth and

guaranteed by what a prison *is* in its very structural essence; a pitting of human beings against one another through institutional organizing logics, harnessed and made useful towards custodial ends. Those ends include the exposing of less-than-full-human beings, violent “savages” (see chapter three) retroactively produced both materially and ideologically through the very exposure to the prison, to a spectrum of tortuous death-potentials – social death, subjective death and/or biological death within spaces outside of the law yet emergent at its very heart - within the prison. Along with various corporal and psychological batterings too numerous to list. And as was evident in the cases of the state-organized rape of Eddie Dillard as well as with the extrajudicial execution of Preston Tate in the midst of a guard-organized gladiator fight, both punishments occurring deep within the state-totalized, technological control pit that is the Corcoran SHU, the intensity of thanatopolitical exposure/punishment is ratcheted ever-upward the deeper one is digested within the carceral belly. Once crossing the liminal threshold into the carceral interior, each and every inmate is rendered both potential victim and executioner through carceral inscription itself; no violence too grotesque, too reprehensible within these state-totalized spaces - the shadow side or unconscious of the civil formation. The prison is a ladder and hosts a series of ever-intensifying spaces of death-production within itself – nested and barbarous monstrosities recombined, recalibrated and retrofitted into ever-novel and devouring forms and always-already disavowable by the very state apparatuses that produce and guarantee them.

As noted in chapter 1, a collectively unconscious drive - unspoken and vicious - animates the carceral surplus engine. Although implicit, the drive is indirectly observable as the very existence of thanatopolitical machinery implies its existence; calls them forth in the interstices

of the law. What forces organize the drive, this unspoken carceral desire that overdetermines the emergence of a thanatopolitical machinery that has entirely subsumed the carceral interior and given rise to those occasions for the satisfaction of perverse custodial enjoyments, whether individual or collective? And if I am correct in my assertion that as Foucault discerned a radical transition in form and object of criminal punishment two centuries ago, we in the late 20th/early 21st century may similarly distinguish a further transition away from disciplinarity and back towards corporal punishment but in the novel form of state-organized, yet delegated and entirely disavowed inmate-on-inmate violence, then another question remains to be answered: *why* was the prison written-over from an institution meant to manufacture docile bodies towards an apparatus so organized as to *break* human beings, entire communities and (sub)populations, through *abandoning* them to myriad forms of death – social, subjective and/or biological within the contemporary prison? To answer these questions judiciously, we have to come to terms with two simultaneous movements within the United States that exist in causal relation to one another: neoliberalism in the economic register and the expansion and repurposing of the prison regime on the social front - the former necessitating the reorganization and amplification of the latter.

Neoliberalism is a contested term. Critics and sympathizers alike utilize it rather haphazardly, an “empty signifier” (Laclau, 2007, pp. 69-71) that connotes while simultaneously articulating together some combination of economic policies, social changes, ideologies and material effects, often to the exclusion of precise definition. Other terms are often used interchangeably – late-liberalism, post-Fordism, post-industrialism, late-modernity, and late-stage capitalism are a few - and reference some varied set of principles having to do with

privatization, the collapse of the public sphere, globalization, the withdrawal of the welfare state, deindustrialization, small government, and/or hyper-individualism. For the sake of precision, I will be adopting the definition of neoliberalism as developed by Loïc Wacquant (2009c) in his theoretical coda in *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity*. I have chosen Wacquant's definition of neoliberalism as most discerning for my purposes because written within it, as one of its four essential pillars, is an accounting for the unleashing of the carceral beast in the United States beginning in the mid-1970's to remedy any variety of "social ills," largely targeting racialized subjects of the capital-abandoned inner-cities as an integral component of neoliberal restructuring, itself. According to Wacquant, "the invasive, expansive, and expensive penal state is not a deviation from neoliberalism but one of its constituent ingredients" (Wacquant, 2009b, p. 308). Said simply, one cannot adequately come to terms with "small-government" neoliberalism without taking account of "a prison-building and -filling plan that government analysts have called 'the biggest... in the history of the world'" (Gilmore, 2007, p. 5), and vice-versa. Yet many theorists of neoliberalism do precisely that, and if attempting to explain the growth of the prison as a "catchall solution to social problems" (Gilmore, 2007, p. 5) at all, do so as an unfortunate or curious aside as opposed to an indispensable logic of it. Instead, for Wacquant, the emergence of neoliberalism and the rise of the carceral state cannot be disentangled as neoliberalism is constituted by four conjoining principles:

1. *Economic deregulation*
2. *Welfare state devolution, retraction, and recomposition*
3. *The cultural trope of individual responsibility*
4. *An expansive, intrusive, and proactive penal apparatus* (Wacquant, 2009c, p. 307)

Broadly speaking, neoliberalism is the state's organizing, performance and ideological dissemination of the principle of "small government," or, the state's staging of its own incapacity within economic and social registers of governing. It is also the abandoning by the state itself of responsibilities historically linked with statecraft to market mechanisms across a plethora of instances. Specifically, and beginning in the mid-1970's, the United States renounced the goal of full employment and transitioned from a state-subsidized, urban-industrial economy, also known as "military-Keynesianism," to a suburban and services-based, post-Keynesian economy. Simultaneously and over the last 40 years or so, capital has been progressively financialized by the state and made nimble (as opposed to remaining anchored within a domestic manufacturing base), wage-labor desocialized and made ever-more precarious, and the welfare state has been progressively retracted and ideologically denigrated. By the year 1996, subsequent democratic and republican administrations from the Reagan administration onward had successfully converted welfare into a springboard towards insecure and flexibilized labor - in democratic party Orwellianism, from "welfare to workfare" (Wacquant, 2009, p. 79).

With the conscious and organized strangulation of the social state and the abandonment of military-Keynesianism² - the substantial federal subsidy dedicated to war-industry guaranteeing not only rather obscene levels of corporate profitability but also functional employment for large segments of the domestic work force within a robust

² In 2022, the United States is on track to spend \$778 billion on its military budget, around \$37 billion more than in 2021. Thus, military spending continues its historical trajectory of increase to utterly obscene levels, constituting 39-percent of total global military spending. The difference being that, under neoliberalism, this spending no longer guarantees functional employment for large segments of the domestic work force (Davis, 2021)

manufacturing sector - came the historically unprecedented expansion of the carceral apparatus:

... the police, the courts, and the prison are, upon close examination, the somber and stern face that the leviathan turns everywhere toward the dispossessed and dishonored categories trapped in the hollows of the inferior regions of social and urban space by economic deregulation and the retrenchment of schemes of social protection. (Wacquant, 2009b, p. xviii)

On the one hand, “small government” means capital deregulation, or, the state’s abdication of its responsibility to structure markets so as to prevent capital’s worst excesses and the resultant ravaging of vulnerable communities. And it is also the withdrawal of the welfare state as safety net for those who fell between the cracks throughout neoliberalism’s radical reorganization of social, economic and political life. On the other hand, small government through its “law and order” mandate is anything but small - in fact quite the opposite. Since the mid 1970’s, the state’s carceral sector has grown immense as resources once dedicated to providing some semblance of security from market rapaciousness have not evaporated into thin air but have instead near uniformly been redirected towards the prison and its armaments of surveillance, capture, and death-exposure. And despite saturating ideologies pronouncing the efficiencies of so-called “small government” promulgated by neoliberal acolytes on both sides of the mainstream political spectrum, in reality, the state has grown *larger* - more intrusive, authoritarian, and brutal - not to mention expensive, under neoliberal restructuring when it comes to managing the deleterious social consequences that it has itself unleashed. In particular, with regards to disappearing rendered-superfluous and racialized subjects from civil society, those Black and Brown people and the poor more generally that occupy abandoned and denigrated regions of social space.

Under neoliberalism, the urban-industrial manufacturing base has been outsourced through iterating waves of capital flight while both democrat and republican administrations have worked diligently and in tandem with their corporate masters to defang and undermine unions. Labor's right to collective recourse and negotiation has been effectively dismantled. As a result, massive layoffs across varied, essential industries have condensed the unit cost of labor and factory jobs with good benefits in the metropolis' have evaporated while lesser-paid and non-unionized work in suburban services has metastasized in their stead. Simultaneously and across the board - at the local, state and federal level - social programs have been mortally slashed or outright eliminated, and welfare has been effectively abolished. Aid programs to families and children in need have been mercilessly withdrawn, and spending on mental health programs ruthlessly co-opted towards funding the expanding punitive bureaucracies. Not only mental health dollars, but resources formerly dedicated more generally towards the social wing of the state – whether in early childhood education, health care, transportation, jobs programs etc. – have been systematically siphoned off by an ever-more voracious carceral bureaucratic field, which simply could not have grown so appallingly massive without vampirically syphoning off revenue streams from varied social programs.

As the state withdrew and capital fled from the city in the Reagan-Bush era (and beyond), social institutions and welfare agencies disappeared, leaving an urban wasteland... in the ghettos of Brooklyn, on Chicago's South Side, and in the barrios of East Harlem and East Los Angeles, where aside from a heavy police presence there is little evidence of government. (my addition) (Aidi, 2007, p. 225)

The "penal dragnet" (Wacquant, 2009, p. 297) composed of the police, jails, courts, prison, probation and parole agents and their armaments and capture, containment and

surveillance technologies was cast within the nether regions of social space to grab ahold of vast numbers of people suffering social abandonment and economic dislocation under this structural recalibration of state capacity to varying degree of intensity, dependent, in no small measure, on racial assignation and class affiliation. Under neoliberalism then, the police and the prison have largely been repurposed as social-cleansing agents,

...a maneuver which aims to sweep the streets clean of human 'debris;' part of the process of exclusion concomitant with the emergence of a society with a large marginalized and impoverished population that has to be suppressed and contained. (Young, 1999, p. 137)

The penal apparatus has stepped into the void generated through the retrenchment of the social wing of the state and is effectively tasked with scrubbing neoliberal civil society of its internal contradictions as manifest in, and *only* in, *people*. Said simply, neoliberalism can't put all of its citizens to work. And that is both a material and ideological problem as it gives lie to neoliberalism's worn-out pronouncements about market efficiency; hordes of Black and Brown able-bodied people can't be seen to be overflowing city streets. Better to get them out of the way. As Angela Davis said so frankly, "prisons do not disappear problems, they disappear human beings" (Davis, n.d.).

Those most deleteriously impacted, the structurally abandoned and already-racialized subpopulations made economically redundant to an ever-delimiting capital in the name of "efficiencies," are themselves articulated as themselves *personally* responsible for their structural precarity through neoliberal ideologies that foreground notions of extreme individualism. Whole subpopulations, largely racialized, are articulated by hegemonic politicians and their media sycophants as making "bad choices;" on its face, an absurd and profoundly racist contradiction, as it cannot explain why so many largely racialized "individuals," as a

group, are making such bad choices without resorting to the most venomous tropes about inferior, non-European cultures. Within neoliberal explanatory frameworks, any analysis taking account of the socioeconomic forces in which individual choice and race itself is constituted, be damned.

Resultantly, in 1975, the total number of human beings in jails and prisons in the United States was under 300,000. By 1980, that number had grown to 500,000. From 1980 to 1990, the total number of incarcerated people increased at *8% per year* adding 2000 new inmates per week, and by 1990 the number of human beings slowly digested within the carceral belly had *doubled* to a million, radically and disproportionately racialized. “Half of these prisoners (were) African-Americans and three-fourths are people of color” (Rhodes, 2009, p. 9). In ten years, that number *doubled again*, and by June of 2000 there were close to *2 million people held captive within United States’ jails, state and federal prisons* (Wacquant, 2009, p. 114); one adult male in 20 and one Black man in 10 embedded within state systems of surveillance, capture and/or control (Wacquant, 2009, p.134). If we include all human beings under the direct control of the criminal justice system –incarcerated, on probation or parole – by 2018 that number swells to 6.7 million adults — or 1 person in 37 (Jones, 2018). The total number of human beings held captive in jail and in prison in the United States has been relatively stable, hovering around two million since the year 2000, and by March of 2019, *the United States held 2.1 million people in various carceral sites*, including local jails, federal and state prisons and immigration detention centers (Kang-Brown, et. al., 2021) and close to *8 million under the supervision of the criminal justice system* in total. The United States, in absolute terms and as a percent of its population, is the most aggressive incarcerator of its own citizens in the history of the world, and if those

under supervision of the criminal justice system (incarcerated, on probation or parole) were counted as a city, it would be the second most populous city in the country just behind the city of New York (World Population Review, 2021). The California Department of Corrections, the prison system in which I did my time, increased its prisoner population *500 percent* between 1982 and 2000, with “African-Americans and Latinos compris(ing) two-thirds of the state’s 160,000 prisoners.” A full 25 percent of California’s inmates are noncitizens. Between 1984 and 2005, the state built twenty-four new prisons to host its burgeoning captive population and the C.D.C. became the state’s largest and most well-funded agency employing 54,000 people (Gilmore, 2007, p. 7-8), effectively transmogrifying California into “the first penal colony of the democratic era” (Wacquant, 2009, 154).

This sevenfold increase in the numbers of people transformed into carceral fodder over the last forty or so years, corresponding *exactly* to the period of neoliberalism’s instantiation, has not been applied evenly across populations nor geographic territory of the United States. Instead, the massive carceral upsurge has been specifically targeted, and most disastrously impacts those racialized subjects trapped within the great metropolitan “hyperghettoes.” In *Deadly Symbiosis* (2001), Wacquant traces a series of structural alterations imposed on the Fordist-era ghetto under neoliberalism with profound and deleterious consequence, effectively converting it into a form of open-air prison. For the mid-twentieth century capitalist “Golden Age” ghetto differs radically from the contemporary hyperghetto in that it was once a “Janus-faced” social form (Wacquant, 2001, p. 107) – on the one hand segregating and containing the racialized other at a physical and symbolic distance from white-supremacist civil society and as a reservoir for cheap, exploitable (Black) labor to the financial fortification of whiteness. But, on

the other hand, the ghetto also provided some protection from that very same brutally rapacious white-supremacy surrounding it on all sides. It had a variegated internal class structure - working class Black men and women lived alongside of an upwardly mobile and well-financed Black bourgeoisie. Black culture flourished with artists, musicians, philosophers and novelists generating animating visions of racial uplift and socioeconomic mobility. There existed an abundance of factory jobs within a robust, inner-city manufacturing sector, and near everyone in the ghetto who was desirous of work was steadily employed. There also existed a dynamic Black-owned/Black-ran economy— barbershops, beauty parlors and markets generative of a “path to economic independence from whites” (Wacquant, 2001, p. 106). A rich network of local, communal organizations anchored daily life – the Black press, political organizations representative of the needs, demands and aspirations of the community, social clubs and fraternal organizations that functioned as springboards for the development and strengthening of communal ties. There existed a host of specialized and dynamic educational institutions and a Black church that was foundational to organizing community and fostering resilience in shared struggle as against racial oppression. While the ghetto was, without question, a result of abominable racial domination established through both legal and extra-legal violence, it also functioned as an infrastructure for group fortification and self-defense, buffering Black residents from numerous external threats, material and symbolic, posed by the larger white-supremacist social formation that surrounded it. Under neoliberalism, these positive attributes of the Fordist-era ghetto have been mercilessly undone. The ghetto has instead become a *hyperghetto*, coming to bear deep structural resemblance with the prison, itself.

It is as against these economically abandoned, precarious and vulnerable people within these state-neglected reaches of social space that hypermilitarized police forces were set loose in order to hunt down, capture and contain the supernumerary masses made so through neoliberal recalibration. Now, as scandalous as it is monstrous, one of every six Black men in the United States has been or is currently locked up, and *one in three* is destined to be at some point in their life. One in six Latinx men will similarly find themselves stewing in the carceral belly (Sentencing Project, 2021). With regards to the young Black men inhabiting the abandoned zones of neoliberal relegation, by the year 1990, *forty percent of Black males between 18 and 35 years old were either in prison, in jail, on probation or parole*. The carceral front is often the only “point of contact” between young Black men and the state and “the vast majority of Black men from the core of the ghetto pass through the prison at the beginning of the 21st-century” (Wacquant, 2009, p.63). These dynamics are stable up through the contemporary moment, with the hyperghetto and the prison forming a closed loop, a “single carceral-continuum” (Wacquant, 2009, pp. 206-207) that the young-Black-racialized-abandoned traverse – from hyperghetto, to the prison and back, accumulating symbolic markers and defamed statuses that function to bind individuals tighter-and-tighter to the carceral circuit. Within this context, it is easy to see that it is not mere hyperbole for one of the greatest theorists of the contemporary prison, Dylan Rodriguez, to repeatedly label the untethering of the carceral beast against largely racialized human beings trapped within the hyperghettoes as a form of genocidal, low-intensity “domestic warfare that appears to target ‘civilian populations’ ... for social liquidation” (Rodriguez, 2006, p. 6).

To understand why, we must understand the formation of the ghetto as most recent iteration within a long legacy of “ethnoracial enclosure(s)” (Wacquant, 2009, p. 201) meant to keep Blackness at physical and symbolic distance. The disparagement of the ghetto is obscenely normalized and often passes without reflection or comment, let alone any comprehensive understanding of the racist brutality that led to its historical emergence as third form of ethnoracial enclosure to have existed in the United States - the first, chattel slavery and the second, Jim Crow - and as foil for the construction of white-supremacist civil society and the normative subjectivity within. Students at predominantly white colleges throughout the country have, in recent years, come to public attention for hosting “ghetto parties” (Toth, 2016) where mostly white students act out the most degrading stereotypes of Black urban youth. To whiteness, being “ghetto” has come to signify brashness or being “uncivilized,” and graduate from those very same universities without any awareness of the barbarous violence that has structured ghettos as spaces of race concentration and defilement in the first place. Let alone Black resiliency and resistance in the face of them. That level of racist ignorance is not accidental, but is entirely ideological towards rendering incomprehensible the series of ethnoracial enclosures and the connections between them that have allowed for an operationalization of white-supremacist racism and identity as the foundational and reproductive principle of U.S. civil society itself. And the role of the prison in guaranteeing its coherence.

(Hyper)Ghetto Formations

Between 1910 and 1930, 1.5 million African Americans fled the Jim Crow south toward the Northern metropolises. The eruption of World War I engendered massive shortages in factory labor, and Black migrants in hopes of escape from the vicious Jim Crow system fled to northern cities and the promise of greater prosperity and social inclusion. Between 1940 and 1960, another great wave of 3 million African Americans migrated northward and for similar reasons: to fill the vacuum in labor-demand created by World War II. These two great migrations of Black sharecroppers, laborers and their families were, in effect, a massive proletarianization of Black men and women - a pulling-into the wartime Keynesian factory system of Black peoples formerly embedded within systems racialized exploitation and wealth extraction that drove the agrarian economy of the Jim Crow south (Wacquant, 2009, p. 201).

With regards to the Golden State,

...by 1940, the federal government was investing 10% of its spending in California... millions, including several hundred thousand African-Americans, moved to California to build war machines, and while wartime wages were indexed to race and gender, workers across the board made more money than they had ever dreamed possible. This prosperous period (1938-45) changed the states demographics, and particularly the racial structure of cities, as Black homeowners established communities in San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley, Richmond, and Los Angeles. (Gilmore, 2007, p. 35)

To the nation's shame, the white-supremacist liberal body politic of northern cities did not welcome Black migrants escaping southern white terrorism with open arms. Since the nation's founding, whiteness has imposed a series of sociospatial boundaries upon Blackness in order to keep the two races apart, both materially and symbolically. In fact, white-supremacy largely constituted race in the United States through these "infrastructures of race" (Nemser, 2017) - mechanisms of enclosure and domination meant to erect distinct spaces and to enforce strict sociosymbolic boundaries, constitutive of modern categories of race. As Daniel Nemser

argues, “race is as much a question of space as it is a question of people and populations. Space is the grid of intelligibility that gives race its form and makes it legible, even thinkable” (2017, p. 2). These ghettos, as infrastructures of race, functioned not only to keep the racialized other in a permanent “somewhere else” (Schenwar & Law, 2020, p. 22) thus constituting our modern ontologies of racial difference, but simultaneously functioned as Black-labor extraction devices to the historical and financial fortification of whiteness.

The first white-supremacist system of ethnoracial enclosure in the United States that simultaneously constituted Blackness and supplemental white-supremacist categories of racial thought through relegating “othered” human beings within itself was chattel slavery – millions of captured and enslaved Africans and their descendants were pitilessly consigned to an inferior, less-than-human status and subjected to unspeakable atrocities with whites negatively defining their very sense of full-humanness and freedom in differential opposition to the less-than-human enslaved person who produced and performed annihilative labor on their behalf. Jim Crow, the American-apartheid system, was the second - an infrastructure of racial delineation defined by codified segregation of public space enforced through both legal and extrajudicial terrorism, deployed by a southern white-supremacist body politic against Blacks as less-than-fully-human symbolic other. “Separate but equal” was of course anything but and functioned to keep Blacks at a distance from white-supremacist civil society proper, while simultaneously locking Blackness within inferior socioeconomic position wherein Black labor was extracted at less-than-full market value to the financial benefit of whiteness allowing for its disproportionate, historical accumulation of wealth.

When Black migrants fled the exploitative Jim Crow system northward in hopes of escape from brutalizing whiteness and towards greater equality, they were instead met with a series of white-initiated race riots between 1918 and 1919 in St. Louis, Chicago, Houston, and many other cities besides (Wacquant, 2009, p. 202). In addition, a series of newly initiated and restrictive covenants determining where Black people could settle constrained Black movement and aspirations, forcing Black refugees of Southern terror to concentrate within cramped, underserved and dilapidated space at a physical and symbolic distance from white society proper. An informal white apartheid movement in the nation's East and West, dedicated to maintaining racial distance, distinctness and exploitation

...culminated (in California) in a state constitutional amendment, organized by the realtors' association and passed by two-thirds of the electorate, that guaranteed the right of home and other property owners to refuse to sell to anybody for any reason. (Gilmore, 2007, p.36)

The ghetto, as third white-supremacist form of ethnoracial enclosure after slavery and Jim Crow, was thus overdetermined by the threat of both legal and extrajudicial terroristic violence from both state apparatuses and their deputized, informal peckerwood militias in the south, white-initiated race riot in the North, and through their restrictive covenants that determined where racialized subjects could live. The ghettos, as biopolitical infrastructures meant to separate and contain Blackness at a material and symbolic distance from white-supremacist civil society proper, were the latest in a long line of "material systems that enable(d) racial categories to be thought, ascribed, and lived, as well as the systems of domination and accumulation these categories make possible as a result" (Nemser, 2017, p.4). Although life in the metropolitan ghettos was qualitatively better for Black refugees fleeing the racial terrorism of the South, it was not the equality of status and opportunity that many

migrants/refugees hoped for. While offered greater prospects for limited economic mobility than under Jim Crow and receiving some limited recognition through the courts including the ability to frequent public places that in the South were “white-only,” white-supremacy bound and locked Black proletarians into a subservient and secondary position of great economic marginality and social precarity. The ghetto, the third system of ethnoracial enclosure after Chattel slavery and Jim Crow, was exactly similar to those previous systems of racial domination, terroristic violence and extortion in that it functioned as organized wealth extraction device, forcefully imposed by the white-supremacist body politic through the threat and actuality of violence in order to maintain “the social and symbolic distance needed to prevent the odium of ‘amalgamation’” (Wacquant, 2009, p. 202).

As the war-time employment structure of the inner-city ghetto collapsed, those pinioned to it had no viable means of escape because generalized white-supremacist hostility surrounding/constituting it was still viciously active and backed by state power. By the 1960’s, the civil rights movement, Black militancy and other associated forms of concerted activism had made substantial gains in dismantling the Jim Crow system and towards the attainment of national civil and voting rights. Movements towards racial justice were no longer willing to accept a shunting off into the inferior regions of social and economic space and began to look towards the ghetto - what Martin Luther King, Jr. described as “the slow, stifling death of a kind of concentration camp life” (quoted from Wacquant, 2009, p. 203) - as the next proper target in their drive towards racial equality.

The Watts rebellion of 1965 against police brutality was a “conscious enactment (even if ‘spontaneous’ in a Leninist sense) to inequality in Los Angeles.” (Gilmore, 2007, p. 39). The

Black Panthers formed in Oakland, California - a militant and disciplined community self-defense organization grounded in Marxist principles that terrified reactionary white-supremacist society and engendered hostile, institutional reaction including state assassinations and counter-insurgency operations usually reserved for foreign enemies of the state. When Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights movement began to redirect the same non-violent civil disobedience strategies used successfully to break-up Jim Crow apartheid toward the Northern ghettos, the civil rights movement was met with utter dismay and both legal and extra-legal forms of violence from the northern *liberal* establishment. Jim Crow in the South had functioned as a type of fetishistic disavowal mechanism for white-supremacist sociopolitical configurations north of the Mason-Dixon line; racism was supposed to be a problem of those crackers down there, not us “tolerant” and liberal Northerners. “Tolerance” for Blackness at a sociosymbolic distance and racial equality are two different things entirely, and while white liberals supported King and the civil rights movement in their efforts to dismantle Southern apartheid, when the civil rights movement arrived in Chicago in 1966 to challenge the ghetto as sociospatial reserve, it was a step too far. Instead of receiving support from the liberal political establishment, the civil rights movement was met with 4000 national guard troops, white mob violence, media castigation and political resistance from city hall to the White House (Wacquant, 2009, p. 203).

Explosive “riots,” what Gilmore called spontaneous resistances, rocked hundreds of cities across the country in the late 1960’s as Blackness attempted to breach the walls of the ghettos as white-supremacy attempted to fortify them in order to keep Blackness in its physical and symbolic place. The Civil Rights Movement, Black militants and their allies were no

longer willing to submit to second-class status and, in demanding their equality, were met with the brutal fist of white-supremacist violence from coast-to-coast. The walls of the ghetto as sites of racial contestation and ethnoracial enclosure were failing, culminating in nationwide tumult and urban disorder after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. A new mechanism of ethnoracial enclosure, meant to shore up white-supremacist domination and subjectivity, was being called forth.

It was within this context that Richard Nixon was elected to the white house in 1972 through helping to articulate a new hegemony, a reactionary and white-supremacist voting bloc rooted in a promised return to “law and order as the appropriate response to domestic insecurity, whatever its root causes.” (Gilmore, 2007, p. 40) Within this racist discourse, Black civil unrest was successfully conflated with *criminality* as opposed to being recognized as borne of a legitimate grievance, as perfectly predictable sociopolitical response from the victims of our centuries-long white-supremacist history. Within the new “law and order” hegemony, the proper response to Black civil unrest and activism of the late 1960’s was to repress it through rolling out the police and to refortify the walls of the ghetto through shutting the lid on it, by (police) force.

As Nixon rode this electoral platform into the White House through appealing to a newly constituting white-supremacist voting block eager to suppress urban disorder through policing Blacks back into their assigned and inferior place, white liberals, who had supported integration in theory exclusively, initiated “white flight” and began to flee cities towards the suburbs in dizzying numbers “to escape the decaying inner cities and their social problems” (Garland, 2001, p. 84), namely, Black people. Whites in droves abandoned public schools as educational

choice for their kids so as to avoid social contamination with Blackness (Wacquant, 2009, p. 203). Miscegenation has always been the issue, whiteness' self-perceived dilution - cultural and/or biological. With the expansion of the suburbs as escape hatch from white-supremacy's racial nightmare, that is, having to "mix" with the abject "other," new "urban renewal projects" establishing highways and transit systems connecting the white suburbs and the inner cities meant

...demolishing many of the inner-city neighborhoods that got in the way... and rehousing the council tenants in new, high density housing projects. The effect was often to concentrate the poor and minority families in areas quite far removed from the city and lacking in basic amenities such as shops, jobs, and good public transport. (Garland, 2001, p.84)

Whiteness also began, as a power bloc, to ideologically turn against the welfare state and the meager social subsistence programs that had heretofore allowed those racialized subjects confined within the ghetto and perched over a vortex of utter destitution to eke out a bare existence. It was within this context that the neoliberal revolution was *launched*, an economic restructuring that meant the unmitigated abandonment of the hyperghetto through capital flight and welfare retrenchment, as well as the massive expansion of carcerality to manage those desperate, precarious and racialized peoples left behind and trapped within the high-rise projects of the collapsing ghettos. But how?

In order for the transnational business interests, state politicians and the cultural representatives that compose the neoliberal capitalist class to transform the state in their own material and symbolic interests - capital deregulation and the rolling back of the welfare state to maximize corporate power and profitability, the needs of the people be damned - neoliberal elites spun two ideological narratives. The first was to depict the state as a burdensome

inhibitor to the economic well-being of the social body. According to this by-now familiar discourse, the state interferes with the optimization of markets - rewarding not hard work and meritocracy but the underserving, undisciplined and the idle - thus distorting markets and creating conditions of structural unfairness. As Wacquant summates the ideology, “The poor take to crime because the state, by lending them a helping hand with excessive eagerness, maintains them in idleness and vice, thereby condemning them to the worst of ‘dependencies,’ that which turns them into ‘welfare addicts’” (Wacquant, 2009, 151).

Second, neoliberal cultural managers and politicians articulated their own self-interested “small-government” demands as the continued and proper response to the social problems of Black crime as Nixon defined it – that is spontaneous, perfectly human resistance against historical, racial oppression as somehow *criminal*. The cause of “social disorder” was “big government” - through “market distortion,” it had fostered welfare dependency and created a climate for the emergence of myriad forms of criminality and abuse (Gilmore, 2005, p. 47). The only proper governmental response to remediate criminogenic conditions was *less* government, the rolling back of the “nanny-state” and a healthy dose of pull-yourself-up-by-your-own-bootstraps individualism. That is, in order to garner electoral support from a newly-constituting white-supremacist voting bloc towards its deregulatory and welfare-state shrinking agenda, the emerging neoliberal consensus appealed not only to an argument that described the regulative state as disruptive to perfect equity in its very nature, but simultaneously constructed *white resentment* and targeted it against the economically abandoned, deploying images of a welfare-dependent and criminal Blackness cheating the system in order to justify support for a broad slashing of “big government” programs across the board. Within this

discourse, “big government” was made coterminous with hard-working, white people’s tax dollars being given away to underserving, idle, and manipulative Blackness: a fool’s errand, counterproductive, and “political correctness” run amuck to the absurd point of undermining the very economic well-being of the social body through spawning the growth of criminality. Thus, white people were discursively positioned as *victims* of a disingenuous, greedy and short-sighted criminal Blackness - profoundly un-American in their refusal to work in order to make their own way.

Media and politicians paraded racist imagery of “welfare queens” (Gilmore, 2007, p.45) and criminal, absentee fathers gaming the system to avoid their sacred American obligation to work for their livelihood. With the white-supremacist voting block willing to support just about any political program that meant shrinking a “nanny state” that favored an undeserving and criminal other at their expense, neoliberalism was able to set the ideological conditions for a radical stripping down of the social state through deregulation and progressively “reforming” welfare clean out of existence.

With a sufficient stranglehold on power through manufacturing the consent of its white-supremacist voting bloc toward just about any state-shrinking measure they could dream up, neoliberal state-managers went to work creating those political conditions through which corporations, absent capital restraint, “externalized” their workforce and relocated factories overseas within labor pools lacking workers’ protections achieved through centuries of struggle in the industrialized west. The remaining domestic workforce was flexibilized, and workers’ rights to organize towards collective recourse was largely eliminated. There were drastic cuts in income and declining living standards as a result for those white workers pinioned in both the

lower -and middle-tiers of the class register. Job insecurity was institutionalized and labor made precarious. During the 1980's and 1990's, U.S. firms initiated mass layoffs as strategy of financial management. Simultaneously, welfare and aid programs suffered a sustained attack from both democrat and republican administrations over twenty years before culminating in the Clinton Administration's "Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act" (PRWOA) of 1994, an Orwellian moniker, functionally abolishing any right to state assistance and "instituted forced deskilled wage labor as the sole means of support on the pretext of setting the indigent back onto the road to 'independence'" (Wacquant, 2009, p. 56-58).

With regards to the white working- and middle-classes, the socioeconomic changes ushered in by neoliberalism were generative of profound socioeconomic dislocation and anxiety. The fear of losing one's tenuous foothold within the class structure was amplified, a social regression and disgrace made real and palpable. Although neoliberal restructuring's deleterious effects were most profound for working-class whites, it is within the politically active white middle-class, a powerful voting bloc, that the fear of social regression is greatest (Wacquant, 2009, p.56). These anxieties generated further demand during the 1980's and 90's for the restructuring state to do something, *anything*, to arrest their socioeconomic free-fall.

With the state's abdication of its responsibility to govern within the social and economic registers, neoliberal state managers did the only thing that they could do within the parameters of their ideological commitments - *further* shrink the welfare state and double-down on the slashing of social programs while simultaneously reinvesting in carceral solutions, "developing their penal functions to the point of hypertrophy" (Wacquant, 2009, p. 58). Neoliberal politicians and media managers further targeted the racialized other, articulated as criminal

scourge, as *the* causal agents for the diffuse social anxiety roiling the white working- and middle- classes – a precarity actually resultant from the neoliberal revolution from above, but rendered invisible. And in their “doing something” to appease their anxious white voting bloc, the state began locking up Black and Brown people to a scale never seen before in a democratic society.

A closed feedback loop had developed in which neoliberalism created diffused social insecurity throughout the middle- and lower-tiers of white-supremacist sociality. This insecurity generated a demand for that same neoliberal state to arrest the freefall, with the only tools remaining in its neoliberal toolbelt to further amplify the very same sets of neoliberal policies – capital abandonment and welfare withdrawal - generating diffuse insecurity in the first place and to lock-up the racialized “other” in vertiginous numbers. Thus, the creation by the neoliberal state of *the fourth form of ethnoracial enclosure, the contemporary prison*. Within this biopolitical infrastructure, new ontologies of race were being developed wherein Blackness was made indistinguishable from criminality, with one implying the other and vice-versa. To put in motion neoliberal social and economic policies, the state doubled down on its ideological messaging, and promulgated the image of the racialized, criminal other as the cause of the economic precarity that the white working- and middle- classes were being subjected to (our tax dollars given over to funding welfare and affirmative action, for instance), and both democrat and republican administrations targeted the hyperghetto with unbridled carceral ferocity, clean sweeping the streets of the toxic, human wreckage that it itself had constituted.

The preceding paragraphs are descriptors of how a revamped white-supremacist power bloc was constituted within the United States in what is known, fallaciously, as the “post-civil

rights era”³ and how an appetite for a brutal and racist carcerality came to develop under neoliberal restructuration. And further, to demonstrate that *neoliberalism*, through the socioeconomic abandonment of the racialized other and their ideological staging as a criminal and/or “dependent” scourge and the cause of generalized socioeconomic precarity, is *ferociously* racist. Neoliberalism, with its inextricable carceral solutions targeting an economically redundant and racialized group of human beings for containment and disappearance, is as vehemently racist as any other system of ethnoracial enclosure that has ever existed in the United States. Of the exact same scale, and character. And as neoliberalism enjoys a Washington consensus – both the Democratic and Republican parties share its assumptions thus constituting a political “common-sense” – it is normalized. Largely invisible. This invisibility allows the fourth ethnoracial enclosure, the contemporary prison, to function largely unperturbed and to reap tragic and devastating consequences across the racialized class registers of neoliberal sociality, further pitting white lower- and middle-class workers, backed by the neoliberalizing state, against the subproletariat of the capitally-abandoned inner cities in a vicious and one-sided, high-intensity, racialized class war.

While Neoliberalism has been disastrous for white working people across the country, for the racialized subproletariat still pinned to the sociospatial reserve of the collapsed ghetto, neoliberal restructuration has been incomprehensively destructive. It has meant the unmitigated abandonment to “premature death” (Gilmore, 2007, p. 28) of the subproletariat, formerly embedded within state-sponsored systems of industrial production within the great

³ Fallacious, because those racialized subjects unjustly targeted by carceral social cleansing are subjected to “social death,” hard-won civil rights are stripped from inmates once crossing into the carceral interior.

metropolises – now necropolitical death zones. Neoliberalism has functioned akin to an electromagnetic pulse weapon in the inner-city - shocking, disrupting and stalling out all state-organized economic activity and its epiphenomenal organizations and those trapped within have been left scattered to wander a post-industrial wasteland - driven into a state of permanent unemployment and pure redundancy, and are mercilessly hunted by a voracious carceral apparatus. The children and the grandchildren of the African-American migrants who had fled terroristic violence of the southern apartheid system and were proletarianized to build the death machines of the great world wars have been economically banished and extruded from the neoliberal order and the white-supremacist civil society emergent as a result.

It is within these conditions that an illicit market in narcotics developed, now the chief employer for young Black men trapped within the hollowed-out ghettos. People don't just willingly submit to starvation, lack and destitution. They resist premature death, and attempt to procure scarce necessities through illicit means. In 1983, the Reagan Administration (re)declared the War on Drugs, actually begun under the Nixon administration but reformulated and intensified, a "guerilla campaign of penal harassment of low-level street dealers and poor consumers, aimed primarily at young (Black) men in the inner city." In 1975, the ratio of Black to white arrest rates for drugs was 2:1. By 1995 that ration was 5:1 despite no change in drug use amongst the respective Black/white populations (Wacquant, 2009, p. 61). The war on drugs left white drug users functionally unmolested as it was selectively targeted to penetrate into the capital-abandoned hyperghettoes and to capture young Black men within it - on the one hand clean-sweeping civil society of its racialized superfluous, and on the other, allowing neoliberal politicians to posture that they were "doing something" to arrest urban

disorder and diffuse social insecurity, its individual cause articulated as the young and Black “superpredator” made (in)famous by Hillary Clinton. As John Erlichmann, White House Counsel and confidante to Richard Nixon described the original launching of the drug war,

The Nixon White House had two enemies: the antiwar left and Black people.... We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the (Vietnam) war or Black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and Blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news...Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course, we did. (Cited from McCoy, 2021)

Under Reagan's second-wave relaunch of the War on Drugs, “... commitments to federal and state prison systems surged 975 percent between 1982 and 1999” (Gilmore, 2007, p. 18) and the carceral state and its neoliberal managers were staged as virile and active, all the while guaranteeing the amplification of these self-same catastrophic and tragic conditions.

According to Michel Foucault in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, his series of lectures at the Collège De France,

American neo-liberals apply, or at any rate try to apply economic analysis to a series of objects, to domains of behavior or conduct which were not market forms of behavior or conduct ... these problems all revolve around a theme or a notion: *homo œconomicus*, *economic man*... this problem of the application of *homo œconomicus* has become one of the classics of neo-liberal discussion in the United States (Foucault & Senellart, 2010, p. 267-8)

Foucault is pointing out that under neoliberalism, full-humanness is reduced to an economic calculation. Man is the economic being, and human behaviors and actions can be interpreted through the framework of rational choice theory and resource allocation and that markets are preeminent bearers of truth value. But, under neoliberalism, those racialized subjects abandoned within the hyperghetto produce no labor that can be extracted by capital. If under neoliberalism, economic productivity is the unitary marker of full-humanness, then the Black

subproletariat is read as *not*-fully-human because not economically productive. They are instead ideologically transmogrified through neoliberal explanatory frameworks as something akin to the “walking dead” - physically animate but suspended economically inanimate. From the vantage of neoliberalism then, the racialized subproletariat are discursively *zombified* - perceived through its categories of thought as harbingers of a series of *contagions* threatening white-supremacist civil society. Riotous inner-city violence/resistance that spreads and consumes (Watts in 1965 up through the recent actions in the wake of the extrajudicial execution of George Floyd and many others besides, etc.), the disease of drug addiction, gang warfare that goes contagious – a series of *plagues* with the capacity to overflow the collapsing hyperghetto as ethnoracial enclosure and threatening to sow civil disorder within the larger white-supremacist society that surrounds it. The prison functions as the fourth ethnoracial enclosure after slavery, Jim Crow and the Ghetto, in which the less-than-fully-human because not economically productive subject is made coterminous with contaminant threat and *quarantined* within the prison as epidemiological intervention to protect the “health” of a racially delimited, white-supremacist *body politic* (explored in depth chapter 4).

We have now come full circle and I am able to answer the question with which I began the chapter. There exists a collectively unconscious and vicious drive that, although unspoken, is indirectly observable through the existence of thanatopolitical machinery within the contemporary prison. Why was the prison written-over from disciplinary and “rehabilitative” institution into a thanatopolitical machine exposing less-than-fully-human “inmates” to a spectrum of death potentials, from top-to bottom? Where did thanatopolitical machinery come from and what fuels the carceral surplus engine?

Perverse Indifference: Economic Suspension within the Gaping Carceral Maw

Two logics overdetermine the emergence of thanatopolitical machinery in the contemporary prison. The first is that our voracious carcerality is not the neoliberal state's response to rising crime but is instead the targeted capture and disappearance of a superfluous and largely racialized subpopulation and therefore a *perversion of penal law*. The second determining element giving rise to thanatopolitical machinery is that, unlike previous systems of ethnoracial enclosure - slavery, Jim Crow and the ghetto - the prison is *not* a labor extraction device imposed upon those largely racialized subjects scrubbed from neoliberal civil society. It is instead their *suspension into economic uselessness*. These two principles conjoin to manufacture a novel carceral milieu riven through by a comprehensive and *mortal indifference* to the fate of rendered less-than-fully-human inmate life with nowhere to be deposited, post-carcerality. Within this over-arching context, the prison is transmuted as a machinic vortex of permanent disappearance through abandoning human beings to corporal punishment and myriad forms of death, most primarily (but not exclusively) realized through inmate-on-inmate violence.

The Gaping Carceral Maw

The amplification of the pitiless carceral apparatus and its extension into state-neglected reaches of social space does not correspond with a precipitous rise in crime rates, which peaked in 1980. As the prison gathered ever-larger numbers of racialized bodies within its machinic clutches over the next two decades, the crime rate was simultaneously *declining*

(Gilmore, 2007, p.7). Despite that fact, prisons were being built to a scale never before seen in the history of the world. The unleashing of the contemporary prison in this augmented and loftier recapitulation was therefore not a response to rising crime as was, and still is, often suggested in mainstream discourse, but staged and given form in order to manage the series of state-initiated social crises that tumbled through the classed structure of American sociality, and in its apotheosis, rendered an entire subpopulation, “the subproletariat of the Black ghettos undermined by deindustrialization” (Wacquant, 2009, p. 12), entirely redundant to the creation of capital. Within this obscene mandate to socially cleanse the capital-redundant from dilapidated hyperghettos, the prison gathered more and more human beings within itself for longer and longer stretches of time through two specific recalibrations in the application of criminal law:

... the *extension of recourse to confinement* for a range of *street crimes* and misdemeanors that did not previously lead to a custodial sanction, especially minor drug infractions and behaviors described as public disorders and nuisances, as well as from the *continual stiffening of sentences* incurred.
(Wacquant, 2009, p. 125)

The prison population quadrupled since 1980 because “crimes”⁴ that were not previously considered as deserving of a prison sentence now increasingly are, and because once sentenced to prison, inmates serve terms made magnitude more severe through instruments like “mandatory minimums” and sentencing guidelines that remove judicial discretion and enact the harshest of penalties devoid of any contextualization. These mechanisms for the prolongation of various prison tortures through increased sentence length have largely been

⁴ “Defined in the simple terms of the secular state, crime means a violation of the law. Laws change, depending on what, in a social order, counts as stability, and who, in a social order, needs to be controlled” (Gilmore, 2007, p.12).

ratified through ballot box initiatives meant to appease white-supremacist middle- and working- class voters desperate for carceral palliatives to their own experience of precarity and increasing anxiety under neoliberal reorganization. As a result,

Incarceration rates have now risen so high that further increases in incarceration are ineffective ... each additional prisoner will, on average, yield less in terms of crime reduction. We have incarcerated those we should not have. This is where the “more incarceration equals less crime” theory busts. (Chettiar, 2015).

Because this unprecedented distension of the prison belly is the state’s response to the massive economic dislocation and the subsequent disorder it itself generated and not a response to increased crime, the contemporary prison realizes a perversion of the institution’s explicit purpose. In fact, if the goal of prison is to suppress crime rates, it appears to be having the opposite effect. Research conducted by Geert Leo Dhont (2012) demonstrates that those economically-abandoned neighborhoods targeted by hypermilitarized police forces with higher incarceration rates suffer an *increase* in the crime rate through profound community disruption. The ravenous prison as fourth essential pillar of neoliberalism is, in other words, performing an *extra-penological* function - the authoritarian management of deleterious socioeconomic recalibration through the disappearance of a made-redundant labor pool. The penal dragnet is cast outward from civil society and into the welfare state-vacated reaches of social space under the explicit ideological cover of crime suppression, but in the absence of any real rise in crime, what constituted incarcerable crime was itself tweaked so as to radically gape open the carceral maw so as to swallow-up ever-more human beings within it.

This perversion of proper penological mandate is largely unconscious in the specific sense that the hegemonic, white-supremacist power bloc supporting massive carceral expansion is not explicitly stating their support, at the ballot box or otherwise, for the

disappearance of Black and Brown bodies so that transnational companies can outsource and flexibilize their own jobs, rendering their lives more precarious in the process. That would be absurd and contradictory. On the other hand, this power bloc isn't particularly interested in exploring the mechanisms of racialized capture and carceral extrusion, either. Instead, white-supremacist normative subjectivity is unconsciously invested in racialized disappearance through carcerality as *the* primary mechanism of identity formation under neoliberalism through negation of the racialized-criminal "other."

The scrubbing of the capital-redundant, that through carceral inscription transmogrifies the subproletariat into a criminal/savage horde, sutures normative subjectivity and functions as an ideological anchor - grounding free-floating notions like "law-abiding citizen," "hard-working American" and a multitude of other empty signifiers that constitute the white-supremacist imaginary. A scandalous trade-off has emerged under neoliberalism between Keynesian state-guaranteed socioeconomic stability and carcerality, the latter clung to more vociferously as the former recedes. And this obscene exchange - white-supremacist and voracious carceral consumption of Black and Brown bodies in order to stage and experience the normative self in the face of increasing economic insecurity - is largely unconscious because unuttered within dominant discourse. Yet it is overdetermining of contemporary carceral logics and revamped institutional structure, the emergence of thanatopolitical machinery, just the same.

To recapitulate, without the devouring prison, normalized white-supremacist subjectivity grows ever-despairing, threatened, anxiety-ridden, violent and finally incoherent as white-supremacist normativity dreads more than anything else a collapse into the undifferentiated void of no-sense that is racial amalgamation. It fears the loss of self -

delineative boundaries that differentiate white-supremacist subjects from a host of racialized “others;” these categories themselves continually staged and reproduced through the prison as biopolitical infrastructure of race. Normative subjectivity under neoliberalism grasps for the prison as quite literal “life”-preserver, that boundary separating a white-supremacist “life” that is to be fostered, organized, trained and disciplined within biopolitical civil society from that less-than-fully-human life abandoned to death within the necropolitical prison. The prison functions as primary ground anchoring normative subjectivity under neoliberalism then, and a carceral vacuum, in the absence of some other set of institutional mechanisms and symbolic frameworks of identity formation to replace it, would occasion a cascading slippage of identification points for normative subjectivity itself generating potentially great discontent and social upheaval amongst the white middle- and working-class. Hence, a collectively unconscious and desperate investment by neoliberal state managers in carceral “solutions” as the neoliberal revolution destabilized those traditional markers through which the white working- and middle-class had previously constituted and (mis)recognized itself: stable employment, upward mobility, the capacity to pass along a quality of life to the next generation, etc. The vast growth of the prison in our age of economic precarity and the racial composition of its population reflects mirror-like back to lacking white-supremacist subjectivity an image of itself as ontologically differentiated and superior to the racialized criminal horde, suturing subjectivity shut. And even more specifically, within hegemonic, neoliberal ideological coordinates in which human beings are rendered as *homo aeconomicus*, the negative definition of full-humanness comes ever-more to anchor everyday notions of freedom and even identity itself as neoliberalism progressively undermines economist groundings of self for white working- and

middle- class peoples: “I am free because I am *not* in prison,” and “I am fully-human because I am *not* one of those savage inmates.” Even as one’s freedom, one’s very sense of self as previously defined is radically undermined through the very socioeconomic policies that white-supremacy, as a power-bloc, largely supports. At the ballot box and otherwise.

The implications couldn’t be more profound with regards to our ongoing and collective interrogation of race relations in the United States in the aftermath of the extrajudicial police executions of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, and so many others besides. Not just killer cops and buffoonish, ignorant racists with their obscene banners and their absurd chants but normalized liberal subjects within US civil society are absolutely dependent and tied-up with the disappearance of the racialized other through the prison. In order to experience our “normalcy” - our actually existing civil society and our lives within - we have to disappear, at all times, around two million largely racialized peoples, and keep another six million under the direct and totalitarian control of a brutal carceral system through apparatuses of probation and parole. To be vanished at any time. Inmates, parolees and probationers form a perpetual “standing reserve” (Heidegger & Lovitt, 2013) of human refuse to be disposed of at a whim and normalized subjectivity, as constituted under neoliberal restructuration, is therefore *unequivocally* white-supremacist. As it has always been because always emergent coterminous alongside of the series of ethnoracial enclosures that make white-supremacist civil society and identity possible through the concentration *elsewhere* of Blackness: slavery, Jim Crow, the ghetto and now the prison. In no uncertain terms then, we live under a prison-apartheid system and our everyday lives with our everyday concerns – our strife and joys, our failures and accomplishments - all occur within a neoliberal-manufactured bubble of fragile white-

supremacist normalcy floated atop a roiling carceral torture pit. It's important to take account of that. The nation's recent obsession with the rise of white-supremacist groups - whether they be neo-Nazis marching in Charlottesville, gun-toting militias on the Southern border, or Q-anon conspiracy theorists and Trump supporters storming the capitol - functions as a fetishistic disavowal mechanism in exact structural homology to those northern liberals who perceived racism simply as a problem of those Southern Jim Crow crackers and, without any hint of self-awareness or irony, unleashed brutalizing police forces against Black activists when they dared challenge the ghetto as ethnoracial enclosure. "Their" racism ideologically disappearing our own - our knotted interrelation with the prison as an infrastructure of race guaranteeing our existent civil society (amongst a host of viable alternatives) and our very particular experience of self that, within current institutional and ideological coordinates, is by definition white-supremacist. It is the prison and all its attendant horrors that keeps us/the U.S. whole through defining who is and who isn't fully-human and gives subjectivity its stickiness and prevents it from being dispersed across a sea of racial disarticulation. One need not even be white to be interpellated by the contemporary carceral formation as disappearance pit. The prison always and everywhere hails its subjects in spite of individual racial identification towards this novel form of what Dylan Rodriguez, borrowing from Sylvia Wynter, calls "White Being," the "militarized, normative paradigm of human being that inhabitants of the ongoing half millennial civilizational project have involuntarily inherited as a violent universal" (Rodriguez, 2021, pp. 7-8).

As long as the voracious prison exists devouring a permanent, racialized underclass, subjectivity within the US social formation is, by necessity, white-supremacist. And as hard as it

may be to swallow, we are all made culpable through the very existence of the barbarous institution. We are as unable to escape its confines as are the inmates held within, because the walls of the prison not only hold “them” inside, but constitute our very sense of self from outside of us through the act. Tragically and unforgivably so.

For the drive to scrub the social of racialized, rendered-superfluous human beings is, on the one hand, a *material* necessity for a delimiting, neoliberal capital through the extrusion of redundant labor-full bodies to a permanent “somewhere else” - a manufactured and sealed-off Hobbesian “state of nature” outside of civil society that functions as its margin, or border (see chapter three). On the other hand, carcerality is terribly effective at doing the necessary *symbolic* work of materializing relations of phenomenological superiority for white-supremacist subjects under neoliberal reorganization as it constitutes a specific relation of enjoyment. As capitalism is ever novel and “creative,” it has rendered the carceral thresher a site of obscene pleasure as the culture industry raids the prison - mining and harvesting images of Black and Brown degradation, violence and state-indifferent and delegated murder for a plethora of films, documentaries and reality television shows depicting “life on the inside.”

In addition to selling white-supremacist eyeballs to corporate advertisers, popular culture representations of prisons and those trapped and butchered within them further articulate and contribute to the (re)fortification of normative white-supremacy in the age of neoliberalism by perpetually “pornotroping” a procession of images of racialized subjects in deep bondage to carceral machinic death(s) production as foils for normative white-supremacist subject coherence. Pornotroping, according to Alexander Weheliye, is the “displaying at once the physical powerlessness of the dysselected slaves subject and the

untainted power of the selected master subject” and “names the becoming-flesh of the (Black) body and forms a primary component in the processes by which human beings are converted into bare life” (2014, pp. 90-91). White-supremacy vampirically consumes images of the racialized-incarcerated other as bare life in order to sustain itself within the imaginary order, further embedding and structurally consolidating properly American subjects as “free” and fully-human because not like those fleshly Black and Brown bodies they see subjected to state-sanctioned premature death on the screen. One need only take account of the perverse explosion of programs taking carcerality as their object, allowing viewers to gaze inside the prison as diorama of alien, dehumanizing misery – MSNBC’s *Lock-Up*, *Inside the World’s Toughest Prisons*, *GIRLS Incarcerated*, *60 Days in, Orange is the New Black*, *Lockdown*, *Jail*, etc. One can’t help but be reminded of Renaissance paintings depicting angels peering down from their heavenly bastions into the infernal pit to give witness to the righteous suffering imposed on sinners in order to know and experience their own sanctity in differential relation. The symbolic refortification of normative subjectivity is an extra-penological rewriting of the carceral apparatus, an epiphenomenal benefit unspoken in dominant discourse. Yet, it is the primary symbolic role that the prison performs on behalf of White Being with the abandonment of the ghetto as ethnoracial container, this newest iteration of racial infrastructure hailing normative subjectivity. The viewer experiencing themselves as properly human because not one of “them,” on the other side of both the television screen and the electrified perimeter fence.

Both these material and symbolic dimensions of contemporary carcerality - the drive to scrub the white-supremacist body politic of racialized and superfluous human beings and to

reconstitute normative subjectivity under neoliberalism - coalesce to overdetermine the emergence of the perverse surplus engine subsuming carceral space. These obscene desires are realized through their institutional materialization: the prison rewritten as thanatopolitical machinery. The prison grows nested thanatopolitical machinery, becomes an unadulterated death machine, because carceral amplification and extension is itself extra-penological and geared towards the physical disappearance of the racialized “other” as “social problem,” hailing normative and white-supremacist subjects through negation in an age of economic precarity in the process.

Suspended Inanimate in Carceral Space-Time

The second overdetermining logic reshaping the prison from disciplinary and rehabilitative institution into a thanatopolitical machine is that the prison no longer functions as a labor extraction device, as did previous iterations of ethnoracial enclosure. That’s a radical break with almost immeasurable consequence for the contemporary prison. Despite the popularity and good intent behind the concept of a “prison-industrial complex” among academics, prison writers, and activists, it has led to some confusion. For instance, much popular and even scholarly criticism takes privatization of prisons as an essential object and a preeminent concern in any struggle against carcerality. Although reprehensible on its face for the transparent reason that it is ethically repellant to profit off of people’s misery, privatization is not a primary logic of contemporary carcerality. In fact, private prisons could be outright banned, and it wouldn’t do much to arrest the ascendance of the prison regime nor the vertiginous numbers of largely racialized human beings permanently transmogrified into

carceral bio-waste. The contemporary prison is a *public* institution, a *state* agency. And the critical focus on privatizations tends to render invisible a state-organized death-logic degrees more reprehensible. After all, fewer than 5000 inmates within the nations prison system work for private industry, or a quarter of one percent (Wacquant, 2009a, 182). In addition, “95 percent of all prisons and jails are publicly owned and operated” (Gilmore, 2007, pp.21-2). If we worked while locked up, we were cooks and janitors, plumbers or maintenance people meant to keep the prison functioning day-to-day within a closed, institutional universe. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore argues, “the problem with the ‘new slavery’ argument is that very few prisoners work for anybody while they’re locked up. Recall, the generally excepted goal for prisons has been incapacitation: a do-nothing theory if ever there was one” (2007, p. 21).

Our critical focus on private prisons fetishistically disappears the essential logic that the contemporary prison is the first iteration of ethnoracial enclosure *not* to function as device for the extraction of racialized labor. It is, instead, the *permanent disappearance of superfluous, racialized labor* from a delimiting civil society that can’t accommodate it. “Labor” is, of course, an abstraction as labor only materializes within or as human bodies. The contemporary prison is the disappearance by the state from civil society of labor-full *bodies* into a permanent somewhere else, away from civil society proper. And that is magnitude more lethal, for if prisoners did indeed function as a massive slave-labor pool organized towards corporate profitability, at least there would have been some interest in keeping us alive as disciplined tools of production...

With regards to the transformation of the prison from a rehabilitative, disciplinary apparatus towards a series of nested thanatopolitical machines and their varied death

exposures, we must acknowledge first and foremost that Foucault's disciplinarity was premised on the making of docile bodies for eventual insertion within an industrial factory system. Under neoliberalism, the United States is no longer organized as an urban-industrial economy but as a suburban services economy, and financialized. Industrial manufacturing in the metropolises, as the "pull" factor shaping the prison as disciplinary training site, no longer exists. Through outsourcing, *the factories are quite simply gone*. Therefore, eventual inclusion of the inmate population into civil society through the factory system is no longer an end goal for carcerality. It is instead their *permanent extrusion*. In this reformulated context, the prison necessarily abandons its biopolitical mandate to organize, train and manufacture docility. The flipside of biopolitical governance is not an outside to governmentality, it is thanatopolitical death administration. The prison, under the suspension of the previous telos to return docile bodies to civil society emerges instead as what Achille Mbembe (2019) describes as a form of "necropolitical" concentration site to keep "those who are allowed to die" *away* from it because rendered economically useless.

The production circuit between capitalism and the disciplinary prison is torn asunder through neoliberal recalibration and a radical caesura is made to appear - the emergence of two circuits where previously there had been only one, now entirely disconnected. The former, the capitalist-production circuit of civil society remains biopolitically administered, while the latter emerges - the hyperghetto-prison circuit - always-already necropolitical. America cleaved in-half along carceral lines between those who are made to live because economically "productive" and those who, within a context of radical and lethal indifference, are "allowed to die" because rendered economically useless. The preexistent circuit of capitalist production

(re)constitutes itself under neoliberalism by sealing itself off - “heals” having expelled racialized, superfluous bodies representative of a series of literal and metaphoric contagions outside of itself. A secondary and polar circuit forms in which the abandoned circulate between the hyperghetto and the prison and back, quarantined as contaminant threat to the smooth functioning of the body politic (discussed in chapter 4). The prison exerts magnet-like pull on those bodies relegated to the hyperghetto, trying to gather and amalgamate as much racialized, contaminated flesh within its belly as it can process without retching. *The hyperghetto is the warehouse not the prison*, and from its shelves the prison selects those superfluous bodies that are to be abandoned-to-death within an active thanatopolitical machinery of inmate-on-inmate violence, organized and set-loose within carceral space within a context of lethal indifference.

What, specifically, constitutes this affective orientation and perceptual framework of *lethal indifference* towards the inmate population? The platitude “time is money” takes on a deadly-literal connotation for us inmates as civil society and time itself, both entirely subsumed by capital, had moved beyond those of us trapped within the contemporary prison as time warp. “Pulled” nowhere through the rupturing of the productivity-prison circuit, we constituted an amalgamated bio-mass of economically-useless bodies magnetized to the prison’s iron core and unable to escape its gravitational pull. Floated inanimate within economic space and time, we were rendered entirely alien within the prison as a space of pure excess outside of the civil order. It was within the context of suspended uselessness that the state assumed its proto-genocidal death mask and *gazed upon the savage inmate horde with a deathly indifference* because those of us pinioned to the prison were perceived as ourselves responsible for our incarceration purely through our own self-interested, poor choices. That made us utterly

contemptible. There exists “a strong imputation of *willfulness* to the inmate” (Rhodes, 2009, p.87), and as Lorna Rhodes notes:

Many conversations in prison are about how the prisoners have *chosen* to do what they do. “You did the crime, you do the time,” the officers say to the inmates. The specifics of the crime are not the point; what this remark means is that the prisoner alone is accountable for his current situation. (2009, p. 66)

We were Loathsome. Repugnant. Unworthy of human sympathy. Something less-than-human because uncivilized - irrational and violent - despite most violence within carceral space as having been guaranteed through the organizing logics of carcerality itself as described in chapter 1. And as economically useless, we were perceived as pure inhibitors – drags on the smooth functioning of the capital machine/social body, not dissimilar from a series of parasites within a host. This perceptual framework and series of attributions coalesced in a radical and lethal indifference with regards to our wellbeing as well as constituting a saturating enmity: a visceral disgust, fear and an experienced hatred.

Lethal indifference emerges within the cannot-be-spoken contradiction of concentrating an ever-increasing and largely racialized population and having nowhere to deposit it, post-carcerality. The prison, as a materialization of this contradiction, has at its disposal only two mechanisms to ensure the permanent removal of the rendered-superfluous from civil society: either (1) *permanent inscription* within the carceral through social and/or subjective death, or (2) *biological death*. *The prison either grows fuller and fuller to the point of bursting with expendable, racialized flesh, or it kills*. Herein lies the obscene logic, the unconscious desire calling forth and guaranteeing thanatopolitical machinery. Lethal indifference interfaces with the carceral mandate of permanent disappearance to generate three carceral-useful death-exposures: *social death, subjective death and biological death*. These three deaths are the

specific means through which the disappearance of the racialized, economically superfluous is realized, a spectrum of vanishings ranging from at its lowest yet furthest reaching frequency, social death, to its midrange frequency of madness production, or subjective death. Both organized towards permanent carceral inscription. And in its highest and most efficient form, thanatopolitical machinery realizes permanent disappearance of superfluous bodies from civil society through *biological death*.

The Tripartite Carceral Death Mask

Social Death. All inmates are made socially dead upon carceral inscription. The concept of social death was first theorized by Orlando Patterson in his seminal work *Slavery and Social Death* (1982) and Joshua Price in *Prison and Social Death* (2015) appropriates the concept to demonstrate that, as with the slave, all inmates crossing the liminal threshold into the carceral interior are subjected to a social death that can be defined by three principles: “generalized humiliation, institutional violence and natal alienation” (p. 6). Social death is not to be confused with the oft-referenced but narrower concept of “civil death,” the revocation of legal rights. Civil death is merely an element of the more comprehensive social death, a “permanent social excommunication” and a series of “systematic limitations in nearly all spheres of life” (p. 20). Further, social death is a permanent “social mark, a stigma” (p. 5), that persists well beyond any inmate’s release from prison. One will always be considered as an excon for example, an ontological iteration of less-than-full-humanness with all the deleterious consequences such an assignation carries.

Within the prison itself, social death means to be subjected to random acts of humiliation and unpredictable acts of catastrophic and terrifying violence – not just the thanatopolitical machinery I outlined in chapter 1, but in addition, a host of batterings and assaults from custodial hands. In addition to this always-potential violence and humiliation, inmates are also subjected to natal alienation, a concept that may require some explication. “The paradigm case of natal alienation is watching one’s kin whipped by the slave master and being unable to intervene” (Price, 2015, p. 25) Natal alienation is the stripping from human beings of their capacity to protect loved ones from acts of humiliation and violence. In slavery, mothers watched helpless as their children were sold off to other white masters. Enslaved children watched their parents beaten, or killed. Through natal alienation then, the enslaved person was made what Patterson calls a “genealogical isolate” (Patterson, 1982, p. 5) – all bonds of solidarity and kinship broken, the protection they afforded torn asunder. According to Price, inmates are rendered as socially dead because embedded within a homologous structure; whatever random act of humiliation or unpredictable violence we were subjected to, there existed no party able to intervene on our behalf and to protect us. Utterly atomized, families and friends were forced to sit idly-by and watch as the institution performed its degrading and violent work. As with the enslaved person, “natal alienation forces people in prison into a structure of vulnerability” (Price, 2015, p. 20) in which we had only ourselves to rely upon in order to resist, or even survive, the humiliation and violence we were subjected to within carceral space.

Being made a *carceral isolate* engenders any variety of responses from inmate’s themselves in order to maintain some degree of psychic and biological integrity within an

experience of social death. An inmate may resist an assault from another inmate or a guard by force, for example. Or an inmate may lash out against the never-ending series of constant humiliations and refuse to “program” - not exiting their cell upon custody’s demand, or refusing to perform an institutional work assignment, for instance. No matter the inmate response to an imposed social death, with regards to an inmate’s permanent disappearance from civil society, *it must be recognized that each and every of these reactions are further incarcerable.*

When inmates attempt to resist the social death to which they are systematically subjected, they are further punished for it. We were given more time. Socially dead inmates are thus effectively locked into an ever-upwardly agitating cycle of carceral reuptake. That is, *being within prison (within an ascribed status of social death) at all gets one more prison time.* It gets worse than that. As social death is a “permanent mark,” then simply for having gone to prison, it is also much easier for any paroled inmate to find themselves returned to the carceral threshold. Nationally, “within 3 years of their release, 2 out of 3 people are rearrested and more than 50% are incarcerated again” (Office of Disease Prevention, n.d.). Through social death then, every inmate is metaphorically magnetized to the carceral circuit simply for having been there; to be disappeared over and over again even if occasionally reappearing within civil society, giving the carceral state ever-repeated opportunity to issue more intense forms of permanent disappearance through subjective and/or biological death.

Subjective Death, or Madness. “The prison environment could not be better designed to activate a sense of threat to the coherence of self” (Rhodes, 2009, p.56). Under neoliberalism, state-sponsored mental health facilities and programs have been roundly shuttered and the public mental health system has been “deinstitutionalized.” In 1955, the total number of

patients in mental hospitals was around 500,000 (Kupers, 1999, p. xv-xvi). Today, there are only 38,000 individuals with serious mental illness housed in such state-run facilities (Carroll, 2016). Those human beings dealing with serious mental illness did not simply disappear. Instead, as funding was redirected under neoliberalism from social programs toward carcerality, so were bodies.

Combining the estimated populations of jail and state prison inmates with serious mental illness produces an estimated population of 383,200 affected inmates. Since there are only approximately 38,000 individuals with serious mental illness remaining in state mental hospitals, this means *10 times more individuals with serious mental illness are in jails and state prisons than in the remaining state mental hospitals (my emphasis)* (Carroll, 2016).

The “crimes” for which many people with mental illness are incarcerated are typically symptomatic emergences of their illness. And once in prison, “the large and growing number of prisoners who have histories of serious psychiatric disorders prior to their conviction are especially prone to break down under the massive stress engendered by overcrowded prisons” (Kupers, 1999, p. xvi). Through the emergence of these self-same psychological symptoms within the prison, the “mentally ill, disturbed, or persistently defiant inmates continue to accumulate sanctions... thus adding to their time” (Rhodes, 2009, p. 59). Inmates with mental health needs thus find themselves inscribed deeper and deeper within systems of carceral reuptake like the SHU through the emergence of symptoms that, in the absence of functional mental health programs within the prison, are largely articulated by custody as “behavioral problems” or as “refusal to program” and are often isolated. As isolation units like the SHU and Supermax facilities are well documented madness production technologies (Grassian, n.d), “disturbed mental states are addressed by imposing conditions that further disturb the mind” (Rhodes, 2009, P. 60).

The Prison not only receives and concentrates the already-mentally ill from civil society. It also a pathogenic institution. Inmates “who never suffered from a psychiatric disorder prior to incarceration, (often) react to the overwhelming traumas that punctuate life in prison by experiencing disabling psychiatric symptoms” (Kupers, 1999, p. xvi). Prisons, and in particular programs of total isolation like the SHU, are “inherently madness-inducing” (Rhodes, 2009, 40). Therefore, to be received mad, or driven mad within prison *guarantees carceral subjects’ permanent inscription within the prison as neoliberalism’s preeminent site for confining the mentally ill*. In other words, a closed-feedback circuit has emerged in which the mad are both sent to prison and manufactured there through subjection to technologies of subjective annihilation, linking them tighter and tighter to the prison as the preeminent institution of madness-management in the neoliberal age, escape from which becomes less-and-less likely. As a result, while the statistic that half of all mainline convicts return to prison after three years is appalling enough, for those with serious mental health concerns, that number rises to 80 percent! Eight out of ten incarcerated people with serious mental health concerns are doing what we inmates called “life on the installment plan” – continually returned to the prison upon the emergence of symptom sets related to a mental illness that was itself originally constituted through exposure to the prison yard. To find oneself incarcerated while suffering a mental illness is to have a metaphorical anchor stitched to your chest – dropping one deep within and magnetically bounding mentally ill subjects to the prison, guaranteeing further exposure to thanatopolitical machinery. And through this mechanism, the prison generates all the opportunities it needs to sufficiently corporally punish and/or kill the mentally ill who, even if

not biologically killed, are daily threatened with as much and *permanently inscribed within the prison as preeminent theatre of “madness” management in the neoliberal age.*

Important to note, social and subjective death - as permanent carceral inscription - both guarantee progressive exposure to a potential biological death over time. Social and subjective death are maybe best understood as the suspension of superfluous human beings – the racialized, the mentally ill, or those otherwise rendered-expendable to neoliberal capital - within an amortized annihilation program, locating carceral subjects within a frequency of death distribution - social through biological - guaranteeing ever-newly generated opportunity for biological annihilation through inmate-on-inmate violence and indifferent, state-organized, premature death.

Biological Death. From 2015 to 2016, the most recent year for which we have statistics, the death rate for U.S. state prisons increased from 296 to 303 per 100,000 people (Prison Policy Initiative, 2020). If there are always around two-million people in prison, that means that every year, about 6,000-plus human beings lose their lives to the prison. Removed from both the capital-productivity and hyperghetto-prison circuits, biological death is the perfect elimination of the superfluous as walking and talking contradictions to a neoliberalized, delimited capital. Biological death may be realized through catastrophic inmate-on-inmate violence, drug overdose, suicide or “natural causes.” And also, most prominently, through what Ruth Wilson Gilmore describes as the “state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group differentiated vulnerability to premature death” (Gilmore, 2007. P.28). In this particular case, substandard and negligent medical care:

Researchers have identified a number of reasons why prisons increase the risk of illness and early death ... constraints on transportation to necessary

appointments outside the prison; and inadequate healthcare in prisons due to insufficient resources, limited medical providers, restrictions on medication administration, and treatment bias because of stigmas attached to incarcerated patients ... punitive practices like solitary confinement compound existing physical and mental health concerns and risks. (Prison Policy Initiative, 2020)

If one were to perform a purely economic calculation, imposed and premature death realizes a strange and monstrous efficiency: each lethal inmate-on-inmate violence, suicide, drug overdose or death from medical negligence removes from the ledger a singular body that makes room for another within the context that prisons operate, near universally, in excess of their capacity to the point of bursting. Biological death is called forth through a carceral mandate to perpetually disappear people, yet with prison themselves incapable of permanently storing their millions of bodies. Each of the approximately 6,000-plus biological deaths occurring behind prison walls a pruning, a small pressure release on a thanatopolitical machinery choking and jamming upon itself with racialized flesh.

The neoliberalized state can't explicitly kill off its excess. The political will for explicit genocide simply doesn't exist in the United States. Yet, for our contemporary civil society to function, the state must disappear and/or threaten with disappearance about eight million disproportionately racialized, rendered-superfluous people, all the time. That prevents some ideological difficulty. The white-supremacist state relies on the prison to realize its disappearances then, as carcerality is ideologically generative of the capacity for the state to virtue-signal itself as enlightened, democratic, humane even – all the while, performing a massively-scaled social cleansing under the cover of “crime containment.” We are not scrubbing the social of human beings, we are protecting civil society from “them,” from criminality. That contagious, racialized criminal horde of the exact type staged in the Corcoran

SHU during the trial of the Corcoran 8. Instead of explicit genocide, carcerality establishes those conditions for the guaranteed emergence of incomprehensively scaled inmate-on-inmate violence and premature death, feigns ignorance with regards to the establishment of this vortex of permanent disappearance and abandoned us all to death machineries always-already disavowable. As long as lethal violence in carceral space is predominantly inmate-on-inmate, it can be pinned upon the very victims of neoliberalism's social scrubbing drive. As long as we don't think too deeply as a collective about the perfectly predictable consequences of capturing and concentrating the most historically, economically and socially traumatized people in the country, imposing scarcity atop of them and not allowing them to leave. Thanatopolitical machinery is genocidal⁵ and constituted through a cultivated and weaponized indifference. Lacking the will for conscious and explicit genocide but within an operative mandate to keep several million people permanently disappeared, the biopolitical/necropolitical state organizes the prison as violence pit and simply *withdraws* to its observation perches and gun towers. The most politically tolerable "solution." Unconscious because unuttered in dominant discourse, a sifting and extra-legal surplus engine manufacturing death for surplus people. Epiphenomenal but guaranteed, always-disavowable because not rationally deliberated and planned. Just not prevented. And steered. The neoliberal prison yard abandons "rehabilitation," and emerges as necropolitical - its perfectly predictable violence steered towards the end of the permanent disappearance of the less-than-fully-human savage mass, an amalgamated flesh that tears itself to shreds upon the carceral's bio-mechanized teeth.

⁵ Activists and scholars, including Mariama Kaba and Dylan Rodriguez, have consistently and convincingly drawn our attention to carceral and policing logics as, in their essence, genocidal (Kaba, N.D.; Rodriguez, 2021, pp. 135-175).

Case Study – Youngster and the Lived Experience of Carceral Abandonment

I was assigned Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1995) several times throughout graduate school. And engaging with *Discipline and Punish* was always an ambivalent experience. For on the one hand, I was always enthusiastic to read any theory around the prison. Doing so could potentially center my experience as a formerly incarcerated person and give me access to some discursive frameworks potentially illuminative of what had happened to those of us abandoned-to-death within the carceral perimeter. In addition, I knew that at some future point in my academic career, I would likely take the prison as the primary object of my own research and writing. *Discipline and punish* could be an essential text for me to come to terms with, then. I was well aware of Foucault's towering reputation within the academy, how important his contributions - particularly in thinking through the prison - have been within the humanities and related disciplines. In addition, I recognized that *Discipline and Punish* is often the only text centering the prison likely to be assigned within any theory-based graduate program. Which to my mind is an utterly tragic deficiency, but never mind. That's another discussion.

As I read *Discipline and Punish* and engaged others around its concepts and argumentation, I had a rather discordant and entirely deflating experience. Despite the elegance and novelty of Foucauldian concepts, quite shockingly to me at the time for a work organized around the prison, it simply didn't speak to my experience, as inmate. As far as I could tell, it seemed to have very little to do with the contemporary prison at all. Further, it was my distinct impression that someone could read and internalize the arguments presented in

Discipline and Punish and walk away from the experience with just as little of an understanding of what happens on any contemporary prison yard as if they never bothered to read it. Foucault certainly explained *something*. And it was essential. Breathtaking in its scale, actually. But it wasn't the viciousness and terror, the absolute death-stranding of the contemporary prison as I understood it in really significant ways. The institution seemed to have moved beyond its representation as found within *Discipline and Punish*. Or collapsed away from those principles that Foucault first enunciated. Thus, a theoretical lacuna was revealed between a dominant strand of prison theorization (and thus, educated understanding of it) and my experience of incarceration. A space opened for potential inquiry and further elaboration in order to fill the gap between the two.

An example may clarify how these two conditions - my lived experience of incarceration and my engagement with texts like *Discipline and* mutually informed one another to create space for a convict epistemology and for this dissertation to exist. Less than a month before I paroled in 2005, I witnessed the last in a long series of bloody events in my dorm at the California Rehabilitation Center in Norco. Court paperwork had recently emerged confirming that an inmate housed within my dorm suspected of snitching had indeed testified in court against another within the facility. My friend "Youngster"⁶ from San Bernardino County "raised his hand," volunteered to "whack" the snitch on behalf of the Sureño (Southsider) prison gang. When we were recalled from yard back within the dorm that sunny and otherwise pleasant June afternoon, everyone gave Youngster a wide berth as we were all well aware that he was about to attack somebody. Palming a plastic-handled state-issued toothbrush with a melted tail

⁶ All names and inmate-handles have been changed throughout this work to guarantee anonymity.

end and a razor embedded into it, Youngster wrapped his white t-shirt around his striking hand and forearm to contain the blood splatter as he approached. The now-verified inmate-informant was standing in front of his locker rooting for something inside of it when Youngster, with no words spoken, came up from behind and braced him, wrapping his left arm tightly across the victim's chest and pinning his arms down at his sides. And with his right hand, Youngster brutally and with significant force deep slashed the snitch's throat from ear to ear. The victim stumbled sideways and then spun 'round in self-defense as Youngster released him, raising his arms while screaming "No! No! No!" in terror, and Youngster slashed wildly in a downward then sideways direction, back and forth across the victim's face, raised arms, shoulders and chest. After a good ten-seconds of brutal and slicing attack, the victim fell over backwards and began pooling blood from seemingly everywhere as he thrashed on the ground gasping for air and grabbing at his throat trying to hold the blood in, gurgling and choking before going still with unconsciousness from some combination of rapid blood loss and sheer horror.

The entire dorm went vacuum silent. And we all just stood there, staring. Taken aback by the explosive violence. Absolute stillness. No alarms sounding. No cops anywhere. There it was again. Our *Abandonment*. Youngster methodically unwrapped the t-shirt from his forearm as we watched, and he wiped the shank clean with it and wrapped it all into a tight bundle like some precious and delicate object. He then handed it off to a homie standing nearby, who promptly disappeared with the weapon in order to stash it, his sneakers squeaking across the dorm's tiled floor the only thing audible as he scampered away. Youngster then did something entirely unexpected. At least, I didn't expect it, as he had cleanly gotten away with it. He had no

chance of being caught I mean. Custody hadn't witnessed the assault, and all he had to do was walk away.

He didn't. Instead, Youngster pulled a state issued-blanket from the nearest bunk and folded it in fourths. He laid it on the floor, and proceeded to casually kneel atop of it one knee at a time, a few feet away from his expiring victim. He then raised his hands in a slow and deliberate motion - I didn't know what he was doing and the action seemed all the stranger for it; I remember having the rather surreal impression that he looked like a Muslim initiating his daily prayer. Which I had always thought was a rather beautiful ritual to observe while in prison, I found it hopeful. But instead of raising his hands in supplication, he placed them behind his razor-bald head and interlaced his fingers. I only realized then that Youngster was preemptively assuming the very position that, if he were to be arrested, cops would demand he assume in order to take him into custody. "Get on your knees! Hands behind your head and lock your fingers, motherfucker!" And he just sat there next to his victim and waited. After watching him sit there still and stoic as a statue for a few moments, the rest of us woke from our captivation by the scene nearly all at once. And in near unison, the entire dorm scrambled to our assigned bunks. And there we waited, too.

A couple of minutes passed with Youngster kneeling there in the center of the dorm with his fingers interlaced behind his head. No one made a sound. I can't say for certain whether it was the unnerving silence that drew the dorm cop's attention or the fact that we were all on our assigned racks well prior to count-time. The dorm usually buzzed with frenetic activity at this time of the day. But it certainly wasn't then, which must have seemed strange. The cop came from his office at the front of the dorm to investigate and made it about ten feet

into our respective living area before seeing the body of the inmate-informant laid-out in a pool of his own blood. The spectacle startled him as it would anyone; the inmate-victim deathly still on his back with arms and legs to the four corners and Youngster there next to him, shirtless on his knees in a pre-arrest, cuffing position staring straight ahead. The scene looked absolutely psychotic. The t-shirt splatter shield hadn't worked and Youngster was *covered* in blood. His bare chest and torso streaked with it and runny, his cut-off grey sweat shorts maroon-soaked. Bright red dollops of blood stood out atop his squeaky-white tennis shoes. The c.o. let out a panicked and vulgar exclamation and triggered the alarm button at his hip; lights above began warbling red as the siren wailed its ear-drum puncturing staccato. He drew his baton with one hand and a pepper-spray cannister with the other, and his military-grade, laced-tight boots bounced and shook the elevated tile floor as he strode toward Youngster and closed the distance between them. And then, in some combination of actions, the cop was simultaneously striking at Youngster's head and body with his baton while blasting him towards the face with intermittent bursts of pepper spray. Preemptively assuming the cuffing position in order to avoid a thrashing hadn't worked, so Youngster fell over to his side and assumed the fetal position covering his face with his forearms. He drew his knees tightly to his chest and squeezed his eyelids shut, drawing into himself as far as possible to ride out the assured ass-whipping. The cop pitilessly beat and chemically saturated him and Youngster took it all silently. No resistance. No utterance. More cops came rushing in, beating and spraying, and on like that it went for a good minute or so. This group battering. The whole dorm eventually filled with noxious pepper spray and I retched from the pit of me along with everyone else before my eyes had entirely swollen shut. Alarms kept howling and flashing inorganic, blurry red before tear-

soaked and tight-eyed Blackness had descended. Guards eventually got Youngster to his feet blinded, bloodied and contused before extracting him from out of the dorm in cuffs behind his back to the control office at the center of the institution for processing and rendering. He would eventually be transferred into administrative segregation (ad-seg) in Chino, another prison down the road from CRC, where Youngster would come to “catch” a SHU term behind the assault. I don’t know how much additional time was added to his sentence and I never saw him again. His victim was taken out on a stretcher. I don’t know if he died. I didn’t ask, and no one else I knew of did either. Effectively, it didn’t matter. The result was the same. He was just *gone*. Disappeared. As so many of us had been already, and many more of us would be soon enough. Gangsters transferred to the SHU or a higher custody facility. Rats to protective custody. The dead to the morgue. So many disappeared, one way or another. The prison is a sifting and scattering machine for those of us inmates deemed abject and incorrigible, more or less brutal dependent on where you might land.

All those times that I engaged with *Discipline and Punish* in graduate school, I would recall Youngster’s vicious assault of that inmate-informant and his surreal actions afterward. And I thought, what does *any* of this have to do with what I witnessed that day? Where was Youngster’s docility? For Foucault, an always-potential observation by custody *should* have led us all to internalize the custodial gaze and to self-discipline as a result. To behave as if we were always being watched. But in Youngster’s case, in all of our cases within that CRC dorm, there was rarely ever any custodial gaze present, at all. We were effectively abandoned and could engage just about any form of violence pretty much at any time and *never* have it be seen by custody (see chapter five for another explicit example). In fact, for Youngster to be observed at

all, he had *to sit there and wait* for custody to catch-up with events and take notice several minutes after the fact. And further than that, Youngster allowed himself to be seen, he *wanted* to be caught. Why?

Because the Southsiders planned for his capture, in advance. In preparation for his “lock-up” in the hole, they had entrusted Youngster with a tube-shaped, tightly-wrapped plastic cellophane “package” filled with dope and tobacco that he smeared with canteen-purchased petroleum jelly. And he had inserted that package in his rectum prior to the attack. We called that “keestering” something, or “hooping.” Along with the contraband, “kites” were included; messages from the yard shot-caller and addressed to gang leadership interred in the hole apprising them of recent developments and yard business. This mechanism, an inmate-soldier hooping a package prior to completing a mission guaranteed to end in a “lock-up order,” a trip to the hole, was a predominant mechanism through which we could not only smuggle contraband *into* the hole for the “big homies,” but could also maintain a communication circuit with gang leadership quarantined (see chapter four) in ad-seg and/or doing SHU terms. Youngster *wanted* to go to ad-seg, he was functioning as a mule. And once housed within, Youngster would un-keester the package, remove it from his ass, unwrap and distribute the kites and dope through inmate tier-tenders/porters who passed from cell-to-cell and through “fishing” – creating a line out of a torn piece of cloth, attaching the goods to its tail end and then sliding it under the cell door to other nearby cells. And in the process of this “putting in work,” Youngster would “earn his stripes,” a greater respect and elevated position within the gang structure’s hierarchy. A solider *has to* volunteer and complete such missions, has to go to the hole, to move up the organizational ladder. The reason that Youngster assumed the cuffing

position and waited to be observed despite the fact that he could have cleanly gotten away with the assault was because he *had to be* apprehended in order to facilitate his movement, and along with him, the flow of illicit goods and communications across carceral boundaries and perimeter fences otherwise unbreachable.

Instead of being disciplined by the panoptic gaze as Foucault theorized, Youngster hijacked it. He rode that gaze and resultant, custodial- administered flows of inmate bodies like a surfer does a wave towards his intended destination. As against Foucault and panopticism as the organizing principle of carcerality, a convict epistemology reveals and asserts that *the panoptic system within the prison is entirely co-opted by inmates*. In addition, we had sufficiently hijacked custodial managed flows of inmate bodies towards our own purposes, from the mainline yard to ad-seg for instance as in Youngster's case, through co-opting that very custodial look. We used it. And when someone is eventually released from ad-seg back to the mainline, communications would come right back out through the same mechanism, but in reverse. Inmate-soldiers from within the hole keestering and smuggling communications from gang leadership there to be delivered back to mainline yard shot-callers upon their return.

This chapter exists not only to describe the specific gap between Foucault's panoptic gaze meant to discipline inmate bodies and Youngster's desire to be observed within the context of its relative absence in order to meet entirely un-disciplined and collective inmate objectives, but also, to make sense of where it comes from. As argued, two neoliberal logics overdetermine the emergence of thanatopolitical machinery in the contemporary prison, of which youngster's slashing is an example. The first is that our voracious carcerality is not the neoliberal state's response to rising crime, but is instead the disappearance of a rendered-

superfluous-to-capital and largely racialized subpopulation and therefore a *perversion of penal law*. The second determining element is that the prison is *not* a labor extraction device. These two neoliberal principles conjoin to manufacture a novel carceral milieu riven through by a *mortal indifference* from custody to the fate of rendered less-than-fully-human inmate life within the carceral thresher. That's why there were no cops watching us, why Youngster had to wait to be seen and apprehended. Custody's lethal indifference emerges within the cannot-be-spoken contradiction of concentrating an ever-increasing and largely racialized population with nowhere to deposit it, post-carcerality. The contemporary prison, as a materialization of this contradiction under neoliberalism, has only two mechanisms to ensure the permanent removal of the rendered-superfluous from civil society: either (1) *permanent inscription* within the prison through social and/or subjective death, or (2) *biological death*. *The prison either grows fuller and fuller to the point of bursting with expendable, racialized flesh, or it kills*. Herein lies the obscene logic, the unconscious desire calling forth and guaranteeing thanatopolitical machinery. That is, my lived experience within the prison, my witnessing of Youngster's throat-slashing of that snitch and the state's relative absence and indifference to our fate, announced that *disciplinarity, the point at which "biopower" is applied to individual bodies* (Foucault, 1978, pp. 39-40), *has collapsed as carceral state strategy*. Foucault's panopticism – us inmates knowing that we were potentially being observed all the time and self-disciplining as a result - and my experience of carceral abandonment - all of us *knowing damned well* that no one was watching us and *no one cared* what violence we did to one another except in order to issue further punishment and longer sentences within the prison - *as carceral-state strategies for the management of an inmate population* are diametrically and radically opposed techniques for

the managing of a collection of human beings. From panopticism towards what I am calling throughout this work an *abandonment-towards-death*. Youngster's slashing and allowing himself to be observed and apprehended by custody *in contradistinction* to Foucault's panopticism illuminates how a convict epistemology, as I think it, functions. And it helps to *reveal what the contemporary prison hopes to accomplish on behalf of a civil society* that has called it forth in all of its colossal monstrosity, perversity and absolutely severe bodily violence. Permanent disappearance from civil society through abandonment towards social, subjective and/or biological death.

Abstract:

Having described neoliberalism as that set of overdetermining forces calling forth a thanatopolitical machinery that has subsumed the carceral interior (chapter 2), this chapter turns to the material and symbolic implications of the United States hosting a series of fenced-off anomie zones inside/outside of itself absolutely overrun with varied state-organized forms of inmate-on-inmate violence within a context of lethal indifference to less-than-fully-human inmate life. Through a textual engagement with Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer*, in particular his interpretation of Thomas Hobbes *Leviathan*, it will be the work of this chapter to demonstrate that the contemporary prison is the manufacture of an *artificial "state of nature"* against which civil society defines itself as constitutive boundary, and each inmate is, through carceral inscription itself, rendered as "savage" ontological type. It is the inmate "savage," as ideological category, that does sufficient work to anchor normative white-supremacist subjectivity through negation. That is, the juridico-political order has no need to suspend itself as Agamben asserts in order to realize a bare life that may be killed as primary gesture of neoliberal sovereignty, as the prison renders each inmate both a potential victim and an executioner within the context of the prison yard organized as an always-potential Hobbesian-style war of all-against-all. I end this chapter with an application of these concepts, what I am calling the white-supremacist Hobbesian fantasy anchoring normative subjectivity, to explain extrajudicial police killings/executions on "the street" in order to demonstrate that, as with Foucault's disciplinarity, the same logics that guarantee thanatopolitical machinery within the prison migrate beyond prison walls within neoliberal abandonment zones, taking varied and lethal form as racialized subpopulation culling tool(s).

Chapter Three, Parallax I - The Manufactured State of Nature and Inmate Savages

Hobbes' Ghost

A specter haunts the first two chapters of this work. I fear that it is inevitable for any work taking the prison's interior, these carceral catacombs as its object need come to terms with a haunting of the prison itself – a spirit that wandered its cell blocks while we slept or hovered there 'round the electrified perimeter fence under the darkened gun towers, cut loose from both time and mortality. Cell doors couldn't contain a ghost that is to be found everywhere throughout the prison, inhabiting its very bricks and mortar. We inmates all heard the deathly whispers whether or not we understood the old-world language that he spoke;

perhaps all-the-more menacing for those who couldn't make any sense of his perplexing tongue. The spirit assumes physicality through a possession of sorts, a hushed seizing of those human beings who find themselves too close to the yawning mouth of the prison, whether through their own volition or dragged there unwillingly and in chains. A possession that is nothing but an old way of seeing things, through dead and ghostly eyes. A perception that *takes* you. Traces of his haunting are evident in the all-the-time and saturating foreboding that every inmate is made to experience in anticipation of the always-potential prison riot that I discussed in chapter one, *a war of all-against-all*. He was there looking out through our eyes, our vision overlaying one another's. He roamed the Corcoran SHU and occupied those jurors in the trial of the Corcoran 8 who, lacking any foreknowledge of his presence were made defenseless against him, and came to perceive human beings held captive within the SHU as "more animal than human" *savages*, in lethal and tortuous isolation to the supposed defense of civil society. We see through ghostly eyes when we realize, as I mentioned in chapter two, that rendered-superfluous human beings taken to prison cross a liminal threshold into a manufactured *state of nature*.

The ghost that has haunted this work up until now, because he haunts the contemporary prison itself, is that of none other than 17th century English philosopher, Thomas Hobbes. And I need to draw him out. Excavate his grave. To implore his ghost to let us know what he sees there, in the prison. Or makes us see. This chapter will function as a *séance* then, and I will be calling to Hobbes deep within carceral shadow to ask him why he is interred there, and to explain his role in all of this. I fear that word of Hobbes' demise in philosophical circles has been greatly exaggerated, his irrelevance to the examination of contemporary social forms

like the prison preemptively announced. We need disinter Hobbes from his only-apparent expiration to draw to light the degree to which the conceptual apparatus that he developed in *Leviathan* – the state of nature, savagery, the war of all-against-all, etc. – deeply influences contemporary carcerality, giving the prison not only a very particular form but an ideological coherence. And because our very individual senses of self as citizen-subjects of the United States are knotted up with the prison and all of its fearsome terrors, we need take account of the degree to which the spirit of Thomas Hobbes possesses us all without any awareness of the fact. Leading us to perceive things, people and particular types of events in very particular ways; that is, through his eyes. And resultantly, to act in accordance with what we have seen while possessed and captivated by him.

We commence our exhumation with the “State of Nature,” a conceptual apparatus with a long legacy in the history of Western philosophy generally understood as a means to imagine what life must have been like prior to the emergence of civil society. Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Locke through more contemporary thinkers including John Rawls and Robert Nozick have used the concept to ground their arguments for or against particular forms of government or even the necessity of the state itself, and have come to radically different conclusions on what the state of nature must have been like for those human beings who inhabited it. Within the Hobbesian conception, the state of nature is a scarce space, and those born within are to be considered as essentially equal to one another; equality defined by Hobbes as nothing more than human beings’ mutual capacity to kill one other. As there is not enough resource to nourish everyone within the state of nature, it places human beings, equal in this precise sense, at odds with one another in a perpetual struggle to acquire necessities: “From this equality of

ability, ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our ends. And therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which neverthesse they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies” (Hobbes, 2009, pp. 176-176). The Hobbesian state of nature is “bellum omnium contra omnes,” or *a war of all-against-all* (Hobbes, 2009, p. 178) and because conflict is written into the very state of nature, any action is justified within it that corresponds with human beings’ inborn desire to prolong their own lives. “Justice” is a meaningless concept in the state of nature as what is to be allowed is any action that guarantees survival including preemptive attack, theft, and murder, and therefore, to live within the state of nature is to live in “continuall feare, and (in) danger of violent death” (Hobbes, 2009, p. 179). The uncanny similarities between the Hobbesian state of nature and the contemporary prison as I’ve described it across these first two chapters should by now be ringing at least somewhat apparent.

Desperate to escape the state of nature in which life is made to be “solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short” (Hobbes, 2009, p. 179), combatants weary of perpetual struggle, insecurity and violence do something that we inmates were prohibited from doing in prison - they enter into a social contract. They lay down their arms and their natural right to attack one another and establish Leviathan – “a common power to keep them all in awe” (Hobbes, 2009, p. 245). Leviathan alone may establish law and enjoys a monopoly of violent means to enforce it, and human beings in the state of nature willingly submit to Leviathan’s sovereign authority in order to prevent a return of total, entropic violence. For Hobbes then, this submission is the basis for all future obedience to the state. No matter the abuses it may enact, governmental power - even in its excesses - is to be allowed in order to prevent a return to the state of nature: a considerably greater evil than any governmental abuse imaginable. Further, under

Hobbesian social contract theory, to commit a wrong against any individual member of the community is to commit a wrong against Leviathan itself, as Leviathan's body is merely constituted of all those individuals bound by the social contract - thus granting governmental power its form and legitimacy. The creation of Leviathan is thus the creation of the body politic, and to take up any of those means that are justified in a state of nature – theft, preemptive attack, murder, pillage, violence against any individual - is to be cast back within the state of nature outside of civil society and to enter a state of war, this time as against Leviathan itself. Within Hobbesian theorization then, a firm dichotomy is established between the state of nature and civil society, the latter ripping itself out from the shell of the former, and it is also to constitute two distinct populations - savages within the state of nature and the civil subjects of Leviathan.

Between the years 1642-1651, the English Civil War pitted Royalist forces against Parliament, ravaging England and leading to the death of 200,000 of Hobbes' countrymen. It was within this context that Hobbes' wrote *Leviathan*, published in 1651. As growing numbers of people had become disenchanted with the notion of the "Divine Right of Kings" to legitimate sovereign power, Hobbes ascertained the imperative to ground sovereignty within a rational framework so as to prevent further bloody revolutions of the exact kind that England had just experienced. *Leviathan*, then, was not simply a thought experiment to imagine what happened in some remote past disconnected from present concerns. It was instead an ideological tract meant to (re)constitute support for monarchical power. Hobbes transposed a fantasy of archaic life from within a war-torn civil society in order to convince his contemporaries of the existence of an always-potential calamity lurking in its revolutionary tracts and aims. Englishmen had a

duty to obey monarchical authority because to destabilize it, even when seemingly justified, was to usher in a new state of nature which was to be avoided at all costs as the greatest of evils. Civil subjects were born into a social contract because their ancestors had established Leviathan of their own volition in order to escape the brutality of the war of all-against-all, which could always return upon the *dissolution of government* as Hobbes and his countrymen had witnessed in their own lifetimes through civil war that ushered in an incomprehensibly-scaled slaughter. Any monarchical injustice paled in comparison to the self-butcherings of peoples previously bound by a social contract. For Hobbes then, the state of nature was less about an opaque prehistory than it was about contemporary civil society and the *internal dissolution* that threatened it. *Leviathan* was an ideological tract meant to manufacture consent towards monarchical authority so as to prevent the reappearance of the state of nature through civil war, threatened when Leviathan was undermined, deposed, withdrawn or otherwise made ineffective.

The State of Nature ≠ The State of Exception

As Giorgio Agamben argues in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (2008), interpreting Hobbes' state of nature as depicted in *Leviathan* as a fanciful description of what life must have been like temporally antecedent and spatially distinct from civil society is not only a limited, but an entirely mistaken reading:

Hobbes, after all, was perfectly aware...the state of nature did not necessarily have to be conceived as a real epoch, but rather could be understood as a principal internal to the state revealed in the moment in which the state is considered "as if it were dissolved. (Agamben, 1998, p. 36)

To understand how Agamben comes to this interpretation of the Hobbesian state of nature, we must first understand what Agamben means by the concepts of inclusive-exclusion, the relation of the ban or abandonment, the archaic figure of Homo Sacer, bare life, and the state of exception.

For Agamben, the primary but opaque action of sovereign power is the “inclusion of bare life in the political realm,” or the creation of a “biopolitical body” that may be killed (Agamben, 1998, p. 6). In a seeming paradox, bare life is *included* in the political realm through its *exclusion*. For the political order to exclude someone does not mean to break all relationality between itself and bare life, but is the enactment or putting into effect of a particular type of relation - that of the ban. Bare life is that which is not only banned *from*, but *abandoned by*, the political order:

He who has been banned is not, in fact, simply sat outside the law and made indifferent to it but rather abandoned by it, that is, exposed and threatened on the threshold on which life and law, outside and inside become indistinguishable. It is literally not possible to say whether the one who has been banned is outside or inside the juridical order. (Agamben, 1998, p. 29)

To render bare life outside of the polis (an exclusion), bare life must first be grabbed ahold of by the juridico-political order as an object of concern, and is thus *constituted in the very process* (an inclusion). Bare life, as category of being, is then not set entirely outside of the political order with nothing to do with it, but remains embedded in a relation of “inclusive-exclusion” with the political in the form of its *abandonment*, it literally comes into being through the act. It is this total exclusion of *Homo Sacer* from both the sacred and profane orders, rendering of they who can be killed by anyone else but not sacrificed (Agamben, 1998, p. 8), that constitutes the very boundaries of civil society proper and its fully-human subjects on

the one hand, and the “biopolitical body” that may be killed “outside” of it. “In Western politics, bare life has the peculiar privilege of being that whose exclusion founds the city of men” (Agamben, 1998, p. 7). Through banning Homo Sacer or bare life from both the sacred and political orders, those very orders (and the fully-human subjects within) are themselves constituted and realized through negation as against a bare life constituted through the ban.

To return to the contemporary moment, for Agamben, it is through *the state of exception* - the suspension of the normative law (the *nomos*) - that Homo Sacer is constituted. Therefore, bare life does not (pre)exist *outside* of the juridico-political order, but is instead constituted and made to appear by it when sovereign power decides affirmatively on the state of exception. All life within its folds is made bare and is therefore both inside/outside of the political order simultaneously; constituted by it through an exclusion and suspended within a relation of abandonment or the “exception in which human life is included in the political order in being exposed to an unconditional capacity to be killed” (Agamben, 1998, p. 85).

Further, and according to Agamben, when the sovereign affirmatively decides on the state of exception, the state is considered as if it were dissolved. And remember, for Hobbes and with regards to the civil war that he so feared, the moment when the state is dissolved is the moment when the state of nature is made to appear. In other words, the Hobbesian *state of nature* and Agamben’s *state of exception* are two ways to talk about the *same thing*, the former misleading as it references an opaque prehistory spatially and temporally distinct from the juridico-political order itself. As Agamben argues, it makes no sense to talk of inside/outside or temporally prior with regards to the state of nature because bare life and the state of nature

are constituted through the sovereign decision to suspend the nomos, an inclusive/exclusion anywhere and at any time.

But what then appears (at the point in which Society is considered as *tanquam dissoluta*) is in fact not the state of nature (as an earlier stage into which man would fall back) but the state of exception. *The state of nature and the state of exception are nothing but two sides of a single topological process* in which what was presupposed as external (the state of nature) now reappears, as in a Mobius strip or a Leyden jar, in the inside (as state of exception). (Agamben, 1998, p. 37)

What was read as distinct from the political order as the state of nature is, in fact, embedded within it in the very capacity of the law to suspend itself. Said straightforwardly, *it is within the state of exception that the Hobbesian state of nature is realized contemporaneously*. All life is made bare through a suspension of the law, and Homo Sacer is he who can be killed by anyone else because pushed outside of the protection of a series of rights and a law no longer in force. Agamben goes on to say,

Far from being a prejudicial condition that is indifferent to the law of the city, the Hobbesian state of nature is the exception and the threshold that constitutes and dwells within it. It is *not so much a war of all-against-all*, as, more precisely, a condition in which everyone is bare life and a homo Sacer for everyone else. (*my emphasis*) (Agamben 105-106)

To recapitulate, Agamben quite clearly collapses the state of exception and the state of nature into a singular concept. Where the state of exception is decided upon by sovereign power, there appears the state of nature as well as Homo Sacer - that bare life that can be killed by anyone else under the suspension of the normative law. This suspension is a principle inhering within law itself, a safety-valve guaranteeing the contiguity of the state, and the “exclusion” of bare life is realized through the law’s suspension in moments of emergency or tumult, in order to save itself through an unleashing of the sovereign’s violence capacity unconstrained by normative law.

What is fascinating in Agamben's theorization though, and of deep interest for this particular study of the contemporary prison, is that if one were to look closely at Agamben's state of nature, it is not the same state of nature that Hobbes describes. It is a rather strange version of it in fact, as Agamben's "state of nature" is *devoid of its primary and essential content*. For Hobbes, the war of all-against-all is the very definition of the state of nature, they are coterminous. The state of nature *is* a war of all-against-all, and to return to a war of all-against-all as Hobbes thought of the English civil war that he and his countrymen had just lived through, was to return to the state of nature. But Agamben asserts that the state of exception, which for him *is* the Hobbesian state of nature, is "not so much a war of all-against-all."

Why make the two things equivalent? To describe a state of nature that is "not so much a war of all-against-all" is to talk of an entirely different state of nature than the one that Hobbes had conceived. Agamben has seemingly constructed a tautology then, in which the state of exception *is* the Hobbesian state of nature (but *not* a war of all-against-all), which is really just the state of exception. What is elided in this tautology is the positive content of the Hobbesian state of nature, *bellum omnium contra omnes*. Is it possible to speak of the state of exception *as* the state of nature if to do so we must discard that element so essential as to be its very ground and definition? After all, the lynchpin of the entirety of the Hobbesian state of nature framework is the desire to escape the war of all-against-all and the subsequent establishment of the juridico-political order. Without the war of all-against-all, not only is the engine that led to the emergence of civil society discarded, but so is the desire by contemporary civil subjects to prevent its recurrence. So why is Agamben content with brushing it aside?

Simply because there isn't a war of all-against-all in the state of exception. Or, at least, not necessarily. Agamben continues to make use of the Hobbesian theoretical framework, in which the "city of men" is constituted through the negation of the state of nature and in contradistinction to the bare life within it, essential to his argument about the "primary action of sovereign power" as the creation of a biopolitical body and the political order (through negation), but he discards the state of nature's most primordial element, the war of all-against-all, thus redefining it.

More specifically, within Agamben's state of exception that is "not so much a war of all-against-all," bare life doesn't tear itself to shreds. It is not the deposing of sovereign authority pitting abandoned and lawless subjects against one another as in the Hobbesian conception. It is instead a freeing of the sovereign sword. Whether it be within the Nazi death camps of World War II or "enemy combatants" in Guantanamo Bay, in the exception, bare life is decimated by sovereign power unconstrained by normative law and a framework of individual rights. In the Hobbesian state of nature though, there is no sovereign, no law operative. It is instead those *already-bare slaughtering one another*. The state of exception can't be the Hobbesian state of nature, because in the Hobbesian state of nature, the sovereign simply doesn't yet exist, or has been entirely deposed. The whole logical chain Hobbes developed - the war of all-against-all, the desire to escape it, and only *then* the establishment of sovereignty - is undermined in Agamben's conception and a sovereignty transcendent to its originary conditions runs rampant through the state of exception, butchering bare life.

To the point, what Agamben wishes to maintain from Hobbesian theoretical architecture is the state of nature and bare life as the negative foundation for civil society, the

principle internal to the state that functions as its threshold or outer limit. An outside in which a life that may be killed is rendered. In order to do so, he radically redefines what a state of nature is in order to make the state of exception the ground, the negative foundation for the positive order. But by making the state of exception the “outside” against which civil society comes to define itself, both materially and as imaginary concept, he has to redefine the state of nature – thus making use of the Hobbesian framework while simultaneously evacuating it of its positive content. And the point - in doing so doing, Agamben *misdiagnoses* that which truly constitutes the negative foundation of the positive order or civil society. It is *not* Homo Sacer that civil subjects come to define themselves against, nor is the state of exception the threshold that constitutes the boundaries of civil society proper. Nor is the state of exception the primary mechanism for the production of a biopolitical body that may be killed. At least not within the neoliberalized United States.

The Manufactured State of Nature

The Hobbesian state of nature that United States’ civil society defines itself against in which the war of all-against-all is not only maintained, but is gestated, active, and brutal, *is the prison*. It is through the prison that the carceral state organizes a war of all-against-all, not only as an abstract principle, but as a material *reality* internal to itself through establishing initial conditions that guarantee the always-potential riot and assorted forms of inmate-on-inmate violence and fences it off as an “outside,” as well as that bare (inmate) life inside of it that is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short” that civil subjects are desperate to keep contained. The “savage” against which civil subjects define themselves in contradistinction to in order to

experience and (mis)recognize their full-humanness and “civility” is not Homo Sacer as revealed in the state of exception but those rendered “savage” inmates within times of juridico-political *normalcy*. The neoliberalized state has *no need to suspend itself* in order to capably produce a “biopolitical body” or a bare life that may be killed by anyone else.

To drill down on this point, United States neoliberal-capitalist civil society (the body politic) hosts within itself a “carceral archipelago” (Foucault, 1995, p. 297), spatially distinct because fenced-off and secured by the gun tower, actively producing of savage subjects that may be killed by anyone else within the prison yard as literal Hobbesian state of nature, and the inside/outside dichotomy that Hobbes theorized as between the commonwealth and the war of all-against-all is contemporaneously realized as that between the civil society and the prison yard as state of nature. Not the state of exception, but the normative juridico-political order is itself “a Mobius strip or Leyden jar” (Agamben, 1998, p. 37) in which law and lawlessness are of-a-piece, appearing as distinct but making possible one another - a constitutive interconnectedness revealed to we inmates who traversed and rode the law deeper and deeper towards its terminus within the carceral belly. We all knew the state-organized, lawless chaos pit towards which we traveled and individually prepared for it both mentally and physically - from the courts, to the jail to the yard. And we well knew what was expected of us once we arrived there. War. Struggle. Extra-judicial violence. Inmate-against-inmate violence broken down along racial lines (for more on emergent, racialized prison gangs, see chapter four). And if we didn’t prepare, we did so at our own, very literal, peril.

As I argued in chapter 1, the primary punishments towards which any inmate is abandoned within the carceral thresher are a set of surplus punishments that supersede any

court-issued sentence, inmates tearing one another to shreds in spaces of functional lawlessness through the fist, the boot and the shank. We rode the law like a conveyor belt into chaos gaps within the *normative* juridico-political order, realized in its culmination as lawlessness because overwritten by the perverse, extra-penological desire to permanently disappear superfluous-to-capital and largely racialized bodies, as discussed in chapter 2. Not a *suspension* of law in the state of exception, but the normative law as organizing and hosting a series of anomie zones within itself at the site of its own culmination, i.e., the gladiator pit, the rape cell, the riotous yard. The originary conditions of mainline prison yards - the imposition of scarcity atop a captive and pinned population with the state enjoying a monopoly over inmate movement within carceral space - overdetermine them as always-potentially collapsing spaces; the foremost thanatopolitical technology in the carceral cache for exposing inmates to a spectrum of tortuous death potentials and corporal violence is the prison riot, a *literal* war of all-against-all. And as with the archaic Homo Sacer abandoned from both the sacred and political orders, any inmate within the prison can be killed by any other at any time through totally unpredictable, radically explosive and entropic violence within spaces both inside/outside of the juridico-political order, on its threshold, where law and lawlessness vacillate and become indistinguishable. To receive a normative, *lawful prison sentence* is to be always-vulnerable to a series of *extra-legal* and calamitous inmate-on-inmate forms of violence simultaneously, no matter the sentence imposed by the courts nor the “crime” committed, within a state-totalized institution. From drug possession to murder, all inmates who walk the yard are in mortal danger and could be swept up in a riot, stabbed, beaten to death, shot, or

otherwise killed by any other inmate outside of the law yet through being grabbed ahold of by it - *the* dominant contemporary relation of abandonment.

With regards to the specific mechanisms through which the artificial state of nature is manufactured to the (re)fortification of civil society, for Hobbes, a pre-existent and natural scarcity in the state of nature pits “equal” human beings against one another in order to accrue sufficient resource to survive. Within the prison, scarcity is *imposed* by the state atop a forcefully undifferentiated captive population made equal - each inmate issued a number, the same uniform, no distinguishing hair styles, etc. - as its *raison d’etre*. A life stripped of enjoyment and made bare, pitting us inmates against one another in order to accrue sufficient enough material and symbolic resource and leading to the perfectly predictable emergence of behaviors and actions articulated as violent. This violence is then discursively staged as a willful choice or as evidence of an ontological savagery, a fundamental difference between those racialized, less-than-fully human savage inmates inscribed within carceral space and made socially dead and those fully-human subjects of U.S. civil society outside of it. Through the imposition of scarcity atop of a captive and undifferentiated population made mass in a lawful space state-organized as functional and experiential lawlessness, the prison is nothing but the *manufacture and the staging of an artificial state of nature*. The contemporary prison is not only the manufacture of an artificial state of nature and its resultant “savages,” by definition because interred there, but is their perpetually recurring *containment*, or the maintenance of an “abyssal divide” (de Sousa Santos, 2006) between civil society and the prison. This “containment” is in effect the *reproduction of the body politic through time in differential opposition to its negative foundation, the consumptive and ongoing war of all-against-all and*

the carceral savages that civil society manufactures and stages in order to cohere, both materially and in ideology. As Hobbes implored and cajoled his countrymen to obey the monarch through enumerating the plethora of calamities that awaited in a returned state of nature during times of civil war and the dissolution of government, the entire contemporary political spectrum - from neoliberal Democrats to reactionary Republicans - beseech, inveigle, and terrify their own constituents in order to manufacture their consent towards a burgeoning and ferocious carcerality as the preeminent mechanism for the containment of a particular form of savagery, materialized as rendered-superfluous-to-capital, racialized inmate bodies. A novel form of bare life.

Civil subjects are in every moment and everywhere interpellated by and invested in the maintenance of a colossal prison system so as to contain the racialized and “savage” horde and to prevent the carceral war of all-against-all as manufactured state of nature from flooding the gates - the reproducing principle for United States civil society, itself. Hobbes not only haunts the contemporary prison. The prison is a pure instantiation of Hobbesian theoretical architecture down in its very skeletal foundations. Within the contemporary prison then, in contradistinction to Agamben’s state of exception that is “not so much a war of all-against-all,” the positive content of the Hobbesian state of nature is realized and maintained in all of its incomprehensible terror and viscera. And the prison, as ongoing and very literal war of all-against-all, is staged as the constitutive outside to civil society allowing it to cohere through time both in its very physical and geographic materiality as well as symbolically within the white-supremacist imaginary.

The Prison as the “Hidden Matrix and Nomos” of the Modern

In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben goes out of his way to argue that unlike various concentration camps, prisons are not spaces of exception and therefore *not* states of nature (after all, he theorizes the two as coterminous), because:

prison law only constitutes a particular sphere of penal law and is *not outside the normal order*. The juridical constellation that guides the camp is... martial law and the state of siege.... As the absolute space of the exception, the camp is topologically different from *a simple space of confinement*. (*my emphasis*) (Agamben, 1998, p. 20)

Agamben simply doesn't understand the contemporary prison. Alexander Weheliye (2014) builds off the work of Colin Dayan and Angela Davis to demonstrate that because Agamben relies on a “dogmatic conception of not only the state of exception but law in general,” he fails to recognize that contemporary prisons are no “simple spaces of confinement:”

Slavery, imprisonment, and torture, in U.S. prisons and abroad, are legal in the strict sense and very much part of the “normal order.” Still, they display many of the same features Agamben ascribes to the camp as the definitive site for the production of bare life. (p.86)

Further,

The normal order is differentially and hierarchically structured and *does not necessitate a legal state of exception in order to fabricate the mere life of those subjects already marked for violent exclusion*; in fact, we might even say that this is its end goal ... the judicial machine is instantiated differently according to various hierarchical structures and frequently abandons numerous subjects, making them susceptible to premature death within the scope of the normal order, which, in turn, aids in the creation and maintenance of a caesura among humans. (*my emphasis*) (Weheliye, 2014, pp. 86-7)

This section will further extend Weheliye's critique through elaborating the specific mechanisms, the various “hierarchical structures” of the judiciary that “frequently abandons” racialized subjects “making them susceptible to premature death within the scope of the

normal order,” that is, within the prison. It is through the abandonment of racialized subjects within the carceral state of nature that inmates are rendered a unique form or “biopolitical body,” as inmate bare life within yet simultaneously outside of the normal order and made susceptible to varied forms of premature death.

As I argued in chapter two, the United States’ contemporary prison performs a social function that is *extra-penological*. Not a simple space of confinement, but in excess of the normative law and proper penological mandate, the prison scrubs racialized and otherwise capially-superfluous bodies from neoliberally delimited and white-supremacist civil society. The entire normative order was *recalibrated* in order to realize this obscene carceral desire through a host of legal rewrites but not suspended - mandatory minimums, three-strikes law, drug enhancements, distinct targeting of capially-abandoned geographies - a series of mechanisms to target, capture, and disappear from civil society not criminals, but racialized and economically-abandoned subjects embedded or simply proximate to illicit drug economies. Many of these recalibrations of the normative juridico-political order were first implemented under President Nixon’s “War on Drugs,” and in 1971, he argued before Congress that drug use had “assumed the dimensions of a national emergency” and demanded increased funding towards “emergency measures” to contain it (Vulliamy, 2011). The law was not suspended under this “state of emergency” then, but gaped open and *expanded*, specifically targeted and intensified, so as to cast a wider net - gathering ever-greater numbers of Black and Brown fleshly bodies towards itself for carceral extrusion and digestion that prior to neoliberal reorganization were simply not articulated as criminal. The obscene mandate to permanently disappear/scrub superfluous human beings through carceral inscription emerged within the

fissures and cracks of the normative juridico-political order itself - exploding it from inside-out, spreading within and colonizing it - but not suspending it - repurposing the prison as a permanent disappearance site, an extra-legal and thanatopolitical machine.

In other words, the contemporary prison and its armaments of capture, concentration, disappearance and abandonment towards varied deaths *displaces or makes redundant the state of exception* as the primary mechanism for constituting a bare life that may be killed in the United States. Civil society and its subjects constantly reproduce and (mis)recognize themselves not through the exception, but through the prison as state of nature and production site for a bare life in times of juridico-political normalcy; a Lacanian-style mirror making appear to civil society itself a “community” of the non-all in which racialized, superfluous bodies are extruded and disappeared from view. The carceral Leviathan stands – quite literally knees through its police - upon the necks of the racialized superfluous as ground and fortification, and subjects of the white-supremacist body politic (mis)recognize themselves as the not-in-prison as state of nature and therefore proper, fully-human subjects. “Free” in our very boundedness within an incomprehensively violent, white-supremacist structuration of social space through the *pre-political exclusion* of rendered less-than fully-human because “savage” life. In this sense, all prisoners are “political prisoners,” as for the delimited “polis” to constitute itself (that juridico-political normative order which, theoretically, could be suspended in a state of exception) as against the carceral state of nature, it need prior and always disappear an amalgamated, racialized and fleshly mass of about two million human beings made biopolitical body/mass and exposed to varied and unpredictable death at all times

on the threshold of indistinguishability between law and lawlessness that is the contemporary prison.

The specific mechanism that Weheliye hints at without elaborating through which racialized subjects are rendered bare (abandoned to death) within juridico-political normalcy unfolds through the following logic: inmates, as ontological category or type of being, are constituted by the ban. They are juridically grabbed ahold-of through the court (inclusion) through its expanded and intensified set of (largely drug and drug related) laws and *abandoned to death* after sentencing through subjection to a series of extra-legal punishments *outside* of the law (thanatopolitical machinery) yet *within* the geographically distinct-from-civil-society contemporary prison (exclusion). The rape of Eddie Dillard and gladiator fights culminating in the execution of Preston Tate discussed in chapter 1 are two exemplary, but by no means unique, models of how one is pulled “within” only to be exposed to death “outside” of the law, while still embedded within its very heart - the prison as the telos of the normative order. The psycho-corporal battering of the prison riot, the interminable torture of the SHU, subjection to intra-racial and interracial violence, checkings, stabbings and beat-downs are further and everyday-within-prison examples. These are not punishments of the normative order but its surplus seizing it from within, an implicit underside of the law emergent within a context of lethal indifference.

The Three Pillars of Humanness – the Political, the Juridical and *The Economic*

According to Agamben, bare life is that which is constituted through the exception. The sovereign’s decision to suspend the normative order is the vacillation point between a fully-

human and bare life. What Agamben fails to take account of is the simple fact that the political and the juridical orders are not the entirety of the registers through which full-humanness is constituted. As Foucault argued, under neoliberalism, man is constituted as *homo oeconomicus* - the economic being (see chapter two). Therefore, there exists a third pillar constitutive of the normative order and its fully-human life, namely, the economic register. From which subjects may also be, and regularly are in western capitalist democracies, abandoned.

In chapter two, I demonstrated that capital flight and welfare-state retrenchment, Gilmore's "organized abandonment and organized violence" functions all throughout the period of neoliberal reorganization, which began roughly in the mid-1970's and still continues through the contemporary moment. This neoliberal reorganization most radically and deleteriously impacts those racialized, rendered superfluous subpopulations pinned to the nether regions of the collapsing hyperghettos. To be banned from the economic order, as with abandonment from the juridico-political, is constitutive of a type of bare life, but a qualitatively different form of bare life than Agamben theorized because not constituted through the exception. Economic bare life is impervious to either the maintenance or the withdrawal of the juridico-political order and functions within a different logic entirely.

The differing logics unfold as follows: there exist juridico-political rights that can be suspended within a state of exception, thus constituting Homo Sacer as qualified form of bare life. There is no such thing as an economic bill of rights guaranteeing of full employment or as protections against economic calamity within the United States. The bare life exposed to death through economic abandonment is qualitatively different then that realized through the state of exception then, for within a relation of economic abandonment, there is no "right" that it

lost, no law suspended. Economic abandonment may be *enabled* by the juridico-political order (i.e., deregulation law allowing for capital flight and outsourcing + mandatory minimum sentencing laws), but it does not result from its retraction. The economically abandoned are not constituted as bare through the exception then, but are revealed always-already vulnerable; we all exist as economically *naked*.

The implications couldn't be more profound with regards to making sense of who can or cannot be killed in the United States and who constitutes the biopolitical body as savage/bare life abandoned to death. Through emphasizing the state of exception and ignoring capital abandonment and welfare withdrawal, Agamben's theorization cannot account for the preeminent mechanism through which capital-superfluous human beings - largely Black and Brown people due to prior racialized and hierarchical structuration of the United States production system as described in chapter two - are rendered a form of bare life and abandoned to death at such disproportionate rates. If the late Stuart Hall was correct in his assertion that "race is the modality through which class is lived" (Hall, 1987, p. 394) then *class*, the economic abandonment of the racialized subproletariat *is the modality through which racialized subjects are predominantly killed*. Through ignoring economic abandonment then, Agamben reproduces a racist and ideological myopia that disavows the reality that it is disproportionality Black and Brown people that are rendered as form of bare life and abandoned to premature death throughout neoliberal sociality through inscription within the carceral thresher. Racialized bare life that may be killed through carceral inscription as manufactured state of nature - *savage* subjects – are made to appear through leaving inscribed and still subject to the normative law and a hypertrophied penal apparatus racialized,

economically abandoned subjects. Unable to negate the “premature death” to which one is assigned within conditions of imposed economic scarcity (abandonment), the abandoned must, by necessity, procure means of survival largely through illicit economies, thus rendering them perpetual targets of the recalibrated, expanded and intensified juridico-political and its hyper-militarized police forces permanently disappearing the racialized-superfluous into the prison as death machine.

Neoliberal ideologues in government and media ascribe individual motivations to *whole subpopulations* rendered outside of circuits of capitalist production that are articulated as iterations of savage subject –gangsters in gang neighborhoods, drug addicts or dealers and “looters” or “rioters” in the case of urban uprisings - all engaged in variant forms of “war of all-against-all.” All evidence of an ontological savagery, an essential difference between those carceral-targeted savages who *deserve* to be in prison and the fully human subjects of civil society requiring the carceral state’s protection. After all, leaving one inscribed in the recalibrated juridico-political order and subject to its normative law while simultaneously excluded from the economic system, and hence, embedded in illicit economies, is a trap, a rigged game. It is straightforwardly the perfectly predictable manufacture of “criminality.” It is to render the abandoned perpetually vulnerable to a law enforcement apparatus transmuted as pure predatory force through its distinct and targeted hyper-policing of economically abandoned zones of neoliberal relegation, a court grown exceedingly punitive and vicious, and the prison as thanatopolitical machine/disappearance site.

Said differently, through undermining inscription into the third pillar establishing fully-human life under neoliberalism, economically-abandoned subjects are made to appear as less-

than-fully-human savages because embedded with variant and emergent states of nature. Neoliberal narratives of personal responsibility ascribe to structurally adjusted individuals a personal responsibility for their lack of employment as a government dependent and/or criminal scourge. The juridico-political order and its armaments of capture, containment and death dealing – police, courts and prisons- rush into the collapsing space generated through the undermining of the third pillar constitutive of full-humanness like water rushing to low ground, re-stabilizing neoliberally-delimited white supremacist civil society by grabbing hold of those made to appear less-than-fully-human criminal/savage subjects and extruding them inside/outside of the space of civil society. Or, the sealing off of the capitalist-productivity circuit (civil society) and the resultant constitution of a state of nature outside of itself through the act.

The third pillar through which properly human subjects are constituted is knocked out through capital abandonment, and a distinct subpopulation -the racialized subproletariat - is made to appear, ideologically staged as savage horde committing savage crimes within variant states of nature - the hyperghettoes and their illicit economies (gang wars) and the prisons (riots and inmate-on-inmate violence) inside/outside of civil society, rife with the potential for disorder and overflowing their boundedness. By not accounting for economic abandonment then, Agamben is unable to theorize how within times of non-exception, a racialized bare life that may be killed by anyone else can be produced to an *enormous* scale – the disappearance of two million and the perpetual control of another six, all existing along a spectrum of various premature death-exposure intensities. The recalibrated and normative juridico-political order, the law itself within times of normalcy, is repurposed as factory for an all-the-time production

of bare life made perpetual target of the murderous carceral chain (police, courts, jails and prisons), itself overwritten as thanatopolitical machine distributing death outside of the normative order yet at its very telos. The normative juridico-political order, through economic delimitation and the extrusion of superfluous bodies, is transmuted as machine casting abandonment in lieu of the exception and producing a life that may be killed in order to continually (re)found the polis in contradistinction to itself; its vehicle for death distribution the punishing carceral as state of nature, effecting the obscene and proto-genocidal mandate to permanently disappear the largely racialized and capital-superfluous horde.

The Hobbesian Fantasy

“I ain’t never ran from nothin’ but the police.” – Vince Staples, Norf Norf

The United States body politic is by definition white-supremacist because materially and ideologically constituted through abandoning-to-death inside/outside of itself a largely racialized bare life, a rendered- “savage” subpopulation made so through an inclusive-exclusion within a manufactured state of nature, the state-organized war of all-against-all that is the contemporary prison. Further, and the argument that I wish to develop here, because emergent and embedded within this very particularly formed white-supremacist sociality, normative subjectivity in the United States is organized by an imaginary framework that may best be described as a Hobbesian fantasy – that is, a seeing things through his eyes, constituted most essentially as a civilization/state of nature binary. This Hobbesian fantasy functions as a common-sense, a subjective filter for interpreting and making sense of particular types of events to be described below through which one’s very belongingness within civil society is

experienced and made “real.” Those fully-human subjects politically, juridically and economically inscribed (the three pillars of full-humanness under neoliberalism) see themselves as inhabiting, while simultaneously co-constituting, something like “civilization.” In contradistinction are those extruded from it, those bound within the hyperghetto and the prison, who are alternately perceived as occupying variant states of nature rife with a contaminating violence – which when taken together constitute what I am calling the *savage underside* of white-supremacist “civilization.” The human beings who inhabit these iterant states of nature, through their very embeddedness within them and as their constitutive agents are, by definition, some iteration of “savage” type, participants of a larger less-than-fully-human ontological category of “the savage” - evidenced through any number of violent *savageries* performed, or rather, through behaviors and actions staged and articulated as such. States of nature are themselves perceived as being absolutely overrun by violent savageries through the Hobbesian fantasy screen, whether it be the inmate-on-inmate violence of the prison yard, or gang violence and “urban disorder” – “rioting and looting” for example - on the street. Within this hegemonic, Hobbesian imaginary, civil society is a rationalized space - organized through the normative law, internalized and shared systems of morality, a mutual inheritance of specific cultural values, a set of internalized norms, a long-learned/disciplined repression of instinct, and familiar codes of conduct including “proper” speech styles and codes of dress, etc. Within the extraordinarily racist and foundational Hobbesian fantasy, the same assumptions with regards to the rationalization of social space and its subjects are not extended to those “savages” as embedded within distinct geographic territories articulated/perceived as variant states of nature overrun with violence.

As with Thomas Hobbes' original theorization in which he perceived the English civil war as the appearance of a state of nature ushering in an incomprehensible savagery, when the contemporary social order is in supposed "crisis," neoliberal ideologues and civil subjects themselves both *reflexively perceive and further articulate* the crisis through the unconscious Hobbesian fantasy as the (re)appearance of a formerly contained savagery. As with the Hobbesian conception inaugurated 370 years ago, the state of nature remains, though the contemporary moment, a thought experiment. A filter or screen for events that we see through. A fantasy born within contemporary civil society of an always-potential calamity emergent at that very moment in which its containment mechanisms are to be considered, as it were, "*tanquam dissoluta*," or are perceived as being threatened with being overrun. The primary containment mechanisms for the state of nature within the contemporary neoliberal social formation are the police, the jails, the courts and the prison – what I am calling here the *carceral chain*.

When this carceral chain is perceived as failing as in the case of so-called urban disorder - what Ruth Wilson Gilmore following Lenin calls spontaneous resistances - normative subjectivity *hysterically perceives the appearance of a formerly contained savagery encroaching it on all sides and threatening it*. The uprising in Los Angeles in 1992 after the acquittal of LAPD officers who savagely beat Rodney King and the out-and-out collapse of varied forms of governmental institutions in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina in 2005 leading desperate, racialized subjects to take to the street to procure survival essentials only to be met with both legal and extra-legal forms of violence and death are examples. As are the Black Lives Matter protests in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014 and the 2015 uprising in Baltimore after the death-in-

custody of Freddie Gray. And as I write this work, the nationwide tumult and brutal carceral-style response shaking the country in the aftermath of the extra-judicial executions of both George Floyd and Breonna Taylor - further examples in which, daily, hysterical white-supremacist subjects perceive and (re)articulate an escaped savagery as encroaching all around it, threatening civil society itself with dissolution through the incapacity of hypermilitarized police to contain “riots” and “looting.”

In each of these spontaneous resistances to the carceral chain - after all, each and every one is a reaction to extra-judicial police violence and/or abandonment to premature death - a variant iteration of the ontological category “savage” was made to appear, the “rioter” and/or the “looter,” thus justifying a supplemented and intensified carceral response meant to re-contain that which is perceived as escaping its boundedness. The response to these spontaneous uprisings is the same as under Nixon’s “law and order” hegemony in 1972; a rolling out of the police as “the appropriate response to domestic insecurity, whatever its root causes” (Gilmore, 2007, p. 40), thus justifying carceral expansion and intensification to control the racialized horde “burning down their own neighborhoods” and threatening to pour into white space. Civil unrest, even in this contemporary moment, is conflated with *criminality* as opposed to being recognized as borne of a legitimate grievance, and a consumptive state of nature – the spread of ‘looting,’ ‘rioting’ and ‘crime’ from the hyperghetto into areas of greater socioeconomic embeddedness or white-coded zones is - is perceived as a threatening of civil society proper. A hypermilitarized force is called forth, supplemented by the National Guard in order to reformatify the failing already-hyperpolicing apparatus in order to (re)contain

the threat to “civilization,” synonymous with white-supremacist and neoliberally delimited social space.

It is this savagery and white-supremacist civil society’s desire to contain it that ideologically justified the casting of a ravenous police force into the capitally abandoned hyperghettoes, beginning in the mid-1970’s and ratcheted ever-upward over the ensuing decades, in order to surveille, hunt down, capture, and quarantine the contaminant threat savagery poses to civil society proper within the white-supremacist Hobbesian fantasy. Further, it is this carceral response that materially and symbolically constitutes the very boundaries of civil society itself, taking definitive form in contradistinction to the state of nature and its war of all-against-all materialized as inner-city gang warfare, urban disorder, and the violence inside the prison – a series of entwined limits making civil society and its subjects recognizable to itself/themselves. These dynamics have been operative, the primary mechanism for the containment of the racialized “other” since the emergence of the neoliberal project that has as one of its pillars a voracious carcerality meant to manage neoliberalism’s own construction - the racialized, economically-abandoned to death.

To be more specific, the normative juridico-political order, as baseline and constituting logic, unleashes an aggressive and hypermilitarized police force into neighborhoods of neoliberal dereliction and abandonment as *internal colonies* and targets capital-superfluous subjects as iterations of savage type - the “criminal” or the “gang banger” - for containment. Rewritten under neoliberalism as that obscenely well-funded and militarized wedge formation plunging into the dark hyperghetto as “state of nature,” the police act as vanguard of the carceral chain more generally and are tasked with the initial grabbing-ahold of savage bodies so

that they may be socially scrubbed from white-supremacist civil society through inscription within the contemporary prison – a nested thanatopolitical machinery of permanent disappearance. I argue that one cannot adequately make sense of the unpredictable yet entirely regular, systematic, extra-judicial police execution of Black men and women— Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, Michael Brown, Freddie Gray, Philando Castile, and most recently Breonna Taylor and George Floyd and many others besides without taking into account the fact that police do not commit their appalling extra-judicial violence in a vacuum. Yet, as a culture, we have the hegemonic tendency to do precisely that – to initiate “reforms” at the point of contact between the police and rendered-savage subjects – body cameras, sensitivity training, etc. The police are *part and parcel of the carceral chain more generally*, the containment mechanism for savagery and the state of nature that simultaneously constitutes the body politic through extrusion of the “other” - its implicit but primary function. Police are tasked with rendering “savages” into custody through arrest - code for disappearance and abandonment to death - and it behooves us to recognize that it is largely within this context, the in-itself illegitimate seizing of human beings towards eventual carceral inscription in order to scrub the social of superfluous, labor-full bodies when these contacts/killings occur

As I described in chapter 1 and 2, the contemporary prison is overwritten by an obscene desire to permanently disappear racialized-superfluous subjects, overdetermining the emergence of a series of nested thanatopolitical machines that expose inmates to a spectrum of death potentials. Not only is the prison overwritten by this obscene desire to permanently disappear, but the entirety of the carceral chain from policing, to the jails, to the courts and the prison. Within each link in the chain, each carceral node, the unspoken desire to permanently

disappear grows and instantiates unique modes of exposure to death, flipping the law itself inside-out and into lawlessness. The prison is absolutely saturated with spaces of lawlessness, the thanatopolitical machinery of delegated and disavowable inmate-on-inmate violence towards which the carceraly-inscribed are abandoned. The police, as primary node in the carceral chain or the buffer between civilization and the “state of nature” and charged with “first contact” with the less-than-human because savage horde, have their own mechanisms for abandonment towards death; instantiations of spaces outside of law within the heart of the law itself. The specific mode of abandonment towards death at the particular carceral node of policing is realized as the police stop itself.

Any face-to-face interaction between a police officer and rendered- “savage” subject (the “gang-banger,” the addict, the “crazy” person) is organized by a Schrödinger logic not dissimilar from the one that organizes the prison yard as an always-potentially collapsing space. As the mainline yard is made temporarily stable through inmate-on-inmate regulative violence or may collapse into race riot, the police encounter with rendered-savage subjects has two potential states or outcomes, entirely unpredictable beforehand as to which state it will collapse into. That is, the police encounter or “stop” – being pulled over in a car for “driving while Black” or seized on the street through persecutory machineries like “stop and frisk” for instance, vacillate between on the one hand either normative arrest leading either to detention or release, or on the other hand, any police encounter may instantiate a space of lawlessness.

To say it straightforwardly, the very concrete street upon which any savage subject stands may be transmuted as an extra-legal space as the extra-judicial execution, through that very bloody action, rewrites the space in which Black death occurs as a space outside of the law

retroactively. The extra-judicial execution of largely racialized subjects through the gun, the “banned” choke hold, and the knee reveals a lawless dimension existing right alongside of the law, under its cloak, coterminous with and indistinguishable from it that is gathered up and made to appear through an act of police violence, itself.

To make this point clear, we return to Agamben, who argued that the state of nature is “a principle internal to the state.” And borrowing from Foucault, and Dylan Rodriguez who extend Foucault’s point, any individual officer is a capillary agent of the state or its material instantiation. If we combine these two insights then, any officer, as capillary instantiation of state power, must by logical necessity carry the state of nature within themselves, within their very physicality. Through an extra-judicial violent action then, police officers cast the state of nature outward from themselves, saturating the particular and localized geographic location in which police/savage interaction occurs. To metaphorically describe the situation at hand, the site of an extra-judicial police execution is functionally the police drawing of a magic circle ‘round the body of the to-be-slain savage subject, instantiating a zone of lawlessness in the circle’s interior - its perimeter boundary made mobile and flexing as determined by the movement of the police officer(s) themselves as they circle, wolf-like, round the fleshly body that is to be devoured:

...when Hobbes founds sovereignty by means of a reference to the state in which “man is a wolf to men,” *homo homini lupus*, in the word “Wolf” we ought to hear an echo of the *wargus* ... at issue is not simply *fera bestia* and natural life but rather a zone of indistinction between the human and animal, a werewolf, a man who is transformed into a wolf and a wolf who is transformed into a man. (Agamben, 1998, pp. 105-106)

The cop, as capillary instantiation of the law yet carrying lawlessness, the state of nature, within themselves is thus a material instantiation of the indistinction between the human and the animal, the nomos and the exception.

This is the real “thin blue line,” demarcating the nomos from the state of nature, full-humanity from less-than-fully-human savagery; a gauntlet thrown down by police as their very institutional essence - delineating spaces of lawlessness through the act of unholstering and discharging their weapon. As with emergent thanatopolitical machinic spaces inside the prison that dialectically flip and the telos of law is revealed as lawlessness, the making appear of a zone of indistinguishability between law and lawlessness through a police encounter turned murderous retroactively is the very logic of contemporary policing. They are organized by the same forces, the obscene underside of law itself as a drive towards permanent disappearance rendered disavowable through extra-judicial execution’s unpredictable regularity. Not all of police officers disavow their role. Some have intuited it, accepted the call. That’s what those “secret” gangs rife within the LAPD and the Los Angeles Sheriff department are – the “Banditos,” the “Executioners,” the “Reapers” (Dickinson, 2021). Informal organizations that accept the war of all-against all that they are implicated in, their obscene mandate to disappear through extrajudicial violence. They have intuited their implicit mandate, literally materialized and inscribed in their very flesh as cop-gang tattoos - enunciations carrying equal material and symbolic weight to the badge itself.

Said another way, all police wear two masks in any encounter with rendered savage subjects - as normative disappearance squad subjecting the abandoned to a series of deaths further down the carceral chain (within the prison), or, as extra-judicial and immediate kick-

murder squad. The very potential states of the police encounter, either “normative” detainment (as police officer) or extra-legal execution (as Reaper or Executioner, etc.), determine whether the very street where police and detained savage subjects stand is “within” the law or without, a “legal” or “extra-legal” space, rationalized through the nomos or an immediately emergent state of nature. For Agamben, in the Nazi state of exception, the word of the Fuhrer *was* the law. And as Carl Schmitt ominously asserted, “sovereign is he who decides on the state of exception” (quoted from Agamben, 1998. P.11). In the United States, *police officers themselves decide whether law is in force through the smoking gunshot*. And a single guilty verdict of Derrick Chauvin is simply the exception that proves the rule. The rule being that normative law hosts exceptional spaces within itself, or, is the all-the-time production of emergent spaces of abandonment-towards-immediate-death wherever any policeman happens to be standing, dragging the state of nature with them like some ominous and ghastly curse.

As with the prison, normative policing under neoliberalism exists within a tension – between “enforcement of law” and the unspoken mandate to scrub the social of racialized and superfluous bodies. The normative juridico-political order can never quite subsume its obscene mandate within itself, and this tension, like two magnets repelling one another, creates a space of lawlessness between them; emergent and subsuming of the very concrete street upon which police/rendered “savage” interactions occur. At any moment and unpredictably, *any* exchange between police and rendered-savage subjects may enter a lawless dimension, a space outside of law through the enforcement of law itself. Police regularly execute rendered savage subjects in the street like animals because the exchange itself is overdetermined by the obscene desire

to permanently disappear, a drive which sporadically and unpredictably explodes from inside-out of the law - colonizing, overdetermining and rendering murderous the normative police stop. Police *are*, in fact, “serving and protecting.” They are *servicing* white-supremacist sociality by *protecting* it from savagery at the gates as perceived through the Hobbesian fantasy.

Police in the United States are in an entirely unenviable position, then. Even if their intentions are noble, they are embedded within an aporia entirely beyond any individual intention; trying to hold together an incongruity within the very essence of normative policing under the logical conditions of economic abandonment. They are *explicitly* tasked with the execution of civil law and *implicitly* mandated with the disappearance of a less-than-fully-human savage life. The execution of their explicit, juridico-political mandate cannot justly be accomplished, for to enforce a set of civil laws on a population banned from circuits of capital production is to simultaneously task them with that population’s disappearance through the execution of civil law itself, a grave injustice. It is within this space of impossibility and tension that extra-judicial execution, as manifestation of the *irresolvability* between enforcement of civil law upon fully-human subjects and the proto-genocidal disappearance of rendered savage less-than-human life is made to appear. Extra-judicial execution is nothing but the obscene drive towards permanent disappearance exploding through the pretense that is the imposition of a civil law meant for human beings upon made less-than-human savage because not-economically-inscribed subjects. The imposition of a just civil law upon rendered less-than fully human subjects is something that the normative law, structurally, cannot do without annihilating entire categories of unjustly targeted human beings.

This is not an apology for the police. Their institutional role is monstrous, and the only way out of the deadlock for any individual cop is to immediately resign. To be a police officer is to be embedded within an apparatus torn between two institutional mandates – one spoken and the other implicit, unconscious and reprehensible – on the one hand, the normative execution of the civil law and, on the other, the extra-penological disappearance and exposure to death of a superfluous rendered less-than-human population, exploding any noble intentionality. In their desire to “serve and protect” and impose justice (giving the benefit of the doubt here), cops, by necessity must perform a monstrous and almost incomprehensively scaled and racist injustice. The more they impose “justice” by enforcing the civil law, the more they racially scrub white-supremacist civil society and perform their reprehensible and unspoken mandate. And it is within this contradiction, in the tense space between the enforcement of civil law and the obscene and voracious desire of carceral disappearance that an extra-judicial space is opened; a space of execution rendering immediate Black death, an explosion of the pretense otherwise. The hyper-policing apparatus unleashed toward economically abandoned subjects within capital-abandoned hyperghettos may unpredictably vacillate, transmute, into extra-judicial death squad in any encounter anywhere, entirely unpredictably, at any time.

And a further terrifying point. As white-supremacist civil society itself is only made possible through the containment of a racialized “savagery” through hyper-policing and the prison, and every and any single encounter between police and “savage” subjects may vacillate extra-judicially murderous, civil society itself is therefore built upon and reproduced through the *always-potential and systematically regular* extra-judicial execution of racialized subjects

through a police force transmuted as thanatopolitical murder squad. This is no problem of “bad apples.” The murder of Black people by police is a *normative* function of neoliberalized hyper-policing within zones of economic abandonment as overwritten by the obscene carceral desire of permanent disappearance; instantiating spaces of lawlessness at the very street corner where the racialized superfluous and the police intersect. A constitutive gesture making white-supremacist neoliberal civil society, the only “commonwealth” that actually exists in the United States, possible. It is a perpetually recurring crime reconstitutive of neoliberal sociality and racial capitalism, always and everywhere. The reason extra-judicial execution of racialized subjects keeps happening, all across the country and through a variety of disparate and disconnected police departments, is because policing is conditioned by this logic as it exists outside of the departments themselves; overdetermined as integral to the normative operations constituting and sustaining the normative juridico-political order under conditions of economic abandonment, our monstrous and vulgar white-supremacist sociality. Banning the choke hold, making police wear body cameras and similar neoliberal reformist measures will do precisely zero to mitigate nor negate the forces - economic abandonment and the rolling out of a militarized police force to disappear people as less-than-human savages - that not only makes possible, but *demand*s racialized execution and permanent disappearance. Cannibalistic, white-supremacist neoliberalized capital can’t function without the digestion of Black flesh, whether it eats on the street or in the prison.

A perverse disciplinarity develops within rendered savage subjects – no longer the obedient and docile body that has internalized the gaze, but the spasmodic body that *runs*. The very fleeing from vacillating disappearance and abandonment to tortuous death, a perfectly

human, predictable and reasonable response, instead justifies their execution for having “resisted arrest,” articulated as a violence. In the Hobbesian fantasy, only “savages” would do that. In fact, perhaps the best marker for the degree of one’s inscription within white-supremacist civil society is the rate of heartbeat acceleration when hailed by a cop. Against Althusser, not everyone turns and is made subject. The perfectly predictable response for the made-savage subject is to flee, for every single encounter with a police officer anywhere, and at any time, for many millions of people in this country, is an encounter with an always-potential and immediate death.

Abstract:

In chapter three, I described the contemporary prison as the carceral state's manufacture of an artificial state of nature, and that through carceral embeddedness itself, each and every inmate is ideologically transmogrified as a less-than-fully-human "savage" type. In this chapter, I argue that as disease infects the individual body and undermines it, within the white-supremacist fantasy anchoring normative subjectivity, the "savagery" threatening at the gates (behind prison walls) threatens to overrun the "body" politic and render it apart in a void of racial no-sense. Through first demonstrating that disease is the prominent metaphoric frame through which "violent" crime is narrativized, I argue that the prison should be resultantly read as a plague quarantine meant to inoculate white-supremacist civil society from the contagion of largely racialized, inmate bodies as individual particles of "violence disease." The body of any inmate is thus semantically overloaded with both notions of savagery and contagion, as these concepts are themselves related at the individual and population registers (an individual "savage" is a particle of a collective "violence disease" threatening the social body). To make this argument, I will deploy Roberto Esposito's immunitarian paradigm, what he calls the "the most fruitful interpretative key for modern political systems" to argue that a logic of quarantine gives form to the prison's architecture and internal procedures, and resultantly, quarantining logics cascade throughout carceral space instantiating in a series of nested forms. That is, much inmate-n-inmate violence are individual and collective inoculations against race riot as a contagious explosion of "violence disease." I end this chapter with an analysis of prison gangs through the immunitarian paradigm to argue that, from every inmate's phenomenological position, we were all entirely surrounded by "othered" inmates as a series of disease vectors, who the very contact with threatens an "outbreak" of race-riot, thus calling forth "prison politics" as prophylactic, social-distancing measures.

Chapter Four, Parallax II - The Recursive Carceral Quarantine

As the sick person goes to the doctor to be made well, so should the unjust person go to the judge to be made well. Just as medicine should be understood as "releasing us from disease [apallattei nosou]," justice (or punishment) should be understood as relieving us from licentiousness [akolasias] and injustice [adikias]. For justice/punishment "is a doctor [iatrikê] for baseness [ponêrias] and reforms us [sôphronizei] and makes people more just.

- Plato, *Gorgias*, cited from and paraphrased by Danielle Allen

Somehow plague has made its way in different fields; after contaminating literally mankind, it infiltrated language, contaminated the ways in which we perceive different things, and established new categories of scapegoats ... [and] new ways of imprisonment.

- Cristina Vidrutiu

The Criminal Contagion

Last night, July 14th of 2020, I had the type of uncanny experience that in the midst of my drug-induced, paranoid-schizophrenic world-breaking would have terrified and convinced

me that the entire universe was just my own mind externalized. After spending the day studiously downloading and attentively marking up essential passages from academic pieces with titles like *Crime and Disease: Contagion by Metaphor*, *Contagion and the National Body*, and *Violence is a Contagious Disease*, I decided to call it quits and turn on the television. I was taken aback by the first thing I saw, a chyron floated prominently at the bottom of *CNN Tonight with Don Lemon* that read: “*Outbreak: Crime, Protests, and Covid-19.*” I audibly gasped. After spending the day researching how “the uncritical use of metaphor around both crime and disease contributes to a worrisome tendency towards a collapse of the conceptual boundary between the two domains” (Hanne, 2016, p. 35), there it was in the immediate moments after having read about it. The epidemiological concept of “outbreak” was, in this case, being used to describe not only a national uptick in confirmed coronavirus cases, but also to metaphorically frame variations of “crime” as “another problem ... that supposedly threatens us and from which we must take immediate action, lest we invite contagion” (O’Brien, 2018, p. 17). Through CNN’s framing, attention was being drawn to the perceived-as-shared characteristics between crime and disease – as virulently contagious and noxiously spreading, a public health concern and a threat to society’s well-being. What were the odds that at the moment I concluded researching the articulation of crime as a metaphoric contagion, I would immediately experience an example of it being broadcast into my living room?

Thinking about it more reasonably, the odds were actually very high. After all, for the last several weeks, civil disobedience and protest in the wake of the extra-judicial execution of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor have been articulated through governmental pronouncement and wall-to-wall media coverage as the work of criminal types. As acting Homeland Security

Secretary Chad Wolf asserted on CBS News in regards to the uprisings that have shaken the nation:

What we're doing in Portland, again, is seeing criminal activity... What we're talking about in Chicago, Albuquerque, and other cities, Kansas City, is violent criminal activity, again, gangs, drug dealers, and the like. (Elizabeth, 2020)

Representatives and spokesmen from police departments across the country have also been appearing regularly in recent days on liberal cable news outlets like CNN and MSNBC to decry an emergent “crime wave” in the shadow of protest against extra-judicial police execution; to bemoan nation-wide calls to defund hypermilitarized police departments which they describe as hindering their capacity to capably enforce the law and “suppress” crime. One thing the research I consumed that day made abundantly clear: if there is a conversation circulating about escalating crime - whether “criminal” protest of the Nixon variety discussed in chapter two, or a “wave” of more traditional violent crimes like robberies, murder, assault, gang warfare, etc. - metaphors around contagion are very likely to follow as *disease* is one of the dominant frames through which crime is narrativized in mainstream discourse.

As Lera Boroditsky and Paul Thibodeau affirm in their study *Metaphors We Think With: The Role of Metaphor in Reasoning* (2011), “public discourse about crime is saturated with metaphor. Increases in the prevalence of crime are described as *crime waves*, *surges* or *sprees*. A spreading crime problem is a *crime epidemic*, plaguing a city or infecting a community” (p. 1). Jessica Grosholz and Charis Kubrin support the claim and note that according to official crime statistics, although the majority of crimes are “nonviolent,” news media has the tendency to emphasize the exact opposite, suggesting an “*epidemic of random violence*” (*my emphasis*) (2007, p. 62). The metaphor of crime as disease and its variations, as well as the collapse of all

forms of crime whether “violent” or not under a generalized violence category, are both ready-at hand and practically reflexive in both mainstream reporting and governmental discussions around criminality; deeply familiar and saturating of mainstream discourse. *All crime is violent crime, and this violence has reached “epidemic” levels.*

Generally speaking, metaphors “involve an effort to describe or frame a person, group, object, or even concepts through comparison with something else:”

The primary rationale for the metaphor... is to “carry over” or transfer important though often covert and highly emotive aspects of the source object (e.g., threat, cowardice, sneakiness, disease, contagion, waste) onto the target...Metaphors may therefore be viewed as a powerful method of synthesizing and framing ... a specific description or, especially in the case of political usage, an ideological position relative to social problems or groups. (O’Brien, 2018, pp. 6-7)

Perhaps the most prevalent of all metaphors used to describe violent crime is as a type of *contagion* – crime is a *plague* on the inner-city or a *virus*, even a *cancer* that *metastasizes*.

Violent crime spreads in waves and *epidemics*. Human beings and the neighborhoods in which they are embedded are seen to be “*infected*” by criminality. Crime and criminals themselves are often described as *parasitic*, preying off of the host body of civil society and as being difficult to “eradicate.” The imaginary connection drawing the two metaphoric domains together is often unexpressed but is not difficult to ascertain and is expressed well by Michael Hanne: “Those who are sick and those who commit crimes disrupt normal social functioning in ways which are considered undesirable” (2016, p. 35). Said in a slightly different way, *as disease infects the individual body and undermines it, the metaphoric contagion of criminality infiltrates, infects and undermines the healthy functioning of the body politic*. Because both criminality and disease “disrupt normal social functioning” of differing “bodies” in similar ways, the two are often conflated in discourse. Thus, for the metaphor “crime is like a disease” to function

properly, it also relies on a further metaphor taken for granted in the enunciation: that of the body politic as site of criminal “infection.”

The body politic metaphor enjoys an 800-year-long history in the West (Hanne, 2016, p. 52), and despite its qualitative changes and variant ideological applications throughout history, still animates social and political discourse to a remarkable degree. Sometimes called the “organism metaphor” (O’Brien, 2018), “the body politic trope is an offshoot of the pervasive Western belief in the macroscopic correspondence between the human body and society” (Paprocki, 2014, p. 2).

The organism metaphor draws on the conceptualization of the nation ... as analogous to a holistic biological body, and particularly to our human bodies. Individual humans and what are considered to be homogenous groups are perceived to be constituent components of this organic social body. (O’Brien, 2018, p 18)

The body politic metaphor first appears in Plato’s *Republic* (Paprocki, 2014, p. 2), and from the 2nd century onward, various political formations have stitched medical frameworks for describing the cause of disease in individual bodies within sociopolitical discourses in order to make sense of the various “ills” that befall society (O’Brien, 2018; Paprocki, 2014). That is, in order to constitute support for particular ideological orientations and state actions to remediate “social ills,” the body politic has been described as being infiltrated by contaminating elements that need to be quarantined, excised or otherwise dealt with - scapegoating various iterations of otherness as agents of contamination in the process. As Gerald O’Brien documents throughout *Contagion and the National Body* (2018), in the 20th century United States alone, Mexican and central American immigrants, the Japanese during World War II, African-Americans during Jim Crow, and communists were all articulated as vermin, parasites, or

viruses - variant forms of viral threat and carriers of a contagion said to be actively undermining the collective health of society. And these groups were subjected to brutal, excising treatments for it. This chapter will attempt to demonstrate the ways in which crime in the aggregate, and criminals themselves, are similarly conceptualized as contaminant threat at the metaphoric level of the body politic; individual particles of contagion threatening to “disrupt normal functioning” of the social body. And as such, a series of sociopolitical responses to criminality as a form of plague have been and continue to be relied upon in order to manage criminally contagious “outbreak.” In addition, and more generally speaking, notions of contagion and infection “permeate everyday thinking in American society” (Weinstein, 2003, p. 113), and the concept of crime functions as a discursive attractor of sorts, drawing to itself a pre-existent obsession with contagion always-already circulative within the white-supremacist imaginary that collapses on the body of the racialized criminal/inmate for a multitude of reasons to be explored below.

Crime Causes Disease, Disease Causes Crime

The explanations for the conflation in discourse between notions of crime and disease are numerous and historical, and in *Crime and Disease: Contagion by Metaphor* (2016), Michael Hanne traces some of the conceptual linkages between the two domains. The boundary separating the two is porous, “has been fluid over time and across cultures” (p. 36), and allows for the slippage of concepts from the disease domain to crime, and back again. As Hanne explains, individual illness has, throughout history and across cultures, been attributed to some underlying crime or violation as pathogenic agent.

In many indigenous cultures, sickness is viewed as the consequence... of the infringement of a taboo by a sick person... It was (also) a fundamental tenet of ancient Jewish thought that sickness, whether individual or in epidemics, was a punishment sent by God for impurity or sin... In the Christian Middle Ages, syphilis... was viewed as retribution for sin. (pp. 36-37)

The logic that says that individuals are themselves responsible for their diseased condition through their own criminal act, violation of a taboo or the committing of a sin is not simply a matter of historical superstition but is still ideologically operative, even within rational medical discourse/practice. Modern medicine has come to understand that many varieties of illness are resultant from many of the things that people may do - smoking cigarettes or eating poorly, having unprotected sex and/or abusing of alcohol and drugs. While these behaviors do indeed have deleterious effects leading to negative health outcomes, there has also emerged alongside of this empirically-verified understanding the tendency to “over-blame those who get sick for their plight.” (Hanne, 2016, p. 37) Doctors and other medical professionals also demonstrate a tendency to apportion blame to patients “for their failure to respond to therapies which, from the physician’s point of view, should have worked” (Gunderman, 2000, p. 8). To summate the ideology, people get sick or do not respond well to treatment not because certain diseases are simply an unavoidable tragedy of our shared human condition, but because they do something wrong or violate an injunction on proper ways of being in the world.

In addition, a familiar narrative has also developed within the popular “self-help” culture industry in the United States describing many diseases, including deadly ones like cancer, as resultant from a failure to “live authentically” – holding “toxic” emotions within, for example.

An especially insidious form of patient blame has developed from heightened interest in “the power of positive thinking.” Flurries of self-help books, many written by physicians, extol the virtues of a positive mental attitude in preventing and curing disease. Whether “positive thinking” boosts health or not,

the claim that it does so creates in the minds of many patients the conditions for denial and self-recrimination. (Gunderman, 2000. P.9)

Inversely, there is a long history of viewing *crime as stemming from some underlying condition or disease*. In the 19th Century, Cesare Lombroso asserted that criminals could be distinguished by “abnormal forms of the dimensions of the skull and jaw,” and “asymmetries in the face as well as other parts of the body.” Speculative research conducted in the 1920’s attributed crime to physical and mental illness, and more contemporaneously, modern genetics research seeks to locate predispositions towards criminality in the DNA. There is also much research being conducted to ascertain the correlations between crime and disease, for instance the link between “violent crime, poverty and potentially fatal conditions such as coronary heart disease” (Hanne, 2018, pp. 38-39).

In other words, there exists a historical and deeply intertwined relationship between our notions of crime and disease, one the cause of the other and vice versa. But as the example I began with from *CNN Tonight* that described both crime and protest as forms of “outbreak” within the social body makes clear, it is not merely that one may be caused by the other, but at another discursive/ideological register, crime *itself* is often metaphorically described as a contagion. It was George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in 1980 who maintained that “our ordinary conceptual systems, in terms of which we think and act, is fundamentally metaphoric in nature” (p. 3). And metaphors that assert “crime is like a disease” set one potential metaphoric template out of many possibilities through which we can even think the concept of crime, at all.

Crime is *Like* a Disease

In their experiment called *Metaphors we think with: The Role of Metaphor in Reasoning* (2011), Paul H. Thibodeau and Lera Boroditsky investigated “whether using different metaphors to talk about crime indeed leads people to reason about crime differently and, in turn, leads them to propose different solutions to the crime problem” (p. 2). Participants of the study were split into two groups and each was exposed to a differing metaphorical frame. The first group was presented a false report about rising crime rates in the non-existent city of Addison, and it was framed as “a *virus* infecting a city.” The second group was given the exact same report but with the metaphor changed, rising crime described as “a wild *beast* preying on a city.” All the statistics remained the same. The study demonstrated that proposed responses to rising crime varied greatly dependent on the metaphorical frame used. If crime were described as a virus, “participants proposed investigating the root causes and treating the problem by enacting social reform legislation to *inoculate* the community, with emphasis on eradicating poverty and improving education” (*my emphasis*) (p. 2). When the rising crime rates were framed as a ravaging beast, respondents favored hunting down, capturing and containing criminals as well as the enactment of harsher laws - those mechanisms of crime control more closely associated with traditional criminal justice approaches and carcerality as we recognize it. Thibodeau and Boroditsky’s study thus offers tacit support for the medicalization of criminality - for treating crime like a disease as a humane and liberal-reformist measure. Their study suggests that how crime is framed matters as primordial concern, and framing it as a contagious disease as opposed to a wild beast could potentially ameliorate some of the more brutal excesses of the carceral system by undermining support for it in favor of medical-style interventions. As journalist Dahlia Lithwick (2018) argues in reference to the study:

If the theorists are correct that it takes little more than reimagining crime as a “virus” – it may not be impossible for journalists to help recalibrate the emphasis on capture and excessive punishment that pervades our criminal justice systems. (p. 267)

For reasons to be explored throughout the rest of the chapter, I would caution the reader against adopting such a naively optimistic conclusion. What *is* of importance for this work is the experiment’s findings with regards to the power of metaphoric framing in structuring our understanding of what crime even *is* at the most elementary level, and its influence on our subsequent sociopolitical, institutionalized response. Of additional import to this study, Thibodeau and Boroditsky’s experiment demonstrated that participants were entirely unaware of the degree of influence that the original framing had on their support for particular “solutions” to crime. When asked why participants supported either “inoculating” the community or “capturing the beast,” participants entirely ignored the metaphor and “[i]nstead, they cite the crime statistics... as being (most) influential in their reasoning” (p. 3). The authors also conclude that “unbeknownst to us, metaphors powerfully shape how we reason about social issues” (p. 3). And equally essential to understanding the argument I will be developing throughout this chapter, in *Generative Metaphor: a perspective on problem-setting in social policy* (n.d.), Donald Schön argues that through the adoption of a particular metaphoric framing, policy planners are likely to propose solutions derived from the field of that particular metaphor. So, with regards to the metaphor “crime is a disease,” responses will favor a “health-dominated approach to criminal behaviors” within the “medical model” to isolate and contain the threat of criminal contagion, to stop its spread, and/or to “inoculate” society against the plague that is criminality (Potter, 2018, p. 200).

Michael Hanne further details the way metaphors slip and concretize from one domain into the other: “Metaphor links two domains or categories, implying that, while they remain distinct, certain features may be identified as common between the two” (Hanne, 2016, p. 44). Linguists discuss this as a connection between a “target” and “source” domain, and in the metaphoric framing of “crime is a virus,” “disease” would be the source domain and crime would be the “target.” Certain features of viral contagion – its capacity for virulent spread and tearing down individual or collective bodies by infiltrating their porous boundaries - may be used to describe crime and to make it comprehensible. With most metaphors, the linkage between the two domains is unidirectional from the source to the target domain. But in some cases, mapping runs in both directions, as with the crime is a disease metaphor. Crime (target domain) can be described as a disease (source domain), and disease (target domain) can be described as a crime (source domain), pulling associations from within its discursive field. So, alongside of metaphors that assert “violent crime is a plague in the inner city,” exist metaphors like those used in a report from Vanderbilt University on potential HIV vaccines that argue that the disease acts criminally: “The difficulty in developing a vaccine against the virus that causes AIDS testifies to its *wiliness*. The human immunodeficiency virus mutates rapidly *to evade detection* by the body’s immune system” (quoted from Hanne, 2016, pp. 47-48). *Wiliness* and *evading detection* invoke notions of criminal character, and agency. And the metaphor flows back again, as criminals are regularly said to adapt and evolve virus-like to the law like resistant strains of communicable disease. “Just as we would expect a virus or a bacterium to mutate as a result of replication, we might expect criminal acts to evolve as societal responses change” (Potter, 2018, p. 204).

The pervasive and unconscious deployment of the dual-direction metaphors “crime is like a disease” and “disease acts like a criminal” leads to a worrisome tendency towards a blurring of the discursive boundaries that separates them:

As a result, rather than the one being seen as analogous to the other, *they come to be seen as more or less identical ...* when the boundary between the domains *collapses*, we assume that all features are shared between the domains... it becomes very easy to suppose that all the key concepts in the two domains are mutually interchangeable.” (Hanne, 2016, p. 54).

And as Sarah Armstrong notes in *Managing Meaning: The Use of Metaphor in Criminal Justice Policy* (2009), when the boundaries between metaphoric domains collapse, “the literal and the metaphoric can (also) become obscured” (Armstrong, 2009, p. 5). In other words, within metaphoric boundary collapse, we no longer realize we are speaking in metaphors at all and perceive all features of the two respective domains as shared across them. And in *Infecting the Body Politic? Modern and Post-Modern (Ab)use of Immigrants are Invading Pathogens Metaphor in American Socio-Political Discourse* (2014), Paprocki argues that through a related phenomenon he labels metaphoric contraction, the conjoining term of the logic may be dropped, and the metaphor “crime is *like* a contagious disease” simply becomes “crime *is* a contagious disease” (p.8). No longer is crime considered as sharing certain essential properties with viral contagion but comes to be seen as fundamentally indistinguishable from a contagion itself. Which leads us to the third discursive register in which crime and disease are conflated to potentially disastrous and terrifying result.

Violence is ~~like~~ a Contagious Disease

Crime is not simply *like* a contagious disease for some theorists, criminologists, medical practitioners and social actors; not simply an ideologically useful metaphor. For them, as appalling as it is dangerous, violent crime is a *literal* contagion. In his article entitled *Violence is a Contagious Disease* (2013), Gary Slutkin, M.D., former head of the World Health Organization's Intervention Development Unit who worked throughout Africa interrupting the transmission of communicable diseases like HIV and Tuberculosis, argues:

Violence has all of the ... characteristics of an infectious disease. It has routes of transmission, incubation periods, and different clinical syndromes and outcomes. There are describable biological practices underlying the pathogenesis. In addition, treatment as an infectious disease is effective. (p. 111)

Upon returning home to Chicago from Africa in 1995, Slutkin noticed similar patterns at work in the "clustering, spread and transmission" (p. 96) of inner-city gang-related gun violence as with virulent contagions and went on to cofound the organization Cure Violence to treat the problem of gang violence epidemiologically. Slutkin's notion that criminal violence is *literally* a contagious disease has itself "gone viral," appearing as a cover story entitled *Blocking the Transmission of Violence* for the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* (Kotlowitz, 2008). His work through Cure Violence has also been profiled in *The Economist* (Budd, 2008), a 2012 PBS documentary entitled *The Interrupters* (Kotlowitz & James, 2012), and in April of 2012, Slutkin gave a TED talk entitled *Let's Treat Violence like a Contagious Disease* (Slutkin, 2013). His "diagnosis" that violence not only *acts like* a communicable disease, but quite literally is one has gained traction and enjoys critical popularity with many liberal-minded criminologists who wish to medicalize the social problem of criminal violence. To stop the spread of inner-city gang-related gun violence, Slutkin proposes the same strategies that are used in the containment and attempted eradication of infectious disease:

(1) detecting and interrupting ongoing and potentially new infectious events; (2) determining who are most likely to cause further infectious events from the infected population and then reducing their likelihood of developing disease and/or subsequently transmitting; and (3) changing the underlying social and behavioral norms, or environmental conditions, that directly relate to the spread of the infection. (Slutkin, 2013, p. 108)

Cure Violence trains individuals who are “at-risk” for violence-infection from the “outbreak” community as “violence interrupters,” their task “to interrupt transmission (of the contagion) to stop the spread of the violence disease (and) to change underlying norms” (my additions)

(Slutkin, 2013, p. 108-109). As Slutkin argues in a frightening passage:

I am suggesting that both what is called perpetrator and what is called victim in the current literature be considered *as violence infected or having the violence disease* ... until we develop a clear marker for infection, we consider *most persons that are exposed as infected* and clinical disease as the presence of symptoms (engaging in violence). In many infectious diseases, there are many more people infected than have the clinical disease. (my additions) (*my emphasis*) (pp. 105-106)

Not only those who have directly engaged or have been victimized by criminal violence are to be considered as contagious and proper targets for a “medical-style” intervention, but merely those who have been “exposed” - witnessed it or been within its proximity. It will partially be the work of this chapter to demonstrate the inherent danger of labeling perpetrators, victims and witnesses of violent acts as literally diseased. The reasons are transparent. Or, at least should be. To articulate a particular group of people as contagious for engaging or being proximate to *a set of behaviors and actions* that we find deplorable, frightening or otherwise irrational is, on its face, illegitimate. In particular, if those “violence-infected” communities and individuals all have similar social profiles - racially, economically and otherwise. We all know what geographic zones and communities Slutkin is referencing as hot zones of infection - those economically-abandoned, dilapidated, largely racialized hyperghettoes described in chapter

two. Any analysis disappearing those political, social and economic forces of organized abandonment that overdetermine the emergence of violence and simply adopting an epidemiological approach divorced from context is to fetishistically disavow those self-same forces. As Michael B. Greene argues in *Metaphorically or Not, Violence Is Not a Contagious Disease* (2018),

We need to be clear that there are no “violence bacteria” or “violence viruses,” no violence parasites or pathogens. Violence is not airborne or contagious by touch or breath. There is no violence “germ” within individuals that can be suppressed ... The primary driver of violence is not some abstract violence germ but rather has to do (with) severe deprivations and oppression that the residents in such neighborhoods face on a daily basis. (pp. 513-514)

In addition, to label those human beings who have engaged in particular actions that we find disagreeable as literally diseased strips all agency through describing particular actions as the emergence of disease symptoms. And it also disappears the potential understanding that in particular social contexts and environments, violence may not only be a perfectly predictable response to atrocious conditions, but also, may even be reasonable for reasons of survival, or necessity. And said straightforwardly, Slutkin’s “violence interruption” has not been the only mechanism historically available to societies articulating some segment of the human beings within its folds as not only virulently contagious, but as especially dangerous. One must also imagine the “purification” of human beings as disease particles through fire at Dachau. And everything on the spectrum in-between Cure Violence style “violence interruption” and the extermination of human beings as disease-spreading parasites. And if that sounds hyperbolic, I would ask for the reader’s patience as I continue to develop the argument throughout this chapter.

To summarize what had been detailed so far, “crime” and “disease” are bound up and entangled at three different ideological registers. At the first register, a strong historical linkage between the two domains, *one the cause of the other* and vice versa. Crime has been articulated as the cause of disease, and disease, from Lombroso’s experiments up through research meant to discover bad criminal genes, has been articulated as causal of crime. At the second register, crime itself is described as metaphorically *like* a disease. The chyron at the bottom of CNN, “Outbreak: Crime, Protests and Covid-19,” is an example. The “crime is like a disease” metaphor saturates United States discourse and culture, which, by the way, happens to be the most aggressive incarcerator of any culture/society in the history of the world. This work will argue that is no coincidence. And as the experiments I have cited around metaphor conclude, disease is the “master-metaphor” (O’Brien) for articulating and making sense of crime in the United States, “a powerful method of synthesizing and framing, in an easily understood and compact package ... an ideological position relative to social problems or groups.” And as a dual direction metaphor that has experienced boundary collapse, “we assume that all features are shared between the domains (of crime and disease) ... all the key concepts in the two domains are mutually interchangeable.” Further, through *metaphoric contraction*, we *forget* that we are speaking in a metaphor that simplifies to read “crime is a disease.” Within this context, the next argument made by metaphor theorists appears even more terrifying - that we are entirely unconscious of the effect that the forgotten metaphoric framing has on our supposed “rational” deliberations and policy responses towards the criminal “contagion.”

At the third register then, we discuss crime not as metaphorically similar to a contagion, but as literal viral threat. Violent crime *is* a contagious disease, as the work of Gary Slutkin of Cure Violence and other criminologists working within contagion models argue, and should be analyzed and responded to through an epidemiological frame. As Roberto H. Potter (2018) draws our attention to, since the 1980's and 90's, biomedical/public health professionals have expressed "dissatisfaction" and "attacked criminal justice practices to control violence" in a liberal effort aimed at medicalizing the problem of criminality" (213). Thus, has emerged a struggle

between not only two practice communities – public health/ medical services and criminal justice agencies (which includes the legal profession) – but also two academic communities – public health/biomedical sciences versus social science criminology/criminal justice/law... the question is which occupational category will define the problem, providing directive programs to control, eliminate, or eradicate the problem, and declare the problem solved? (pp. 214-215)

The preceding examination of the entanglements between the concepts of crime and disease raises more questions than it answers. Or, at least it *should*. For if crime is historically and contemporaneously entangled with notions of disease as perceived causal agent and vice-versa (first register), and if disease is already a "master-metaphor," the dominant frame through which we conceptualize and can even think criminality at all (second register), then in addition to the problematic reification of biologically-based notions of criminality, *what is novel about asserting that crime is a literal contagion* (third register)? More specifically, if the theorists of metaphor are correct that as a society, we already perceive all key concepts and attributes as shared between the crime and disease metaphoric domains, doesn't that mean that in the collective imaginary, *we already articulate and experience crime as a contagion*? And if "crime is a disease" is *the* generative metaphor (Schön) with the power to concretely influence our

sociopolitical and institutional response to crime, in fact *has already been doing so*, then what is contemporary carcerality? What is *the prison* as the dominant institutional mechanism for realizing “crime control” if crime is *already* being responded to as contagion, as theorists around metaphor consistently claim?

The rest of this chapter will attempt to argue that the contemporary prison, in both material and symbolic fact, is a *quarantine*. Or better, the contemporary carceral formation in the United States is an archipelago of recursive or nested quarantines organized by a logic of epidemiological intervention into “violence-diseased” (largely racialized) community and the sequestering and eradication of the contaminated from the “healthy” white-supremacist body politic. The prison is an immunizing apparatus meant to disappear, concentrate and eradicate from white-supremacist civil society not full human beings, but less-than-fully-human contagions, realized most primarily as racialized and otherwise rendered-superfluous-to-capital labor-full bodies. The worst and most brutal excesses of the contemporary carceral formation are not to be *ameliorated* through the labelling of crime as a literal contagion, as Lithwick suggests. The contemporary prison, with all of its reprehensible violence and incomprehensible terrors, is *already a “medicalized response” to criminality*. To further articulate human beings as literally “violence diseased” is simply to contribute further ideological support and to reify the dominant framework through which the contemporary prison is made possible as civil society’s containment mechanism from the criminal contagion it perceives all around itself and threatening its very coherence and delineative boundaries.

Having read the prison as a quarantine meant to isolate, contain and eradicate not human beings but individual particles of contagion threatening the health of the body politic

with “violence disease,” I would like now to turn to Roberto Esposito and his work around the immunitary paradigm, what he describes as “the symbolic and material lynchpin around which our social systems rotate” (Immunitas, 2011, p. 2). For it is through Esposito that we can begin to come to terms with where this quarantining drive comes from in the first place. And it is through the immunitary paradigm that we may begin to ask why certain groups of human beings, in this case supposed “criminals,” are regularly rendered as contagious threat, and we can also begin to explore the specific logics and mechanisms through which the body politic comes to inoculate itself from (violent) crime - through taking within itself a smaller dose of the very pathogen from which it means to protect against. In the case of the prison, violence.

Roberto Esposito and the Immunitary Paradigm

We all *want* community. We long for better relations with our families, our neighbors, those we work with, our countrymen. Whether it be at the local level in neighborhoods growing more disconnected with each passing decade or at the national level, deeply polarized and split off into discursively warring factions, or even globally as between nations - we strive to come to agreement through resolving our respective differences and establish shared platforms of meaning upon which we can take collective and beneficial action. Whether it be to increase individual happiness in our everyday relations or to address looming threats to the global commons like climate change, racial animus, nuclear proliferation and interstate strife, community is necessary. The survival of organized human life is, quite literally, at stake.

For Roberto Esposito, there is a contradiction right at the heart of our modern notions of community. Community on the one hand is absolutely necessary. But it is also *impossible*

(Esposito, 2013, p. 15). Community is our transcendental and originary condition as we have always existed in common. Yet despite the fact, absolute community has never been effectively realized by living and breathing human beings. The communities in which we are embedded, that in a sense gestate us as individual subjects within history, are always lacking - violently excluding of otherness and profoundly dysfunctional across multiple instances. That is because, according to Esposito, the community, *as we conceptualize it*, is by its very nature unrealizable. Community is instead “something that determines us at a distance, and in difference from our very selves, in the rupture of our subjectivity, in an infinite lack, in an unpayable debt, an irredeemable fault.” (Esposito, 2013, p. 15). We are a community only in the sense that we, as *individual* human beings, are united by our very *lack* of community. But why?

Because, says Esposito, community defined as an association of separate and autonomous *individuals* is split against itself. Esposito traces the etymology of “community” to a combination of the Latin roots *cum* and *munus*. Members of the community are bound together through the *munus*, “a ‘task,’ ‘duty,’ or ‘law.’ According to the other meaning of the term (which is closer to the first than it might seem), they are bound by a ‘gift,’ but a gift that is to be given rather than received... they are bound by an obligation” (Esposito, 2013, p. 14). Human beings within community have a responsibility to others. But it is not just any responsibility, easily met. Our responsibility to others is *inexhaustible* in its very nature, a *perpetual* obligation that is always unfulfilled. As this debt that is owed to community is fundamentally unpayable, it works continually to undermine the boundaries constitutive of self-identity. We, as individuals, are continually exposed to an alterity, an unbearable otherness at the risk of tearing ourselves asunder; expropriative of not only what is properly one’s own,

things like material goods and possessions, but further and more essentially, *our very sense of self*. The community thus threatens individuals “to the point of nearly expropriating themselves in favor of this other” (Esposito, 2013, p. 49).

Common life is what breaks the identity-making boundaries of individuals, exposing them to alteration -and thus potential conflict... it tends to confuse the boundaries between what is proper to each individual and what belongs to everybody and hence to nobody. (Esposito, 2011, p. 22)

But why does the breaking down of individualizing boundaries within the common lead to conflict? Following the work of Rene Girard around sacrificial violence (discussed in detail in chapter 6), Esposito claims that conflict emerges because “violence is always connected to the figure of indifferentiation” (Esposito, 2011, p. 37). Indifferentiation is the erasing of the strictures and boundaries that constitute self and other, and too much community is experienced by the individual as a *contagion* that wipes away self-constituting borders. Our very sense of self is so intertwined with the differentiations of the social that to undo them is to annihilate normative subjectivity, to allow it to dilute and to leak outward into the common. When people become too common, too similar, when “the community is filled up with itself to the point of overflowing all barriers and confines, left to its own absoluteness, to its ‘absolute communal being: without limits, separations or differences” (Esposito, 2011, p. 37) then violence is made to appear.

human beings fight to the death not because of the differences between them, as we still tend to believe ingenuously today, but because human beings are alike or even identical, like brothers, or even more so, twins. They kill each other not because they are too different but because they aren’t different enough. (Esposito, 2011, p. 124)

People scratch, claw and tear at one another in absolute community not because of any essential, socially constructed or even imaginary difference, but because of an unbearable

similarity, a drowning lack of distinction. Modernist political philosophy assumes that the absolute community with everything in common guarantees a self-differentiating and reciprocal violence. Individuals fight to the death in order to wrest identity and to reestablish boundaries proper of the self from the appropriating common. For Esposito then, according to modernist political philosophy (and the institutions that rest upon its foundations), “violence is actually community’s most intrinsic expression ... We might even say the violence is the inside of the community that has grown to the point of destructively boiling over outside itself” (Esposito, 2011, p. 37).

Said simply, individuals and the demands of the community, *as these concepts are defined within Western modernity*, are at odds. Community laps up against the dam that is individual identity, continually wearing it away and pulling individuals outward and away from themselves, potentially casting them adrift in a sea of indifferenciation. This indifferenciation leads to a contagious and reciprocal violence; a self-anchoring violence of individual against individual - “a war of all against all” in Hobbesian language, in order to, by force, re-erect/define the boundaries constitutive of the self and to cease the torrential drift of the subject.

In response to the inextricable violence at the very heart of all undifferentiated community, the community itself erects *immunitary apparatuses* meant to relieve individuals from the collective burden of the *munus*; to refortify a destabilized identity from the contagion of the other (indifferenciation) and the assured entropic slide into contagious violence. In both the biomedical and juridical lexicons,

If members of the community are characterized by ... this law to care for the other, immunity implies the exemption or exception from such a condition ...

Immune is he or she who breaks the circuit of social circulation by placing himself or herself outside it. (Esposito, 2013, p. 58)

If those within community are bound by the same reciprocal debt, then they who are *immune* are relieved of this obligation. Immunity restores the proper to oneself, allowing the subject to “conserve his or her own essence intact” (Esposito, 2013, p. 39). If the originary community leads to indifferentiation and violence, then immunitary procedures cut across the community, suturing it closed through the relieving of collective obligation. This community constituted through immunization is no longer, and will never be, an absolute one; it is *delimited* and an association of separate individuals united in their common separateness.

All community that is not collapsing into entropic violence and the void of no-sense (a lack of differentiation) is, according to modernity, in some sense always-already immunized from the threat of communal contagion at its heart. In other words, and absolutely essential to understand, immunization is on the one hand *constitutive* of actually existing community, and on the other, it limits or deprives it - keeping the community from reaching its full expression which would simultaneously be to realize its telos as an explosion in violence. “Immunity constitutes or reconstitutes community precisely by negating it” (Esposito, 2013, p. 9). Community is never fully consistent with itself, but is always-already immunized and cut across through immunization – namely, the exclusion of some others as contaminant threat in order to guarantee the integrity of the *individual* in common, or the community’s healthy although delimited function. Community is therefore both necessary and impossible because always-already immunized from the contagion that threatens it in its absolute form, other human beings in-common.

But what exactly *is* immunization? In the biomedical field, immunity refers to “the refractoriness of an organism” to a potential contagion (Esposito, 2011, p. 7). The biological body has natural immunity to many contagions realized through its immune system, and immunization may also be *actively* induced through the “controlled incorporation of the communitarian ‘germ’ that it wants to neutralize” (Esposito, 2013, p. 46):

The basic idea that came into play at a certain point was that an attenuated form of infection could protect against a more virulent form of the same type. From here came the deduction, proven by the effectiveness of the various vaccines, that the inoculation of nonlethal quantities of a virus stimulates the formation of antibodies that are able to neutralize pathogenic effects at an early stage.” (Esposito, 2011, p. 7)

Immunization functions through exploiting the very same pathogen that it means to protect against towards beneficial effect; “it reproduces in a controlled form exactly what it is meant to protect us from” (Esposito, 2011, p. 8). The body takes within itself a tolerable dose of a pathogen so as to stimulate the immune system without overwhelming it; the poison is a precondition for the cure. The pathogen is thus instrumental in the protection and prolongation of life. Life takes inside itself, in a controlled form, that which it means to exclude.

Evil must be thwarted, but not by keeping it at a distance from one’s border’s; rather, it is included inside them. The dialectical figure that thus emerges is that of *exclusionary inclusion or exclusion by inclusion* (my emphasis). The body defeats a poison not by expelling it outside the organism, but by making it somehow part of the body... It is as if it were doubled into two halves, one of which is required for the containment of the other: the lesser of two evils is intended to block to greater evil, but in the same language. (Esposito, 2011, p. 8)

As with the inoculation of an individual body, the body politic/community also subjects itself to immunity procedure so as to protect it from contamination. It does so through the same paradoxical device as with individual inoculations - the incorporation of the “communitarian germ” of violence, an inclusive-exclusion. As “the physician inoculates the patient with a minute

amount of the disease... the community is injected with a minute amount of violence, enabling it to ward off an attack of full-fledged violence” (Esposito, 2011, p. 38).

Building off of the work of Walter Benjamin, for Esposito, the law, as “the immune system for the entire social system” (Esposito, 2011, p. 9), is nothing but “violence against violence in order to control violence” (Esposito, 2011, p. 29). The immunitary function the law performs on behalf of community is evidently clear: “if violent means such as the police apparatus... are used to exclude violence external to the legitimate order, the legal system works by adopting the same thing it aims to protect against” (Esposito, 2011, p. 29), namely violence. Police hunt down, seize, beat, shoot, boot, choke, brutalize, kidnap, disappear and abandon people to death to prevent a greater contagion of criminal violence. Of course, these brutalities, as means, are not called violence. But if anyone outside of the legal apparatus were to engage these actions, that’s how they’d be described. Thus, we counter violence not with its elimination as an evil in itself, but through its inclusion in an artificial apparatus – the police, jails, courts and the prison. The problem is not the nature of violence *per se*, but its *location*, as outside the political order. The law is nothing but the progressive interiorization of violence and its successive and repeated application through time in tolerable doses so as to prevent the community from collapsing into an entropic void of consumptive violence: an inoculation.

Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, engaged with at length in chapter three, is exemplary for rendering sensible the immunitary paradigm that is for Esposito “not only the instrument but also the form of Western civilization” (Esposito, 2011, p. 40). In the modernist Hobbesian conception, the absolute community *is* the state of nature, and the state of nature is nothing but undifferentiated violence, “a war of all-against-all.” Entirely subsumed with contagious

violence as a function of our very equality, this absolute community institutes “an artificial order capable of neutralizing the potential violence that riddles it by nature” (Esposito, 2011, p. 98). It *inoculates* itself from reciprocal violence through each and every one giving up their natural right to violence to the artificial *one*, transcendent to the common. And as Esposito argues, it was not only Hobbes’ who argued that the originary community is “doomed to break apart” (Esposito, 2013, p. 127) in an entropic void. This antinomy between the individual and the common is constitutive of the paradigm of modern political philosophy, itself. He draws attention to the fact that from Hobbes to Rousseau, Kant, Vico and Locke, their assessment of the individual life in common agrees that:

Life cannot be preserved in community. Life’s communal dimension sweeps it away, which is to say by the lack of identity, individuality, and difference. The *munus* that circulates freely in community... is seen (by modernity) as the poison that kills. (Esposito, 2013, p. 127)

In the face of “this threat of undifferentiated community, modernity, in its dynamics and self-interpretation, erects an enormous apparatus of immunization” (Esposito, 2013, p. 127).

Immunitary apparatuses, built upon modernity’s fundamental philosophical assumptions, come to proliferate and subsume the modernist world.

One might come to affirm that it wasn’t modernity that raised the question of the self-preservation of life, but that self-preservation is itself raised in modernity’s own being [*essere*], which is to say it invents modernity as a historical and categorical apparatus able to cope with it. (Esposito, 2008, p. 55)

A critique may have emerged not dissimilar from the one leveled at Thomas Hobbes and his conception of the state of nature as he described it in *Leviathan*. How could Esposito have *any idea* what an originary community from some dim prehistory actually looks like? The critique is beside the point. Whether or not the originary community is, in fact, condemned to explode in

violence as an actually existing historical reality, modern, European political philosophy certainly thought it was. And modern political institutions, built upon those concepts derived from modernist political philosophy, proceeded from the assumption that the telos of absolute community is an explosive chaos of indifferentiation and contagious violence. The institutions and apparatuses of capitalist modernity, in which we are still embedded, are built upon an understanding of community *exactly* as detailed above. Modernity is then, for Esposito, a series of artificial, immunitary apparatuses meant to protect the individual, and the community itself, from the perceived threat of indifferentiation and contagious violence as the innermost expression of the common.

According to Esposito, immunization has in recent decades hypertrophied to an apex point in which the need for immunity has become “our fundamental commitment, the very form that we give our lives,”

The immunitarian dispositif has become the *coagulating point, both real and symbolic, of contemporary existence* ... only today, at the end of the modern period, has such a need become *the linchpin around which both the real and imaginary practices of an entire civilization have been constructed*... Everywhere we look, new walls, new blockades, and new dividing lines are erected again something that threatens, or at least seems to, our biological, social, and environmental identity. (*My Emphasis*) (Esposito, 2013, pp. 59-61)

Whether it be an immigration that threatens a nation’s self-constituting borders or a computer virus menacing and infecting the body-technological; whether it be the replicating threat of international terrorism, biological warfare, the viral spread of Covid-19 or a crime that is a “plague” on our inner cities:

What matters most is limiting ... a potential contamination. Thus, the virus has become the widespread metaphor for all of our nightmares... the demand for immunity grew massively until it became our fundamental commitment, the very form that we give our lives.” (Esposito, 2013, pp. 59-61)

Threatening the body politic from within and without, a host of contagious threats and a series of immunitary apparatuses and inoculative procedures meant to protect life from the series of indifferentiating and therefore contagious threats. In the contemporary moment then, immunization becomes for Esposito “the most fruitful interpretative key for modern political systems” (Esposito, 2013, p. 39).

After a long detour away from the prison, we finally arrive at the point. What does the immunitary paradigm Esposito develops have to do with the contemporary prison? The contemporary prison is a modernist political system/institution. And if immunization is the “most fruitful interpretive key” for rendering transparent both the material and symbolic function of modern sociopolitical systems as Esposito claims, then what does an interpretation of the prison as a modernist institution through the key of immunization make visible?

Carceral Inoculations

I argue that the contemporary prison within the United States, when read through the framework of Esposito’s immunitarian paradigm, is the apparatus of social immunization par excellence. Further, the prison is the quilting point, drawing together in discourse and in institutional realization of the thematic I explored earlier in this chapter. In the first section I established that the collapsed “crime is like a contagion” metaphor structures not only how we conceptualize crime, how we fundamentally perceive it in its very ontology for both historical and ideological reasons, but as a generative metaphor, it overdetermines how we *respond* to it through social policy. That is, as a contagion. I also attempted to illustrate that if crime is indeed conceptualized as a form of virulent contagion, it infects at the communal level of the *body*

politic, crime perceived as undermining the normal and “healthy” functioning of society as organism. And through tracing the immunitary paradigm as developed by Roberto Esposito, I intended to demonstrate that responding to crime as contagion is quite far from a novelty. According to Esposito, the entirety of modernity and its institutions are, perhaps more than anything else, a set of immunitary responses to a series of perceived contagions from within the delimited body politic in order to erect defenses against the dreaded possibility of absolute community that through posing the threat of indifferentiation, is perceived as generative of reciprocal and cascading violence in the modernist imaginary.

Linking the three together, as contemporary carcerality is built upon modernity’s fundamental philosophical assumptions, *the contemporary prison is revealed as an artificial immunitary apparatus meant to inoculate the white-supremacist body politic, the delimited community from the perceived-as-contagious threat of racialized criminality - an indifferenciating violence potential threatening to overwhelm not only the social organism, but individual identity as constituted within neoliberally-delimited and white-supremacist social space*. As immunization is itself both constitutive, yet depriving of community, the prison, as the dominant immunitary mechanism within the United States, is both constitutive and depriving of the white-supremacist body politic, as community. Carceral Immunization is performed through the violent containment of a panoply of indifferenciating and therefore contagious bodies perceived as circulating within and potentially undermining of the health of the social body, and the prison stabilizes and refortifies the individualizing strictures and boundaries constituting white-supremacist subjectivity through *the relieving of a series of communal obligations which are largely racialized in nature (but not in toto), protecting subjects*

of civil society from the experienced-as-overwhelming munus - our perpetual debt to largely racialized others within our ~~community~~.

Our very *lack* of community within the United States across racial lines and otherwise, the tear at the national body's center, is *sutured through the prison*; the racially-delimited community stitched shut and inoculated, rendering to the "outside" through an *inclusive/exclusion* those that the subjects of white-supremacist civil society in some very real sense perpetually *owe* - buttressing individual identity from the contaminating indifferentiation of collective obligation in the process. The prison thus constitutes a particular deprived-because-immunized "community" of identical-with-themselves "individuals," rendered white-supremacist not through any individual set of beliefs, attitudes and/or internalized racist ideology, but through the material "breaking (of) the circuit of social circulation" - an immunization from the "law to care for the other." It is through our very material and mutual embeddedness as subjects within a social formation that resultantly and predominantly targets racialized subjects as contaminating/indifferentiating threat - thus benefitting from this structuration of social space with ever diminishing returns - that subjects of the contemporary U.S. social formation are rendered as white-supremacist. Which counterintuitively, leads to ever greater support for carcerality in a desperate, futile and grasping attempt to refortify the proper to one's own, whether material goods or imaginary identifications.

The munus, this responsibility that is owed – synonymous with being in full community with the other - is experienced from within civil society across a host of instances under neoliberal capital as an undermining of individual identity; assaults on the strictures and boundaries constituting the overburdened neoliberal-capitalist, white-supremacist self. As

social and economic life is made ever-more precarious for that hegemonic voting bloc of white-supremacist subjects embedded within ever-inwardly collapsing circuits of neoliberal-capitalist productivity - reorganized through flexibilization and outsourcing so as to enhance profitability for shareholders - *any racialized economic or social demand placed on normative white-supremacist subjects is experienced by them as indifferiating threat* and therefore *contaminating*. Whether it be through limited taxation in order to fund the welfare state, affirmative action measures in the workplace, representational politics, the “panacea” of reparations, proposed policies meant to address racialized inequality and to reduce the wealth gap, universal health care, challenges to the carceral chain both legislative and extra-legal, a viable public school system, a viable public anything for that matter is experienced by normative subjectivity as *contagion*. As attacks on and destabilizations of the self. In other words, economic and social demands for equity and for a more inclusive community, particularly across racial lines (within modernist philosophical assumptions, the very conditions for a war of all-against-all to emerge), are perceived as a threat not merely to economic viability and the well-being of those subjects embedded within white-supremacist sociality, which they increasingly and materially in fact are under neoliberalism – for instance, undermining the capacity of subjects within civil society to reproduce for themselves and their children the same quality of life their parents enjoyed, to pay medical bills, to own a home, put food on the table, to pay off debt, etc. But further and more essentially, these demands are experienced as the undermining of a series of normative differential bar(s) constitutive and differentiating of the “us” – “hard-working” albeit “struggling” Americans - from “them,” the articulated-as-parasitic, largely racialized horde and the criminal contagion threatening to drag subjectivity down and

render it apart in a void of undifferentiated no-sense through the obliteration of racial identifications. The munus, this responsibility that is owed, is experienced as the elimination of those imaginary strictures differentiating and defining subjects who imagine themselves as upholding the social, political and economic systems - true Americans – as against an onslaught of those parasitically preying off of them. The prison and the carceral chain more generally, through breaking the munus or the collective obligation to those utterly abandoned under neoliberal restructuration - the racialized superfluous, the mad, the otherwise abandoned - returns economically precarious and identity-threatened individuals of civil society back within themselves. It cancels the debt and eliminates the downward drag, thus refortifying the demarcations of self through the simultaneous attribution of contaminant threat to the superfluous and racialized other rendered outside.

The walls of the prison not only hold “criminals” within them, but through the refractoriness of the social organism in the face of indifferenciating contagion, render the strictures and boundaries constitutive of white-supremacist self-identity stable in an age of socioeconomic precarity through the relieving of collective obligation and the abandoning to the “outside” that is the inside of the prison. The walls of the prison then, in both a material and symbolic sense, constitute a series of self-defining boundaries within the neoliberal-capitalist subject. The prison is thus the immunization of the white-supremacist body politic from the contagion of social, racial and economic indifferenciation as materialized in a host of othered because “violence-diseased” bodies; absolute community with “them” signifying a feared and total apocalyptic violence.

This delimited community immunizes itself from this fantastical violence that it merely perceives through the modernist immunitarian framework, like all inoculations, through taking within the body politic a tolerable enough dose of the pathogen from which it means to protect itself. As described above in my review of the Hobbesian paradigm and its inoculative procedures, United States civil society similarly inoculates itself from community ravaging violence (the criminal contagion) through internalizing violence within an artificial apparatus, the carceral chain, that deploys targeted dosages of the very pathogen that it means to protect against. Kidnappings and handcuffs, batons and pepper spray, block guns and smoking Glocks, chokeholds and steel bars, beatings and assorted violations of bodily integrity are essential means through which the police and the prison, as artificial immunitary apparatuses, enforce their “peace” - a “lesser” violence meant to inoculate against the greater criminal violence perceived as threatening to overtake the community. While the Benjaminian conception of law as an internalization of violence is certainly true, a truism actually, the inoculation that the prison performs as immunizing apparatus is even more specific, more essential than the establishment of a monopoly of force.

In addition to the internalization of violence as *means*, civil society through the prison takes an encapsulated form of undifferentiated violence within itself of the exact type that threatens civil society - reciprocal and contagious - but scaled down and in manageable doses so as to inoculate against its, albeit imaginary, socially-consumptive and community ravaging expression. Specifically, as I described in chapter three, the geographic territory of the United States is subdivided internally by a “carceral archipelago” (Foucault, 1995, p. 297) in which a pure Hobbesian-style state of nature, war of all-against-all, organizes prisons as distinct from a

civil society that is rationalized through the normative juridico-political order - itself geographically wrapped around the prison and gestating it, establishing and holding firm its boundaries. Prisons are *inside* the geographic space subsumed by the normative juridico-political order, but constituted as an *outside* in which the *nomos* does not apply; spaces where the law dialectically flips or is realized in its culmination as lawlessness because overwritten by the extra-penological desire to permanently disappear rendered-superfluous, already-racialized labor-full bodies. The prison as immunitary apparatus is *inside* of the body politic yet simultaneously its *constitutive outside*, and those rendered into prison are thus subjected to an *inclusive-exclusion*.

Inclusive-exclusion, which for Agamben is the mechanism for the production of a *biopolitical body that may be killed* (Agamben, 1998, p. 6), and that I argued through the prison in chapter three is the mechanism for the construction of the *savage type*, bears *exact structural homology* to inoculation procedures - the introduction of a pathogen into the body in order to defend against it (exclude it) through stimulating the immune response. The pathogen that is inclusively-excluded in this case, through the prison, is undifferentiated violence composed of *inmate bodies as individual particles of violence disease*. Three differing frames through which to read the process of inclusive-exclusion and the manufacture of carceral subjectivities – the state of exception and the creation of a biopolitical body that may be killed (Agamben), the creation of the *savage type* that may be abandoned to death within the prison as artificial state of nature (Chapter 3), and as inoculative procedure rendering those inclusively-excluded as *particles of contagion* (Esposito). Reading the three interpretations together, or laying the three lenses atop one another in order to observe the inmate body and

carceral subjectivity, *carceral* inclusive-exclusion is revealed as the manufacture of a *biopolitical body* - a less-than-fully-human life *that may be killed because contaminating savage*. As disease particle undermines the individual human body, each inmate savage is a contaminating threat at the level of the body politic in exact structural homology, threatening to tear it down from inside and render it into a void of no sense of radical, racial disarticulation. The implications will be returned to in the last section of the chapter.

As described in chapter 1, as the originary conditions of carcerality - the imposition of scarcity, a monopoly over mobility and the articulation of human beings as violence potentialities within conditions of functional lawlessness - guarantees total entropic violence in the form of prison riot and assorted forms of inmate-on-inmate violence – the contemporary prison is thus the inclusive-exclusion (or, manufacture) of the very same undifferentiated violence that threatens absolute community, but in an already contained and tolerable dose behind prison walls; *each prison rendered an inoculating “pill” of undifferentiated violence* swallowed by the body politic.

The shocking conclusion that must be drawn *against* the modernist notion of the absolute community and its intrinsic violence, or through deploying a convict epistemology in order to read modernity and its philosophical assumptions critically through the lens of the prison (and not vice-versa), is that the white-supremacist body politic inoculates itself not against an *actual* reciprocal contagious violence potential at the heart of community as modernity asserts in its very foundational philosophical assumptions, but as against an *imaginary* threat - a fantasy of total annihilation that it merely perceives within the absolute community, but only through its limited and material construction. A convict epistemology

reveals that it is only through the manufacture of a *real* undifferentiated violence, the always-potential prison riot and related forms of penitentiary violence, that the imaginary, catastrophic and reality-threatening undifferentiated violence menacing the contemporary body politic is made to appear at all. That is, *retroactively*. The merely perceived, imaginary violence that apocalyptically threatens the social body, calling forth the prison as immunitary apparatus meant to protect against it, is only made to appear through its staged and very real manufacture/materialization in *already-contained tolerable doses*. Within the contemporary U.S. social formation then, the violence intrinsic to the prison functions as a *material support for the fantasy of a consumptive criminal violence/plague threatening civil society – the very fantasy that comes to justify the existence of the prison itself*.

In other words, the prison-justifying reflexive fear of an apocalyptic violence overtaking society should the prison cease to exist, be rendered inoperable or *abolished* - is only made to appear through staged violence within the carceral as its very condition of being. Without the prison, the material support for a fantasy of an apocalyptic, society-consuming violence evaporates; undifferentiated violence disappears in its limited and already contained dosage as it is only made possible through carceral logics. The prison thus manufactures contagious violence (prison riot) as a form of institutional self-defense mechanism, ideologically justifying its own existence through undifferentiated violence's materialization and appearance within its folds, which is then attributed to a differential ontological type, the less-than-fully-human inmate savage/particle of contagion that civil society and its subjects need protection (inoculation) from. The main argument against prison abolition, that "if we just let everyone out, there would be chaos and crime and rampant violence" is pure, white-supremacist fantasy;

a fever dream generated from within the modernist/immunitarian paradigm. Without the prison, there would be no community-annihilative violence potential at all, as the fantasy of it is only made to appear through its very real yet entirely limited and controlled construction.

The prison *constructs*, through inoculation, the very thing it wishes to defend against – undifferentiated violence. Civil society may then reference this carceral violence as evidence for its prior existence and community swallowing potential and the necessity of the prison for containing it. Simultaneously then, carceral inoculation is the construction of a fantasy figure, *the inmate as individual particle of the hysterically perceived community-annihilating violence disease that must be quarantined*; each inmate body perceived as viral contaminant threatening to undermine civil society (remember the jurors of the Corcoran 8 trial visiting the SHU). The manufacture of these stageable pathogens ideologically justifies, through fantasy, the existence of the immunitary apparatuses themselves. Thus, the institutions of civil society, as immune system of modernity, more and more resembles a closed-loop feedback system subsuming the social and guaranteeing the intensification and expansion of immunitary apparatuses through their own internal logics *devoid of actual threat*, ever-siphoning off from the body politic (and those individual subjects who constitute it) those resources, bodies and energies necessary to facilitate their own expansion in the name of protecting white-supremacist “life” from the series of fantastical contagions that threaten it. Artificial immunitary apparatuses tasked with inoculating the social body are not responsive to an actually existent and internal/external threat then, but *manufacturing of threat to create the conditions of their own voracious growth*. Thus, this immune system of modernity could be said, in a very literal sense, to be vampirically attacking the body politic it was meant to protect,

draining its life force, or, within the metaphor, the white-supremacist social body as being perilously consumed by rampant *autoimmune disease*.

Quarantine Formations

Returning specifically to the prison, our white-supremacist civil society is immunized (both constituted and deprived) through carcerality - the identification, tracking down, capturing, transportation, containment, isolation and abandonment to death of individuals articulated as posing a contaminant threat at the level of the body politic. Immunization of the body politic thus takes the form of a quarantine, a “medicalized response” to criminality – for those metaphorically or “literally” infected with the community-consumptive “violence-disease.” The original model of quarantine derived from the Middle Ages was divided into:

two pathogenic archetypes of leprosy and the plague: while the first led to the expulsion of the sick outside the city walls, the second provided for their placement into individual settings that would allow them to be numbered, registered, and assiduously controlled. (Esposito, 2011, p. 139)

Though the leprosy/plague models of quarantine do not map precisely, they are nevertheless procreant interpretive models for representing the immunitary responses of the contemporary carceral formation within the United States to the contagion of criminality (always collapsed under the violence category) across two registers - the hyperghetto and the prison. As the hyperghetto, as I described in chapter two and three, is effectively rendered outside of circuits of capitalist productivity, it is through that very economic exclusion/abandonment articulated as a *state of nature* within the Hobbesian fantasy. The hyperghetto thus bears structural homology with the *leper colony* for those stricken with violence disease, outside the “walls of the city,” or, in this case, neoliberally delimited social space. All of the formal and informal

social, political and economic practices/mechanisms that raise the hyperghetto as ethnoracial container then, are through the immunitary paradigm, to be read as the erection of fortifying walls to keep the viral contagion of criminal violence contained, outside of the walls of the city.

Noticeably, it is *within* the hyperghetto as violence-disease colony that liberal reformers like Gary Slutkin and his violence interrupters bent on the medicalization of criminality as literal contagion work. They target “violence outbreak” within spaces *always-already quarantined as leper-style disease colony*, or erected through a social policy meant to contain rampant contagion (gang violence, urban insurrection, etc.). A contagion that the logic of quarantine, remember, made to appear in the first place; the originary conditions for violence’s emergence articulated as disease. The work of violence interruption occurs, then, within spaces *already made virulent through the preemptive social quarantining of human beings as contaminant threat*. The dichotomy established by liberal reformists between medical-style intervention and the “traditional” carceral approaches of hunting down, capturing and containing people cannot be maintained for it is non-existent, as violence interruption occurs after the fact within spaces already established and distanced through quarantining logics.

As the prison inoculates the body politic through an inclusive-exclusion of inmate bodies within the carceral thresher, then the prison follows that other archetypal model, the *plague quarantine* - retroactively rendering its inhabitants through their very inscription within the prison itself as carriers of the *plague* of violent criminality simply for being there; synonymous in the white-supremacist imaginary with undifferentiated violence capacity. One outside the city, the neoliberally abandoned wastelands as state of nature, and the other inclusively-

excluded within/out, through the prison, in order to be “numbered, registered, and assiduously controlled.”

Mapping the hyperghetto and the prison as variant archetypal quarantine formations begins to break down when taking account of the fact that that the prison as plague quarantine largely mines and extracts its bodies from the leper colonies/hyperghettoes outside of the walls of the city. Of course, this was not the case with historical leper/plague quarantines. It is as if contemporary forms of quarantine meant to contain this particular brand of “social illness” dealt not with two separate diseases but one, the violence disease. Two differing forms of quarantine tasked with the management of various stages or the virulence of infection. Reaching a clinical degree within the leper quarantine, violence-infected criminal bodies are seized and extracted from the hyperghetto to the other through arrest, the plague quarantine that is the prison⁷. Despite this inconsistency in metaphorical mapping, reading the prison as a plague quarantine is still uniquely illustrative of contemporary carcerality, in particular the logic of quarantine as it hypertrophies and cascades throughout the prison, overdetermining the emergence of a series of inoculative procedures, discourses, apparatuses and actions meant to insulate both self-identity and bodily integrity from the contagious threats of violent indifferentiation saturating carcerality; a taking distance from the other and from the amalgamated mass - individual inoculations enforced by violence and the creation of carceral subjectivities through violence-imposed differentiations.

⁷ At this point, it is important to remember that most who end up in prison are there for non-violent crimes. But as the study by Jessica Grosholz and Charis Kubrin cited at the beginning of this chapter indicates, media-constructed mass perception of crime and criminals is as an “epidemic of violence.” Therefore, within the prison, all inmates are perceived as violent whether or not they actually are, and this understanding is anchored and reified through the very existence of the state-manufactured violence inherent to carceral space.

Recursive Carceral Quarantines

To trace the logic of quarantine gone hysterical throughout carceral space, we begin at the largest scale and work our way down and inside through its nested materializations throughout the prison. To review what has been argued so far, at its largest scale, the prison is a plague quarantine meant to immunize the United States neoliberally-delimited white-supremacist body politic “community” from the indifferentiation that threatens it through the munus, the collective demand(s) from the rendered superfluous-to-capital largely racialized other, articulated within discourse and perceived within the Hobbesian fantasy, as well as socio-politically responded to through policy, as criminal contagion. As viruses threaten to undermine the normal functioning of the individual body through penetrating its porous boundaries, so the inmate-savage is perceived as contaminant threatening to undermine the smooth functioning of the social body - to tear it down into a void of racial no-sense and apocalyptic violence within the modernist imaginary. At the level of the body politic then, the carceral quarantine at the population level constitutes the immunized and delimited body politic through the disappearance and concentration of racialized, “violence-infected” human beings as individual particles of contagion. This overarching framework, this logic of quarantine, sets an operative template that cascades throughout the prison itself, establishing a series of nested and interdependent sub-quarantines *within* the larger social quarantine that is the prison that further identify, separate, isolate, contain and eliminate human beings articulated as savage contaminants seen to be saturating the interiority of the prison in its entirety as its very condition of being. The logic of quarantine goes absolutely hysterical within the

dilapidated and overcrowded conditions of the prison, calling forth every day, inoculative interactions between not only inmates and custody but between inmates themselves - the progressive and repeated enactment of a series of imposed isolations, distances taken and separations from other inmates as a series of contaminant threats. The logic of quarantine overdetermines daily life, the discourses, the very architecture of the carceral space. Why a cell system, for instance? Why a division into yards? Where does the profound and noxious racism of the “prison politics” organizing carceral space come from? What *is* administrative segregation, the SHU, the classification system? What is a lockdown? Et cetera. Only after answering these questions will the carceral’s quarantining logic reveal itself in all of its varied permutations.

My examination of carceral quarantining logics will focus on California state prisons (as opposed to federal prisons, the jail system, other state prisons, immigration detention centers. etc.), as these are the carceral institutions I am most familiar with, having spent about eight years inside of four of them - North Kern State Prison or “Delano” for 5 months, RJ Donovan Correctional Facility for two years, the California Rehabilitation Center in Norco for 5+ years, and the California Institute for Men or “Chino,” in administrative segregation for another 6 or so months. It should be acknowledged that no matter the lock-up, the logic of quarantine as I describe the practice of erecting barriers and separations between human beings, isolating them and exposing them to mechanisms of (violence) disease suppression/eradication is operative in any prison, because quarantine is the foundational logic of carcerality itself. The logic of quarantine saturates prisons across and throughout multiple registers because, at its most basic level and quite obviously if one were to think about it for five seconds, *the prison is*

nothing more than a series of hierarchical separations, isolations and containments of inmate bodies over periods of time in order to prevent the spread of variant contagious potentials, most primarily violence (as disease). A series of dissections of the inmate population into ever-more manageable units to block “transmission.” These separations function at their grandest scale to keep particles of contagion (inmate/criminal bodies) away from civil society, but also and just as essentially, to suppress and/or steer the appearance of contagious violence within the carceral perimeter. A prison at its most elementary level is nothing more than a hierarchically arranged set of dissections and stabilizations of the inmate population within manageable units, enforced by threat and/or actuality of custodial inoculative violence, mutually informing and reinforcing one another in order to contain the spread of the violence (contagion) threatening to overrun carceral space.

Important to remember, the prison as a series of recursive quarantines intends to contain and suppress an entropic violence that *it itself establishes and guarantees as the very condition of its own organizing principles.* Through the imposition of scarcity atop a captive and undifferentiated population, the prison is generative of a simulated, absolute community with perfectly predictable contagious violence as its innermost expression; a violence which boils over outside of itself in the form of the prison riot. The prison, after the fact of its instantiation, responds to its own organized and emergent violence both *architecturally* and through custodial action in order to suppress and channel this emergent violence’s virality. Essential to understand, this suppression is never total – the prison does not extinguish the violence it establishes but only contains it to a relative degree, as the violence that the prison generates is the precondition for its own existence within conditions of modernist auto-immunity. Prisons

manufacture reciprocal and contagious violence as material support for a society-consuming violence fantasy and it is this imaginary violence that retroactively justifies the existence of the prison as its containment/inoculative mechanism.

This antinomy at the heart of carcerality, the generation (implicit function) and simultaneous suppression of a contagious violence (explicit function), or its controlled burn, is not intentional, nor consciously designed. There exists no grand carceral conspiracy. Quite the opposite, as carceral state managers dedicate significant energies, resources and bodies towards the suppression of violence within the carceral perimeter - ever-more sophisticated surveillance systems and containment technologies, new guns and new chemical subduing agents, training in counter-insurgency tactics for a massive and well-financed correctional force. But their suppression efforts take place as embedded within a contradiction, an originary framework that preemptively frustrates any suppressive intention. Carceral violence, instead, and as described in detail in chapter 1, emerges as epiphenomena of its organizing logics. The prison itself organizes the perpetual recurrence and always-potential of catastrophic violence, no matter how brutal, how severe and totalizing its suppressive efforts - rendered futile and undercut from within. To effectively eliminate consumptive prison violence, the carceral state need only abandon its violence-generative organizing principles – that is, *not* impose scarcity atop a captive and undifferentiated population. Or allow human beings to leave. Stop stripping individual identity. A series of intervention points exist. But that is something that carceral state managers will not, in fact cannot do, for any serious curtailing of these logics would functionally abolish the prison, unravel it. These three logics - the imposition of scarcity, holding a population captive under the lethal threat of gunfire, and subjecting inmates to

indifferentiation – are so essential to carcerality that they compose its very essence, giving material form and purpose to the prison, as institution. Therefore, the prison is not contradictory in itself, but is instead embedded within two contradictory demands from outside and transcendent to it – on the one hand the manufacture and staging of contagious violence of the racialized other justifying their removal and disappearance from civil society, and on the other, the simultaneous need to keep this violence subsuming carceral space from overflowing its bounds. The architecture of the prison, through a series of recursive quarantines, is called forth in order to contain the violence it itself generates; it shapes emergent inmate-on-inmate violence as a controlled flame without its extinguishment into socially constitutive and stageable forms. Through quarantining, a hierarchical series of separations, isolations and containments - compartmentalization of inmate bodies - the contagious and socially consumptive violence that inmates represent as originary community is itself broken down into a series of forms of sub-violence, the prison isolating and eventually recombining inmate bodies into always-potentially explosive, yet manageable forms.

The contagious violence potential at the heart of the undifferentiated inmate mass then comes to seed all the custodially-administered, collective spaces of the prison. Said differently, if the undifferentiated inmate population represents unmanageable total and reciprocal violence, prison riot or war of all-against-all, then the architecture of the prison breaks this violence down into more manageable segments across a series of yards, cell blocks and individual cells throughout carceral space, separating the inmate population from itself (which is nothing but violence in its absolute form), dividing it across a series of recursive quarantines while leaving the generative engine of contagious violence intact. What emerges then is a series

of reciprocal violence potentials of varying size and intensity scattered throughout carceral space, unpredictably and assuredly ready to explode in any moment towards which carceral suppressive efforts are dedicated. Suppressing violence in one collective space, one yard for instance, does nothing to preempt its occurrence in some other collective space within the institution, or its appearance in the same collective space at another time.

The prison, as series of recursive quarantines, first compartmentalizes the inmate population at the level of the prison yard. As the political philosophers of modernity perceived contagious violence as the very essence of absolute community, if all inmates were to be placed on any single yard together, prison administration perceives entropic, catastrophic violence as assured. The operative logic is to divide the total inmate population of any prison into more numerically manageable segments (cutting it into thirds, fourths, or fifths, etc.) so as to keep the reciprocal violence at the heart of undifferentiated community from subsuming the entirety of the carceral space. Inmates are assigned to differing yards within the same facility based on their custody level – their perceived violence capacity, or, through the immunitary paradigm, their degree of infectious virulence - minimum, medium, high security and supermax yards, separating the perceived-as-most-virulent from the less so. The technologies, practices and procedures of violence disease suppression vary dependent on yard security level, with higher security yards deploying more significant technological, militarized measures – limiting or even the absolute cessation of inmate movement entirely, total isolation, more block guns and mini-14 rifles, more C.O.'s on the yard as “violence-interrupters” including elite tactical goon squads, more inoculative state violence, cell and body searches, observation cameras, etc.

As with the breaking down of the inmate population across yards in order to suppress riotous violence potential at the heart of the inmate population as manufactured originary community, on each yard, the logic goes recursive and the inmate population is further subdivided across a series of housing units - cell blocks, buildings or dorms. On those yards designated as high-security, level III and IV yards, each cell block/building contains any number of individual cells housing, further quarantining, either one or two inmates, dependent on institution and degree of individual inmate in-cell violence potential/virulence. Though often articulated as a Victorian-style punishment mechanism meant to drive self-reflection for those who commit crimes, this common-sense understanding is mistaken. The cell system did not, for instance, guarantee introspection with regard to one's moral failings and the "bad choices" that we had all made; no one within prison really thought that was happening interior to the cell, whether inmates or guards. Nor does the individual cell effect the self-disciplining of the inmate as Foucault, following Bentham, claimed. The cell system is instead the isolation, containment and separation of the inmate population into a series of perfectly quarantined units, an epidemiological device meant to prevent the transmission of violence disease and outbreak perceived as ontologically inhering within, or more precisely as, inmate bodies. Inmates are articulated and responded to as incorrigible, spasmodic, or, within the immunitarian paradigm, hopelessly "diseased." No disciplining was possible. All they could do was isolate and contain us for varying periods of time.

The cell is a prophylactic measure to keep raging violence "disease" contained, to keep inmate bodies as individual particles of contagion from amalgamating, potentially undermining the "healthy functioning" of the prison through reaching a critical mass in entropic violence

explosion. As an aside, many inmates prefer single-cell housing and to be perfectly quarantined from the violence contagion in which they are entirely embedded. If any inmate has a history of fighting with cellies, they may be deemed an “in-cell predator,” virulently contagious, thus incentivizing those inmates who prefer to have their own cell and the limited privacy it affords to commit acts of in-cell violence. In-cell violence then itself becomes, for inmates, an inoculative procedure (a smaller-scale violence) in order to protect against the contamination of the violence-diseased other and riot “outbreak” that phenomenologically inundates any inmate bound within carceral space. A small example of the ways in which an overarching logic of quarantine goes hysterical, saturating every day relations and leading to the instantiation of myriad, individual and collective, violent inoculations. The majority of inmate-on-inmate violence within prison takes this form - it is *immunizing*.

From their respective in-cell quarantined housing assignment, each inmate is daily released onto the yard, to the dayroom, to the chow hall - to any of a series of collective points that exist within carceral space to be (re)amalgamated as undifferentiated, inmate mass. Each of these amalgamation points is dangerous, as through carcerality’s organizing logics, all points of collectivity throughout carceral space are particular locations overdetermined towards an always-potential collapse, the emergence of a contagious violence outbreak or riot. To “do time” is, in other words, to be subjected to a daily series of expansions and contractions, from perfect individual quarantines and into a collective mass then back again; each expansive releasing of inmates into the yard/undifferentiated mass potentially generative of violence outbreak. The prison yard functions like a massive artificial lung, expanding through the release of individuals into an undifferentiated community within collective and razor-wire, gun tower-

secured spaces - the yard being the principal amalgamation point - and then contracted, returned to in-cell quarantine. Day after day. This expansion/contraction mechanism is the primary apparatus, a thermostat for regulating the contagious violence at the heart of the undifferentiated inmate population; suppressing and steering the contagious violence at the heart of undifferentiated community into manageable size and gun tower-secured spaces. Should a violence outbreak occur, administration responds through a brutal inoculative violence and the imposition of total quarantine measures, reseparating and isolating violence-infected bodies through the institutional lockdown, and their total immobilization under threat of execution.

The prison then, through establishing conditions of violence through its originary logics, plays something like the same game that Freud observed his 18-month-old grandson playing, "fort/da" as theorized in *Beyond the Pleasure principle* (1989):

The child had a wooden reel with a piece of string tied around it... What he did was to hold the reel by the string and very skillfully throw it over the edge of his curtained cot, so that it disappeared into it, at the same time uttering his expressive "o-o-o-o" (a child's attempt to say "Fort," or "gone"). He then pulled the reel again by the string and hailed its reappearance with a joyful "da" [there]. This, then, was the complete game of disappearance and return. As a rule one only witnessed its first act, which was repeated untiringly as a game in itself, though there is no doubt that the greater pleasure was attached to the second act. (Freud, S. & J. Strachey, pp. 13-15)

The prison simulates a total loss of control through the entropic violence it enables within already-contained and digestible quantities within controlled space (the inmates are "gone," or out of our control), and then recalls (or locks down) inmate bodies into lockdown. This expansion/contraction, or individual cell quarantine into manageable sized units of undifferentiated community/violence potential and back again, is thus a machinery for the

production of an unpredictable as to *when* it will occur, yet *entirely guaranteed* and manageable violence, putting at risk not only those violence-diseased bodies made inmate, but those guards made metaphorical epidemiological interventionists tasked with symptom suppression in any violence disease outbreak within the carceral perimeter as plague quarantine.

Further and radical separations of the inmate population exist, more intense forms of quarantine for those perceived as exceptionally virulent contaminant potentials from within the mainline yard. Administrative segregation (ad-seg) and SHU units disappear and contain inmates who are perceived as most noxiously diseased/violent. Those in possession of illicit contraband like drugs, weapons or tattoo guns (disease vectors, in themselves) and those inmates who “refuse to program,” that is, are unwilling or incapable of following dictates from custody - disrupting “normal functioning,” and therefore, as contagious - will all find themselves receiving lock-up orders and further quarantined from the mainline inmate body politic. If an ad-seg yard does not exist within any one facility, then inmates may be transferred to another facility entirely, and a recursive inclusive-exclusion takes nested form from one prison to another - as was my case when sent to the hole twice from the medium-security open dorm facility at California Rehabilitation Center. From there, I was transferred to Chino State Prison, a maximum-security facility and a tortuous hell-pit of degradation and brutal violence and was housed in the Cypress cell block, an “overflow” ad-seg block in addition to the primary because so overflowing with violence-diseased bodies they had to open another to contain its virality. There, I was assigned single-cell housing before being deemed a non-cell predator and moved to a two-man cell. Considered too infectious for open dorm living, I was subjected to a further

and intensified quarantine, 24-hour-a-day lock down with an hour of yard twice a week for a number of months. Ad seg is generally within the larger mainline prison yard, encircled by its own razor-wired perimeter fence and gun tower, with targeting windows pointed down and inward at the fenced in yard below thus separating it off from the General Population (GP) yard so as to keep the “worst of the worst” from the mainline, viruses threatening to disrupt the institution’s smooth functioning and rip it apart in entropic chaos. A replication of the population-scale logic of the containment of a savagery threatening civil society with disarticulation, but in a nested form interior to the prison. A series of recursive quarantines.

Looking down on any prison from a bird’s eye perspective then, we first see the external and electrified perimeter fence secured by a ring of gun towers, separating the prison off from the external, or the carceral quarantine/prison as surrounded by a civil society pointing guns inwards towards it. Inside of that perimeter fence, a series of yards themselves encircled by further electrified perimeter fences and gun towers taking aim downwards and inside, the yards linked by small roads and pathways traversed by custodial administration transferring inmates in handcuffs - moved back and forth from lesser to more intense forms of isolation. On the yards themselves, a series of buildings/cell blocks with their own separate and isolating mechanisms - electrical gates and locking cell doors - across which the yard’s inmate population is further subdivided. Within each cell block, a series of isolating cells holding inmates as individual violence contagion particles away from one another. And within the mainline yard itself, a further perimeter fence secured by gun tower - the ad-seg unit quarantining from the mainline population those inmates who, like a disease, threaten to “disrupt the normal functioning” of the mainline yard through any variety of contagious behavioral problems.

The prison then, from a view above, takes form as a series of concentric circles, fences inside of fences dissecting the inmate population from the perceived as most violent to the least, the more virulent to the less so. The prison is a recursive quarantine - a series of hierarchical separations, isolations and containments of the inmate population from itself and the violence internal to it, without its extinguishment. The flexing and flowing of inmate bodies, their release from quarantining cells and to the amalgamation point of undifferentiated community on the yard and back again functions to channel flows of contaminants, to regulate and to suppress the reciprocal violence at the heart of undifferentiated community; a riotous potential that the state itself organizes, breaking it into institutionally manageable units, while simultaneously generating the conditions for its entropic and contagious appearance within already-secured and collective carceral spaces. Away from civil society. If this contagious violence does make its eventual and guaranteed appearance on any particular day, then the institution entirely freezes - responds through imposing maximal quarantine through the lockdown - total isolation, immobilization and separation, thus eviscerating the possibility of inmate-to-inmate contact. A contagious disease-style epidemiological intervention meant to quell any particular riotous outbreak, or carceral symptom suppression enforced through the inoculative violence of the riot shield, pepper-spray, the block gun and the smoking Carbine rifle.

After being released from the hole during one of my two ad-seg stretches, I walked a mainline yard in Chino with a cellie of mine. As we circled the track, we came upon a housing unit, itself encircled by chain link fence. But it wasn't ad-seg. It was portentous, protruding catty-corner out onto the yard, eerily silent and secured by its own dual-gating system. Blacked-

out windows. I hadn't seen anything like it in any of the three state prison yards I had previously been incarcerated. No one was going in and out and I couldn't see any inmate life stirring inside of it. It looked like an ominous spaceship had landed on the yard, a darkened grey, poured-concrete, monolith. I asked my cellie the purpose of the cell block and who was housed within, and he told me that it was set aside for those inmates who were H.I.V. positive and/or living with AIDS, a medical unit. As I watched inmates circling the yard that day, many took a rather wide berth as if just getting too close to the building was contagious, as if the very air surrounding it was lethal.

Whole buildings on some yards are set aside for those living with literal contagious disease. Whole yards. Even entire prisons, like the California Health Care Facility (CHCF). Separate cell blocks within any prison for those living with contagious tuberculosis. Separate facilities quarantining those living with the disease of addiction, keeping them distanced from the mainline population. Prisons divided into general population and special needs yards or in inmate parlance, snitch yards for "rats," notorious carriers of plague. Mental health wards/buildings quarantining the mentally ill away from GP, mental illness considered as itself contagious because any "ding" may infect the smooth functioning of the mainline prison population yard. Dividing the California prison system, a series of recursive quarantines within quarantines to prevent a greater contagion from subsuming the field. The foremost contagion quarantined through carcerality is the community-consumptive violence disease, but not the only. As inmate/violence-diseased bodies are individual particles of contagion within an undifferentiated community made mass, the release onto the yard and the daily retraction into quarantine formation is an engine, the continual striking of a match with the potential to ignite

into an outbreak of entropic violence. And in the face of this always-potential reciprocal violence at the heart of any prison yard, inmates themselves come to inaugurate further immunitary mechanisms so as to protect themselves and self-quarantine from the besieging contagious potentials in which they are daily enmeshed. The logic of quarantine goes absolutely hysterical within carceral space, giving form to daily inmate-to-inmate relations themselves (the taboos and prohibitions or racialized prison politics) and calling forth myriad forms of violence within the prison as inoculations meant to prevent against violence disease outbreak (see case study at the end of this chapter).

A Hobbesian Parallax – The Inmate Body as Savage Contagion

In much of the critical work around the contemporary prison, it has become somewhat commonplace to describe carcerality as rendering the inmate as something “less-than-fully-human” and treating them accordingly. Largely racialized and otherwise abandoned peoples are subjected to a set of humiliations and violence within the prison that are entirely beneath human dignity. True enough. But I wish to argue is that merely articulating the inmate as “less-than-fully-human” doesn’t properly get at the heart of what’s happening interior to the prison - what people are made to suffer and what we were transmogrified into through carceral inscription. “Less-than-full-humanness,” as ontological category, is a purely negative descriptor. The question still remains, what are the *positive* attributes of this less-than-fully-human carceral subject position? What substantial qualities define inmate “less-than-humanness,” give it form? Not merely what do we incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals lack, our degrees away from full-humanness, but what *is* the inmate body in itself, from the perspective

of those normative, fully human subjects rendered so through their full inscription within white-supremacist sociality?

Those of us fortunate enough to enjoy the functioning of both of our eyes are probably familiar with that uncanny experience, maybe since childhood, in which we alternately blink one eye and then the other repeatedly, and the object that we are observing seems to move back and forth. The object itself does not move of course, but as the place from which we look changes, the object itself *appears* to us differently. This is known as a parallax view, or looking at the same object from two different positions in order to reveal a different perspective. The last two chapters, entitled parallax I & II, have attempted to answer the precise question of what composes the positive content of the inmate as a less-than-fully-human ontological type. As described in chapter three or parallax I, the Hobbesian fantasy organizing white-supremacist civil society and the normative subjectivity found within, articulates the inmate as an iteration of savagery - a *savage* subject made to appear within the prison as manufactured state of nature. And on the other hand, or through the second parallax as described in this chapter, those inclusively-excluded within the carceral thresher are articulated and socio-politically responded to as a form of virulent *contagion*; quarantined within the contemporary prison as epidemiological-style intervention meant to inoculate civil society from “violence disease.” Two parallax ways of seeing the inmate body, two differing ways to read carceral less-than-full-humanness – as both a savage and a contagion with the contemporary prison transfigured as both state of nature and a plague quarantine simultaneously. Collapsing these parallax positions, or synthesizing both of these perspectives through looking squarely at the prison with both of our eyes wide open, any individual inmate is made to appear - that is,

conceptualized and responded to - *as a contaminating threat at the level of civil society because a savage.*

As discussed earlier in the chapter, through metaphoric collapse, the criminal and the virus, Esposito's metaphor of all of our nightmares, are no longer seen as simply "analogous to the other," but instead, "they come to be seen as more or less identical" (Hanne, 2016, p. 54).

The criminal is a form of virus, and within the epidemiological community,

There is debate about whether 'viruses' are alive or in some other state of being. If we take the ability to replicate as a criterion for being alive, then viruses do fit... If we require that a living organism be able to perform metabolic processes, they are incapable of doing so, and not considered alive. The origin of viruses is open to question, along with whether or not a virus 'lives.' (Potter, 2018, p. 202)

If all characteristics between the metaphoric domains of crime and disease are perceived as shared between them, then as the virus enjoys a curious half-life - neither alive nor dead but somewhere in between - then the inmate is perceived as not quite alive or dead. Specifically, inmates are *biologically alive and rendered as socially dead* - a unique, utterly biological, and repellant form of bare life. As viruses are seen to replicate within the biological body, inmates are feared as replicating and subsuming of carceral space as disease colony, a contagious savagery threatening to overtake and annihilate the body politic from within itself. In addition, inmates exist as suspended within a profoundly inhuman carceral order absolutely inundated with violent death-potential - social, subjective and biological - as both its agents and/or its victims, as both hopelessly diseased and as vectors of transmission. As the inmate is absolutely inundated by an always-potential death, the contemporary prison is revealed as something like a Heideggerian city of the half-dead - all inmates made beings towards an *immediate* death as singular elements of a contagious and zombified assemblage, spreading of a noxious disease

threatening the apocalyptic collapse of the social. And we inmates, because of that very fact, are abandoned within a context of lethal indifference within a medicalized response to protect the “health” of the delimited body politic, or, are allowed to die as a form of disease management strategy. That is, inmates, because of our peculiar form of less-than-full-humanness as savage contaminants, compose a *sacrificial category* of human beings. Our exposure to myriad deaths generative of the social order itself. And it is to the logics of sacrificial violence that we turn in chapter five and six.

Chapter Four Case Study - Belly of the Beast: The Prison Gang as *Subleviathan*

Devoid of those immunitary apparatuses that protect fully-human subjects of civil society - a functional system of law, individual civil and political rights, private property - as well as lacking those inoculative apparatuses issuing violence in smaller doses so as to prevent the slide into its absolute form – we inmates, as manufactured and absolute community, erected immunitary apparatuses of our own. *The dominant form of immunitary apparatus raised by inmates within carceral space is the prison gang.* Prison gangs (security threat groups, STGs, in the official discourse of California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation) are, at their foundation, *the enactment of informal social contracts, known to inmates ourselves as “prison politics.”* These social contracts, built upon a set of commandments and prohibitions to be described below, establish a series of smaller-scale *subleviathans*, flesh-devouring monstrosities *inside* the great Leviathan’s belly, roaming the manufactured state of nature in an unending struggle to a perpetually-delayed death. Individual inmates are like singular cells within the larger organism that is the subleviathan/STG/prison gang, churning and absorbing

bodies at the center of the yard and largely sustaining itself through what might best be described as a *self-devouring or autophagic violence*. An inoculative series of acts of violence issued so as to immunize the sub-collective from the greater contagion, reciprocal violence organized by the prison as its very condition of being. As an attack on any member of the body politic of premodernity was articulated as an attack on the king himself, so it is with the prison gang - an externally-positioned attack on any individual prison gangster is an attack on the collective and invites retaliatory violence against the perpetrator, interpellating each and every member of the collective/subleviathan as its retributory agent.

Being swallowed by the civil-society-constituting grand Leviathan or processed into the prison is to cross a liminal threshold *from* civilization and *into* an emergent and manufactured state of nature - outside of the protection of the neoliberal state - wherein all of those overdetermining forces that call forth immunitary apparatuses are once again made present. The prison gang is the inmate population's collective and consequent response, albeit brutal and horrifying, to the imposition of scarcity and indifferenciation, or their embeddedness within a simulated originary community/state of nature, synonymous with entropic and reciprocal violence. The prison gang and prison politics are, in the simplest terms, means of collective self-protection from the devouring munus (re)established as a primary practice of carceral statecraft; each subleviathan nothing but a fractured, warped and muddied reflection of carceral *abandonment* itself as originary *atrocit*y.

More specifically, if 1) the imposition of scarcity 2) atop a captive and 3) undifferentiated population 4) within conditions of functional lawlessness are primary logics of carcerality and are generative of reciprocal violence as Esposito argues - the prime inputs

establishing the operational frequency at which carcerality is set, as *state of nature* - then prison gangs as our collective inmate *response* to these overarching conditions are like the secondary waveforms, reactions emergent within carceral space. With regards to prison gangs themselves, there exist two different types with two tiers of intensity and violence activation. At the foundational tier, upon being inscribed within carceral space, *the amalgamated* inmate mass is racially subdivided through *both* inmate and administrative practice (classification). The entire inmate population is *gangsterized as originary gesture in the construction of carceral subjectivities*. When I went to prison, I was asked in classification by my administrative case counselor,

“Who do you run with?”

“What do you mean?” I responded.

“Are you a wood? A Southsider? What gang do you claim?”

I explained I never “ran” with anyone, that I wasn’t a member of any gang. He informed me that for my own safety, I better get with “my people,” clique with an inmate set with severe haste, or else find myself a victim to any and/or all of them. To clarify his meaning, he asked my racial identification. I explained that I had always identified as white, to which he responded that within California prisons, that made me a “Wood” - short for peckerwood, and part of the “Wood Pile.”

“Find the woods on the yard, and link with ‘em. If you don’t, you’re not gonna’ make it out here,” he said.

The wood subject position preexisted my arrival within the prison, an element of the larger carceral symbolic order in which I was inserted. Both guards, administration and inmates

were interpellating me as wood before I even knew what the term meant. A Latinx inmate from southern California is a Sureño, a Southsider. A Mexican national is a “Paisa.” If Black, it matters not whether the inmate was from Grape Street Watts or from “Bompton,” or even street gang-unaffiliated. In prison, that inmate is made part of a united front and the Blacks “ride” together in differentiation to the other racialized groupings on the yard. Everyone else within California’s prisons is made an “Other” (Native American, Asian, South East Asian, Arab, etc.). Inscription in one of these racialized subleviathans is the default setting for all individual inmates and there is a gang for everyone. And custody and inmates work hand-in-hand to uphold this classification/gang inscription, despite any disavowal otherwise.

As there exists no “outside” to this all-subsuming system of race gangs dividing any prison yard, it can’t be fled from or resisted. Trying to assert distinction, that you *aren’t* a Wood, Black, Hispanic, or “Other” is to say that you are from Mars - equally incomprehensible to inmates and custody. As a result, the life of any inmate attempting to disaffiliate is put on a running clock. Gang unaffiliated is a structurally impossible position within the prison, and these inmate remainders are made vulnerable to predation and catastrophic violence from both the subleviathan that they refuse, and devoid of its protection, the disaffiliated becomes an attractor of sorts for all the free-floating hostilities and predation from other subleviathans on the yard. Undefended and scorned. An inmate may decide to *try* and flee through “rolling it up” into protective custody, but to get to “PC” housing inmates are required by prison administration to inform on those “gang members” threatening them; to explain/justify to c.o.’s why they are not safe on the mainline. Through the act, the informing inmate implicitly adopts the pre-existent and carceral-established subject position of the “rat.” After informing

to custody, the “snitch” is subsequently ensconced in the living tomb that is administrative segregation on a snitch block - used up and shelved for the length of their sentence by custodial administration. From that biologically “safe” subject position, as “rat,” all the handcrafted scrap metal shanks and sharpened sticks, shoelace garrotes and battering instruments in the entirety of the prison will be, in perpetuity, taking ravenous aim in their insatiable and regenerative desire to puncture, render apart and contuse “lame” flesh, as the rat is made an acceptable target for the expression of murderous, bottled aggression and frustration for *all* gangsterized mainline inmates.

In my eight-year carceral stretch, staying on the main line - being interpellated and answering the call as a “wood” as opposed to snitching - was a *rational* choice. Facing the threat of biological death through race riot on the mainline was a qualitatively better option for me than the psychological annihilation of spending eight years hiding within a snitch-lockdown after “debriefing.” I reasoned that my chances of survival were higher in GP, even though I cared nothing for “prison politics.” I hated them to the point of energetic collapse. But I could take an ass-kicking and/or defend myself with my hands better than I could withstand the mind-shattering experience of the hole. Eight years in protective custody, I concluded at the time, was guaranteed to (re)drive me mad. The normative structure of carceral statecraft is to be forced into a gang under threat of death, subjective annihilation and/or physical torture.; an extra-judicial sentence far surpassing that imposed by any court in terms of totalizing mental anguish and threat to biological existence.

All inmates are gangsterized or they are immediately broken snitch and hunted. Atop of this foundation, a further tiering in prison gang structure; a set of elite gangs more brutal and

militant than the baseline sets from which the elite prison gangs recruit. These are the inmate groupings most people think of when primed with the signifier “prison gangs” - the Aryan Brotherhood and the Mexican Mafia, for instance. These groups are on mandatory lockdown within the various SHU’s throughout the state, their leadership quarantined within the Pelican Bay and Corcoran Segregated Housing Unit, the most notoriously brutal and optimized control system(s) within California’s prison belt. Members of these gangs have been on 23 hour a day (or more) lockdown for years or even decades. To be “gang validated” by prison administration, identified as a member of one of these sets (often unjustifiably, on the word of a “snitch” for instance, with any number of vested reasons to name you), means to do the entirety of your sentence quarantined within the SHU whether or not you have committed any further infraction while incarcerated, as these groups are considered by custody to be too active, too bloody, too *contagious*, to do their time within the General Population. These gangs’ overrepresentation within the SHU makes it, perhaps, the most militant place on planet fucking earth. But despite this two-tiered structure of gang affiliation and the absolute nauseating intensity of the SHU⁸, it should be recognized that the entirety of carceral space is paramilitarized; *the entirety of the mainline prison population is interpellated as gangsters*. To be sentenced to prison is indirectly, or more precisely within a context of state-organized indifference, to sentence them into a gang.

Each and every gang within California prisons – the Aryan Brotherhood (A.B. or “The Brand”), the Mexican Mafia, Nazi Low Riders (NLR), the Wood Pile, the Black Guerilla Family

⁸ Which I got a taste of, during one of my stints in Ad-Seg. The ad-seg unit was filled up, so after a riot between the Woods and Southsiders that I was pulled into, myself and several other woods were placed into a unit in Chino State Prison filled to capacity with Nazi Low Riders doing their SHU terms. I was in there for a couple of months.

(BGF), Norteños (Northerners), Sureños (Southsiders), The Blacks, Skins, the Paisas, Bulldogs and “others,” et cetera, are overdetermined and temporarily-stable assemblages, *subleviathans* brutally subdividing the inmate population through the threat and the actuality of potentially murderous, inoculative violence into refractory and immunized mini-communities to protect constituted-within individuals from the annihilative, total and entropic violence at the heart of the prison as undifferentiated and compulsorily-scarce space/community. The prison gang as subleviathan inoculates through pushing to the outside as contaminant threat all other-raced groupings on the yard, constituting a specifically racialized sub-community while simultaneously depriving it of its absolute form, the inmate population made mass that is coterminous with total violence in the process. And each racialized prison gang, as subleviathan, does the same to the others in return.

Both the inmate population itself and the prison yard are therefore split, territorialized, fractured against themselves along racial with each subleviathan jockeying for position and advantage, so as to more effectively immunize and thus constitute as carceral subjects those racialized inmates/gangsters taking shelter from the munus within. As those not party to the social contract within the Hobbesian Leviathan are therefore outside of it and exist as in a state of nature with respect to it, so it is with prison gangs. Each and every one existing in a state of nature with respect to all the others, and at never-ending and perpetual war with them. The subleviathan thus breaks the obligation to the other across racial lines, shatters the munus, which is once again, nothing but state-manufactured *actual* chaotic, annihilative violence; each inmate gang attributing to the other a contagious and violent savagery who through the very

contact with, threatens to drag the members of both subleviathans into an entropic void - all-consuming violence and truly unfathomable and reality-shattering terror, in riot.

As Leviathan at the level of the body politic organizes social space through inoculating “civilization” from the state of nature (through the prison) and the perceived contagious violence internal to it, inside the prison, the logic goes recursive, reverberating and instantiating in reiterating forms of inoculative machines. Prison gangs inoculate themselves, or more precisely their members that compose subleviathans as *sub-body politic(s)*, from the looming threat of the prison riot through the internalization of violence as their means; issuing targeted and smaller-scale autophagic violence so as on the one hand to originally constitute itself, and on the other, to stabilize/inoculate the subleviathan from both the internal and external threats posed to it as the carceral’s very condition of being. These self-devouring forms of violence are known, in inmate jargon, as “disciplining your people,” “checking,” “regulating,” “tuning someone up,” or “handling your business.” Inoculative targeted doses of violence meant to “clean up the yard” are directed towards either “solid convicts” in violation of prison politics on the one hand or “rats,” “lames” and/or “chesters” (sexual predators whose controlling cases include child molestation, rape and other sex-related crimes) on the other. These forms of inoculating violence may include intra-racial beat downs, stabbings, slashings, small-group assaults, throwing off tiers, strangulations, forced exercise and other variety of corporal disciplining/punishment.

Against the plethora of pop culture references supporting the claim, the most commonplace form of violence within the prison is not that *between* races, but amongst members of the *same race* - a *regulative violence* to keep those situations that lead to

interracial violence from arising at all. Actually, against this preponderant myth, there really exists only one violence as between racial groupings within the contemporary prison, that of the all-consuming and dreaded prison riot for reasons to be described below. Prison gangs and the daily violence they enact largely exist so as to preempt its occurrence, to *immunize* against that always-potentiality. Subleviathans do so through the issuance of smaller-scale, inoculative doses of violence “against their own people” in order to discipline disobedient bodies in violation of any of those taboos and injunctions that comprise prison politics as informal social contract, the obscene law, and in the process stabilize the yard from entropic collapse. Through these disciplining and repeatedly-issued inoculative forms of violence, subleviathans drive the (carceral-established) state of nature (contagious violence) further outside and away from themselves, push it back towards the center of the yard, and in the process, shore up the foundations of the artificial immunitary apparatus/prison gang itself. At least for a while, as inoculative forms of violence always-eventually fail as prophylactic measures; the board eventually collapses riotous only to be reset towards the next eventual conflagration.

Smaller-scale inoculative violence also performs an individuating function, returning inmates back within themselves from the appropriative common/inmate mass through the performance of a series of violent acts; deindividuated inmates reconstituted from the inmate mass as *prison gangsters*, with a name for themselves and a reputation in the process distinguishing them from the rest. In inmate vernacular, this subjectifying process is known as “putting in work,” or “getting down for your people.” Prison gangsters who “raise their hand” and volunteer to “go on missions” for the gang, stabbing someone for instance, are considered to be “solid woods,” “down-ass homies,” “ryders,” or “soldiers.” Individuality within the prison

is thus largely carved, ripped and pounded out, quite literally, from the block stone of flesh that is the undifferentiated inmate mass through the shank, the razor, the fist and the stomping boot devoid of other formal mechanisms for the signification of self.

With regard to prison politics as informal social contract realized amongst inmate racialized subpopulations, they are a set of commandments and prohibitions that all inmates interpellated by a particular subleviathan must follow under the threat of great bodily violence, psychological duress or death. These commandments and taboos include injunctions not to congregate with other racialized groupings or inmates on the yard. Don't share food across racial lines. That's a big one that leads to a lot of "checking" intra-racially. There a taboo against buying the other's dope. Don't gamble with other races. Don't sit at their tables or benches. Certainly, don't borrow/use cosmetics from the other - soap, toothpaste, deodorant or shampoo. Don't use their showers. Don't touch, shake hands, hug or even talk to other races unless you have no choice. End any communication as quickly as possible. Stay out of their respective areas of the yard – workout pits, bench areas, basketball or handball courts. In fact, as much as is in your individual control as inmate, just *stay away* from other races on the yard entirely. I once took a drink out of my Indian homie's water bottle. One of the shot callers from the Native American "Other" clique saw me, and checked him for offering it in the first place. Luckily, no "woods" saw, or I would have gotten "disciplined." Sometimes, there emerge informal agreements between subleviathans, for instance the woods "riding" with the Sureños which is common, or the "others" riding with the Blacks. But these alliances are always temporary, subject to collapse and a return to hostilities.

From the outside looking in, the commandments and taboos of prison politics may appear to be arbitrarily racist - motivated by prejudice and ignorance for their own sake. Prison politics most certainly are reprehensible, as they are structured along the racial fault lines that divide the inmate population into respective sets and the physical territory of the yard into racially segregated zones. But they are anything but arbitrary. Prison politics have an internally consistent and functional logic. They are *the establishment of a series of material and symbolic distances between racialized subleviathans, imaginary and real spatial boundaries regulated and enforced through the threat and actuality of violence*. They are, in other words, a breaking of the state manufactured absolute community, coterminous with reciprocal violence, into segments. Prison politics then, as forms of emergent social contract within carceral space are the expressions of a desire emergent from within the inmate population itself for its own protection in the form of *a series of communal self-quarantines from potential contagions manifest by the other, most primarily violence*. In fact, if we look at prison politics through an epidemiological lens, they assume exact structural homology to a series of prescriptions for the prevention of the spread of virulent contagion: *the establishment of physical distances, the minimalization of contact, and the avoidance of sharing potentially contaminating goods*.

Prison politics establish physical distancing through the compartmentalization of the yard separating it into safe and unsafe areas, clean or unclean, along racial lines; its boundaries regulated through the subleviathan's own self-policing through the threatening of inoculative violence against its own members who traverse its boundaries. Each subleviathan/Prison gang has their own separate patches of grass and tables, their own exercise areas. Subleviathans also divide the chow hall into a set of racialized tables, with only members of the particular gang

able to sit at them. White, Black and Southsider tables. Tables for the “Other.” Each race has their own day-room, or a shared day room is split and divided, an imaginary set of lines dissecting it by race. Same-raced housing assignments. Separate, racially assigned showers. There exist deep prohibitions around entering the others’ space, one can be “disciplined” simply for wandering into or loitering on the wrong part of the yard. A taboo against the formation of cross-racial friendly relations, as they are the grounds for more intimate and regular contact.

Within the collective spaces of the prison then, quarantining logics echo and reverberate in multiple and replicating forms, dividing the inmate populations across yards, cells, and otherwise secure spaces dependent on relative degree of perceived virulence of infection with “violence disease.” That is, as U.S. civil society conceives and responds to criminality as contagion, then within the prison, the logic goes spasmodic and from each and every inmate’s phenomenological position, they are embedded in a situation in which they are *entirely surrounded by contagion* - other inmates as particles of a disease which is nothing but contagious violence potential. To protect themselves from the threat of contagion outbreak which surrounds them in any of the prison’s collective spaces – reciprocal violence, war of all against all, prison riot - inmates themselves form social contracts that give rise to prison gangs; immunity apparatuses providing shelter and protecting inmates from the contamination (the munus) which enveloped the entirety of our social space and daily life. Subleviathans push the violence-disease contagion back outside and away from themselves and onto the yard, and in the process, attribute *to the other* the entirety of contagious potentiality. *If there is no contact*

with the other, there is no violence disease outbreak - thus carving out physical space of racially-clean areas, devoid of the othered inmates as violence contaminant.

As each and every racially-scrubbed subleviathan is composed of a differentially racialized grouping, each gang is considered from the perspective of all others as contagious. Each and every inmate on the yard is therefore considered from some other inmate's perspective as a contaminant. The drive to erect distances to prevent contamination gives form to the very inmate structures (prison gangs) and organizational schema (prison politics) productive of daily carceral life. Daily and regulative intra-racial inmate-on-inmate violence is therefore inoculative, taking the form of a lesser evil meant to contain the most fearsome, the prison riot as organizing everyday inmate experience as its overarching concern and ground state. But how does this contagious and total violence emerge from simple contact with the other? From economic and social exchanges or from sharing food from instance, or even from intimate and friendly cross-racial contact? What are the carceral logics that transmute these *individual relations into collective hostilities*?

At the most fundamental level, imposed scarcity overdetermines exchanges between inmates, structurally pitting us against one another in order to accrue material and symbolic necessities. Carceral scarcity is generally a zero-sum game. If one inmate has enough or one subleviathan is flush, another is made lacking. Within this context, inmates try to "get over" on one another, to gain advantage to the others' detriment. Prison gangs, as immunitary mechanisms, put an end to this jockeying for position for those same-raced inmates taking shelter within through the (partial) seizing control of the distribution of goods for "their own people" through "taxing." Each inmate within any subleviathan "kicks in" some "issue" – food,

cosmetics, clothing, dope, etc. for the collective good of the group. Prison gangs attempt to ensure a relatively “fair” distribution so that no singular inmate within the reaches the degrading and vulnerable position of absolute lack. The members of the subleviathan then work collectively so as to establish and/or dominate Black-market economies to increase the total volume of goods within circulation of any particular subleviathan. Prison gangs thus struggle and compete with one another over control of illicit markets so as to, as they say within conservative discourse, “raise all boats” - but only for those same-raced inmates bound by the respective subleviathan’s social contract.

All individual inmates, me included, “land” on the yard in media res; the prison’s physical space always-already preemptively colonized by a set of warring subleviathans jockeying for position and control over illicit market share. Newly arrived inmates come to internalize prison politics quickly through “getting schooled” by other cons who preexist their arrival, or through actually violating a taboo and “getting pulled up” (being lectured or threatened by members of the subleviathan), or through being corporally disciplined for violating them. Despite being aware of and internalizing prison politics, inmates may still be compelled to violate the prison politics of their respective subleviathan in order to gain material or symbolic advantage, or even basic necessity. They may eat off the plate of another race, because hungry. They may borrow an other’s shampoo or toothpaste because they don’t have any. I’ve seen inmates regulated for all of the above, innumerable times, and was threatened with as much myself.

Also, lacking inmates may go outside of the subleviathan in order to accrue contraband not available within their own subleviathan’s distribution network, or simply available for a

better price with another subleviathan staked on the yard. If a need for heroine is pitted against the observation of racialized prison politics, the addiction often trumps any prohibition, undermining any concern for the safety and self-preservation for themselves as well as the others with whom informally contracted. Inmates may gamble or enter into any other of the dozens of Black-market exchanges with otherly-raced inmates that are available. Inmates are always-already constituted within carceral space as lacking subjects, motivating inmates to break with prison politics and social-distancing measures in myriad ways.

The danger inhering in cross-racial exchanges on the prison yard is immediate, and profound. That is because through engaging in such exchanges, inmates are stepping outside of their particular immunizing apparatuses. They are instead *returning* to the state of nature in which the exchanges between inmates, that is cross-racially, are not mediated by the subleviathan's authority/command structure. If any inmate from one racialized subleviathan were to "get over" on an inmate from another, as they eventually and assuredly *will do* given imposed conditions of carceral scarcity, there is no immunizing apparatus available to appeal to, no mediating mechanism to punish. No functional law to right the wrong as there exists internal to the exchange structures within the racialized subleviathan.

Take, for example, an unpaid drug or gambling debt – two of the exchanges which most regularly lead to interracial, contagious violence on the yard in my experience. In the case of an exchange between same-raced individuals, if one of the inmates claims that the other didn't pay their debts, "burned" them, the aggrieved inmate can take it to the command structure of their subleviathan. Each subleviathan has their own "shot caller" and their lieutenants who can mediate the dispute. Perhaps the shot caller will assign inmates within the gang, soldiers, to

discipline he who “burned” or “got over” the aggrieved inmate through corporal punishment. Perhaps the command structure of the subleviathan will arrange a one-on-one fight between both parties to the dispute in order to balance the scales, to enable the debtor to take physical revenge for being “burnt.” After physical combat, the “beef” will be considered as “squashed,” the scales balanced. Within carceral space, any dispute between two members of the same subleviathan can always be mediated through a third party, the command structure of the prison gang, and, essentially, it can be done away from view of the other thousand-eyed monstrosities, those other subleviathans always watching for weakness, a point of vulnerability to emerge in enemy sets. A conflict over a debt between differently-raced inmates plays out entirely differently.

First, as between two differently-raced inmates, there exists no shot caller or command structure to appeal to. Lacking the mediating mechanism, the inmates are returned or (re)enter the state of nature through the very exchange, and are pitted directly against one other with the responsibility to right the wrong falling to the aggrieved inmate, himself. And in the case of any perceived injustice, the scales absolutely *must* be balanced. For within the state of nature, to let the violation stand unanswered would signify to every other inmate aware of the bad exchange (pretty much everyone on the yard) that the “burnt” inmate was weak; a demonstration of a gaping vulnerability. To “let it go” would all but guarantee a further taking advantage, potentially even an outright violent attack in the moment leading to the total seizure of that victimized inmate’s goods or lethal violence. The wrong must also be alleviated immediately, in that exact moment of the violation or “disrespect,” for it is not only the individual inmate made vulnerable through such an unreciprocated and predatory exchange.

As subleviathans are merely composed of the individual bodies that compose them, a weakness in any of those bodies that compose it is a weak spot in the armor that is the sub-body politic itself. No subleviathan can allow their members to be taken advantage of in the interests of their own self-preservation. The inmate burnt by a differently raced inmate is in an unenviable and terrifying position then, and according to the unfolding of carceral logics as embedded, *must* strike, stab or beat that inmate, balance the scales by force. That's a catastrophic situation in all cross-racial exchanges.

For another essential element of prison politics contextualizes cross-racial exchanges; all subleviathans within carceral space sharing this one transcendent and organizing principle: no otherly-raced inmate, *no member of any other subleviathan, may "put their hands" on "our people."* Said simply, if any inmate of a particular subleviathan sees one of their own in a physical altercation with a member of an other-raced subleviathan, then that witnessing inmate must "jump." Prison politics across races assert that if an inmate were to see a member of their own subleviathan fighting an otherly-raced inmate and *not* jump in, then that witnessing inmate is himself subject to a disciplining by their own gang – likely to be stabbed, jumped and/or rolled up off the yard as a "punk" and into protective custody. What necessitates this trans-organizing principle is the fact that no member of the subleviathan, any subleviathan, *can ever be seen to lose a fight to a member from another, as it signifies a vulnerability in physical combat.* Within state-imposed conditions of carceral scarcity and indifferenciation, this injunction is a *necessary logic in order to prevent predation.* For if no other inmate comes to the defense of a member of their subleviathan, then the members of that subleviathan can be taken by a superior show of force.

In the face of such a possibility, subleviathans collectively attempt to *eviscerate the very possibility* through the absolute commandment on threat of violent death at the hands of “their own people” that if a member of an inmates’ subleviathan is “getting down” with a differently raced inmate, then that witnessing inmate has got to get down too. Everyone on the yard is aware that all racialized subleviathans hold the principle that to engage in combat with one member invites attack from the rest. Therefore, this principle that “all must jump” functions as *an inhibitor on day to day, cross-racial predation*. Because the implicit message is, rather than see one of our own defeated, we’d rather all join in the fight - let the yard explode in riot, all face death and/or the hole, then to allow any of us to be victimized or to live in a context of daily predation.

The aggrieved inmate strikes the perpetrator. The perpetrator strikes back. The sound of scuffle draws the eye from all within ear-shot on the yard. Air thickens and time slows. Dread seizes the hearts and the throats of every single inmate on the yard as they witness two differently-raced inmates struggle and thrash. A choice that is no choice, decided within a few heartbeats at most. Rush or hide? There is no hiding. The prison is a fish bowl, or better a petri dish – everyone sees what everyone else is doing all the time. If an inmate were to try and hide, after the fact, their own subleviathan, those who *did* rush - will come for, perhaps kill, the hesitating inmate. For through not participating in the battle, the odds of survival were made that much worse for those who *did* abide prison politics. By *not* rushing in, the inmate guaranteed a greater degree of vulnerability for those riot-participating inmates through his very absence. Some don’t think about it at all and are conditioned to react to the sound, the sight, and the feeling. Thinking shuts off and the body moves, speeding up and ramping

upwards in intensity the closer they get to the center. *Everyone* on the yard rushes within a matter of seconds. Inmates turn where they stand, locate the nearest member of the enemy subleviathan and thrash. Violence jumps from person to person, body to body, and intensifies. The outbreak consumes the yard, violence disease has gone virulent. Shanks plunge and razors slash, violence goes paroxysmal and all are engaged in a struggle to the death as the gun tower of the superior-armed subleviathan within carceral space, prison guards, begins licking off shots into the rioting crowd; themselves subsumed by the spontaneous outbreak of the violence disease.

Prison politics are perhaps best viewed as an obsessive-compulsive attempt, overly-cautious and fearful, to erect symbolic and material boundaries; a series of self-quarantining measures enacted in the space between subleviathans in order to prevent this very occurrence. Specifically, they are a set of commandments and prohibitions meant to keep their own members from engaging in those exchanges that, when they go bad - as they assuredly will do within conditions of imposed scarcity - guarantee to lead to riot through the unfolding of their own internal logic. Prison politics are a type of prophylaxis overkill meant to prevent contact between racialized gangs and thus the very possibility of those situations overdetermined by carceral scarcity pitting inmate against inmate in which an inmate from one subleviathan “gets over” on an inmate from another. They are meant to preempt the double-bind – the need to remediate a wrong by force in a context of functional lawlessness, within an overarching logic where to do so is to violate perhaps the most sacred of inmate taboos, the “putting of hands” on another race. These cross-racial exchanges gone sour, by their own internal logic as

embedded within the state of nature, must by necessity go reciprocal. They are contaminating exchanges, and the yard explodes in an entropic void.

Therefore, *all* forms of contact with the other - Black market dealings, interpersonal relations, the sharing of goods - are prohibited. The racism within the prison is meant to *prevent* race riot, it is not its cause. Inmate subleviathans are organized racially through logics outside of themselves, reflecting the informal segregation of civil society. These prohibitions, meant to prevent contagious contact are enforced through regulative violence internal to the subleviathan; inmates as individual cells of the subleviathan attacking one another as yard destabilizing, internal threats so as to secure the collective from threats external to it, other subleviathans. Any exchange, relation, or unnecessary interaction between races, as they exist outside of the immunitary apparatuses and within the manufactured state of nature, are “checkable” as they have the potential to explode in reciprocal and consumptive violence and are therefore *taboo*.

At its root, the self-quarantining drive at the heart of prison politics follows the logic that: a) any exchange between differently raced inmates b) is overdetermined by carceral scarcity and place them at odds, c) always-potentially and eventually guaranteed to lead to contagious and reciprocal violence d) within conditions of functional lawlessness. Over time a short-hand develops and the logic simplifies to read any other-raced inmate as *themselves* contagious. Don't go in their areas. Don't bunk with them. Don't use their showers. The racist stereotype of the other so prevalent within the prison – “them” as dirty, smelling strange with strange hygiene habits, or as otherwise abject - comes *after* the quarantining drive. It is conditioned by the need to prevent the explosion of state-guaranteed contagious violence. As

with metaphoric contraction in the “crime is like a disease” metaphor, within prison, “the other is *like* a contagion because relations with them lead to reciprocal violence” collapses simply to read “the other is contagious.” As the skin is the most prevalent marker of difference, contagion is then attributed to this signifier, the logic organizing the attribution disappeared, and racialized difference becomes a contagion within itself. At its root then, racial animosity within prison is first and foremost resultant from the structuration of carceral space in which differently-raced inmates are pitted against one another through scarcity and indifferenciation and lacking any third-party mediation mechanism or functional law -which is generative of entropic violence. The logic of quarantine grown spasmodic and absolutely, horrifically brutal. I don’t have the words to adequately describe what that looks and feels like. But I try in the next chapter.

Abstract:

Chapters three and four were primarily theoretical and worked together to demonstrate that the concept of “inmate” is semantically overloaded with notions of both savagery and contamination. And I also argued that through the carceral quarantining logics that organize carceral space, from each and every inmate’s phenomenological position, we were all entirely surrounded by each other as varied sets of as racially- “othered” inmate contagions who, the very contact with, threatened an “outbreak” of community-annihilative race-riot. Resultantly, as inmate population, we erected “prison politics” which are nothing but prophylactic, social-distancing measures meant to prevent contagious contact and explosive riot. In chapter five, I apply these logics as developed in chapter three and four to make sense of a particular, inoculative violence of which I was an active participant to demonstrate not only how these logics functioned on the yard and within the carceral interior as I witnessed them, but also how they felt, what they looked like, and how they were intellectually and emotionally experienced and processed through my subjective position, as an inmate. Further, through relating the “disciplining” of my friend “Diesel” who was in deep violation of a taboo within prison politics (contaminated), I begin to hint at intra-racial violence within carceral space as being not only inoculative, but *sacrificial* in form – a displacement of communal tensions through a violent act issued against a marginalized member inside/outside of the community, a scapegoat, who lacks the capacity to propagate further violence, thus discharging and evacuating communal tension.

Chapter Five – The Sacrificial Stone, pt. 1

Through personal narrative and a close reading of Rene Girard’s theorization around the practice of human sacrifice in archaic societies as found in *Violence and the Sacred* (1977) – its internal mechanics as well as the logic that calls it forth - the next two chapters will demonstrate that sacrificial violence as Girard traced it and the logic of carceral violence are *precisely homologous*. That is, as institution, *the contemporary prison is the material and symbolical enactment of an organized human sacrifice constitutive of the community of civil subjects*. Carceral sacrificial violence is a community-stabilizing violence of the all-against-the-one, a displacing of civil society’s internal tensions as against the inmate scapegoat attributed responsibility for the social ills that befall it. Through a first-person account in this chapter and engagement with Girard’s theories in the next chapter, I pronounce the inmate as sacrificial subject. This is a hyperbolic claim, but it is one that I intend to demonstrate as quite literal and

absolutely functional both within and constitutive of the carceral perimeter. United States white-supremacist civil society is continually cleansed in blood and made anew through the regularly recurring sacrifice of largely racialized human beings at multiple and recursive scales - from the level of the inmate population (a sacrificeable class of individuals) down through the individual register within the carceral hell pit. The prison is no “warehouse.” Nor is it a device for the extraction of surplus labor. And it has precisely nothing to do with the creation of docile bodies, rehabilitation of offenders, or any other “positive” aim, in the Foucauldian sense, which may take into account the needs of the lives it has gathered to itself and swallowed. *The prison is a sacrificial stone, atop which the community is founded.* And it is within the California Rehabilitation Center, a medium-security prison where I spent a little more than five years of my life, that we will begin our investigation with the violent sacrifice of an individual convict – one that I not only gave witness to but was deeply implicated in - as the inmate community in which I was embedded was swept up in stabilizing, sacrificial logics. As is the larger social formation that grounds and embeds us as subjects within history and calls forth the prison as sacrificial chamber, though conscious recognition of the fact regularly escapes us.

The Regenerative Scapegoat as Structural Position

“Diesel”⁹ was a good friend to me during my imprisonment. Generally speaking, friendships within prison are structurally precarious as any inmate may simply disappear. Any of us could be transferred to another institution at any time or be banished within the hole for “disciplinary reasons.” Or we could wind up in the infirmary. A mental health building (The

⁹ All names and “handles” throughout this work have been changed in order to guarantee anonymity.

“ding house”), or the mortuary. Any inmate may parole earlier than another. This carceral instability preempts the formation of deep and abiding bonds. That simple fact wasn’t necessarily something that we considered all that much, just a structuring given when doing time. Also, the imposition of scarcity within carceral space worked against intimacy. Any two inmates may, unpredictably and without warning, be placed at violent odds - myself and Diesel included. That meant that although friends, there existed an unspoken and self-defensive distance between Diesel and I, a definitive hesitancy. In spite of these dynamics aligned against the deepest relationality, I cared for him. We spent many hours together both inside of the dorm and out on the yard. We near daily worked out together, using one another’s bodies to provide resistance in the absence of weights. We threw “spread” - a potlach-style meal composed of ramen soup packets, canned meats, vegetables poached from institutional kitchens, and pork rinds and/or chips - a pronounced cultural practice within California prisons. And I know that an appreciation - especially within that battering space - was mutual. We laughed together a lot, and we faced threatening circumstance with our backs to one another more than once. And we talked about our lives on the streets, our families, and anything else that two friends within prison are likely to speak about. Diesel and I also slept about twenty feet apart from one another, day after day, for the better part of three years. Generally speaking, daily prison life forces human beings into an exceptionally close physical proximity through extended periods of time, shared hardship and extremity of circumstance not dissimilar from the experience of soldiers sent into a conflict zone - rare within atomized civil society. Solidarities develop in prison, and are cultivated. On the other hand, the prison consistently undermined organic relationality through the very organizing logics that I have

traced throughout this work. Prisons, in other words, exert a constant push-pull set of forces that overdetermine the human relations within them, compressing people together and ripping them apart, and the process can be rather brutal.

We were housed together in dorm 307 – one of several 100-man dorms that comprised the 3-yard of the medium-security California Rehabilitation Center (CRC) in Norco, California. I often reflected during my incarceration there, five+ years from the year 2000 until my parole on July 5th of 2005, that the best way I could describe being imprisoned within that failed and abysmal place, should I ever choose to write about the experience, was like being dropped into a chaos pit. Or like living within a collapsed society, secured at all corners by a series of darkened gun towers that refused escape. The daily life that emerged within CRC was largely devoid of influence by the state excepting the establishment of its physical boundaries and the ever-present bull-doing potential of disappearing punishment that roamed the interior, one that could scatter your life to the outer-wastelands of California’s waylaid agricultural zones within ever deeper and darker lock-ups. Prison administration and the state senators responsible for California’s prison build during the 1980’s and 90’s set the operative conditions for these prisons, ratcheted their frequency to a violent clip, established a well-armed and brutalizing colonial-style occupying force, and subsequently fled to positions of relative safety outside of their three dozen or so violence pits.

I felt an utter abandonment while incarcerated within CRC and was left to fend for myself more so than in the any of the higher custody institutions that I had come from - RJ Donovan, North Kern State Prison, Chino - perhaps with the exception of L.A. County Jail where I was housed on “high power row;” a torture box of human degradation and unpredictable,

catastrophic violence nearly impossible to describe, utterly despairing. The reader might reasonably assume that after dropping from a high to medium-security custody level because of “good behavior,” no disciplinary write-ups over a couple of years, and subsequently being transferred from the RJ Donovan Correctional facility to CRC, it would mean an easier time: less violence and better accommodation. That is also the stated intention of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation point system. Do “good time” administration told us all, and we would be rewarded. We would earn transfer to a safer yard, one that was closer to home and diminishing of the hardship imposed on friends and family who would like to visit with us. There would be more programs to fill the day and more freedom of movement. More opportunities to develop those skills necessary to navigate a successful parole upon release which, at the time I was transferred, seemed an impossible remain of time as I still had five years left to do. That did not even remotely reflect my experience.

The very structure of high-security level III prisons with their cell systems and visible-from-all-points yard layouts (enforced by custody) and rigidly enforced prison politics (enforced by inmates, themselves) translated into greater day-to-day stability on the higher security yards that I traversed. If things did “pop off” on a level three yard, they were magnificently terrible catastrophes; total riot, with high school graduates in gun towers unleashing igneous and bone shattering bullets with clean lines of sight. Though always possible, the emergence of riotous violence was relatively uncommon. Level III daily life saw *less* instances of actual violence than a level II yard because the space was so tightly co-regulated by inmates and custody alike, and the repercussions of riot were understood, by *inmates*, to be so catastrophic. Significant inmate efforts were dedicated to riot *prevention*, to working against the state logics which organized

the space and pushed it towards entropic collapse; the inoculative violence that did occur, as preventative measure, was more targeted, efficient, and purposeful than on the lower custody yard of CRC. Violence internal to any prison gang was generally kept from view of the racialized other within cells and institutional “blind spots” – the few areas within the prison devoid of guard presence and cameras. Because violence was not seen to be overflowing itself at RJ Donovan, it was perhaps less traumatizing, even if more severe in its applied cases. Also, on level III and IV high security yards, correctional officers are more ever-present and in greater number, and inmates internalized the set of injunctions and taboos that comprise prison politics more fully. There were more “convicts” on any given yard in higher custody facilities, a shocking number of men doing life sentences or something damned close to it. I was serving close to a decade for instance, and counted amongst the most fortunate because I had a (release) date. A lot of the lifers didn’t, or their parole was so far away as to be meaningless. One guy I did time with had two hundred years plus, for example. Prison terms that were linguistically non-sensible. As if he died, they would revive him, and make him do another hundred years. Let him die again. Revive him again, make him do decades more. It certainly expressed something about the drive to punish circulative within civil society as an irrationality and an unquenchable bloodthirst, an automaton. As an inmate population with a bunch of years to do, maybe all the years that our miserable and fragile lives contained, we had a greater stake in keeping peace. In making our potentially-forever home habitable. Subcultures emerged on the yard, and sports teams. We had a touch football game on thanksgiving one year, and basketball tournaments. Religious groups, and clubs and long-lasting relations. A decent library, by prison standards. Men that were our neighbors in our cell-blocks that we saw every day for

years; that we would age with or even grow old with and watch die. Better paying institutional jobs in which we could develop a skill set, and more day-to-day stability. There was a more pronounced sense of community on higher custody yards amongst the inmate population, with all the criticism that the notion entails, which I discussed at length in chapter four.

CRC was intensely and disastrously different. Instead of cells that we could return to every night that guaranteed some reprieve from the thick tension of the yard and its always-riotous potential, we were housed in dilapidated dorms with a singular cop assigned to each housing unit; three actually, splitting the day across three eight-hour shifts. Each C.O. carried a baton, a pepper spray cannister and an alarm button at the hip to control a hundred men. The potential for inmate-on-inmate conflict and escalating, reciprocal violence was constant day or night; the capacity for guards to prevent it nonexistent. It was unpredictable as to whether any particular guard would step out of their office during their shift at all, the “cop shop” located at the front of the dorm, let alone get involved to break-up any inmate melee. Many stationed within housing units only walked the dorm in order to tally inmates during count time. They were content to watch TV or to read a magazine while on the job; they “minded their own business,” and all kinds of justifications existed. “They don’t pay me enough for this shit,” being the primary one that I heard in different forms. Why put their physical safety on the line to protect irrational and prone-to-violence inmates? The operative belief was that “inmates do it to themselves” and we were likely to attack one another again tomorrow. We were savages, so very different from them, inhuman. Why risk injury by getting involved? Let us tear ourselves apart.

CRC was also one of the older institutions within the California prison panoply, decrepit and in physical disrepair - a converted Naval hospital from the Korean War era. No panoptic institution, it was not designed with an eye towards ensuring visibility in order to prevent violence. Instead, the majority of the prison's physical space was riddled with "blind spots." Whole swathes escaped any custodial observation – bathrooms interior to the dorms, hallways between dorms, roadways connecting yards to receiving and release, the fenced-in canteen area, holding tanks with fenced in perimeters, nooks between racks within the dorm itself, day rooms. All blind spots. All places where inmate-on-inmate violence could emerge or be willfully engaged in without ever being observed by custody. Prison politics within CRC were less stringently enforced because more difficult for us inmates to do so for a host of reasons, most prominently the greater turnover of inmates, leading to myriad and daily violations of those implicit prohibitions and commandments that comprise the obscene, inmate-generated informal law. Instead, doing time within CRC meant to be embedded in constant penitentiary drama - fights and drug smuggling, struggles over Black-market economies, racial tension and deals gone bad, extortions - ever-present violence potential at any time, day or night.

Wildness. It felt like living in a post-apocalyptic society in a Mad Max movie or a deranged science experiment in which we were the lab rats, imposed by a carceral state looking down upon us in order to observe how people, under the imposed conditions of being bound to a physical space devoid of functional law and starved of sufficient resource would react. We reacted as one would hypothesize based on these simple assumptions. Generations-long enemies lived and slept in the same dorm, showered together and sat next to one another on open and exposed toilets, no stalls for protection or privacy. Every time nature called, we were

made vulnerable. I couldn't piss at the urinal. Many of us took to urinating sitting down on the toilet so that our backs were not exposed. I was awoken to the breath snatching sound of rubber soles screeching on tiled floors, the muted grunts and booming repercussions of fleshly bodies slamming into walls and metallic lockers feet from where I laid my head more times than I can count. Screams in the middle of the night, as combination locks were shoved into socks and weaponized, or canned goods, swung like maces at the faces and soft tissue of the somnolent. Stretches of time in which violence of all intensities – one on one fights, jumpings, assaults, roll-ups, disciplining - kicked off multiple times in a week, for months-long blocks. Often, multiple times a day when tension was especially thick, all across the yards and the institution more generally; inmate-on-inmate brawls igniting like hot spots in a brush fire and chemically suppressed. The piercing screech of institutional alarms was an always-jarring familiar; the acrid odor and unbearable burning of the eyes and nasal cavity from pepper spray unleashed from industrial-sized cans an acquainted and repellant sensation. Fights exploding unpredictably in chow hall. Lock downs. Strip searches. Trips to medical. Inmates rolling up into protective custody like a conveyor belt straight to the infernal plane. Hospitalizations and disappearances.

Prison politics issued from all prison gangs within CRC dictated that, as inmates, we were to sleep with state-issued boots unlaced at the side of our racks, so that should violence break out in the middle of the night, we could slip into them easily and join the melee within a second or two from unconsciousness. Be ready to jump up and swing from a dead sleep. The daylight saw no break. Violence could explode anywhere and at any time without warning, right next to you in the dorm, in the chow hall, or on the yard. And it did. All the time. And when it

exploded inter-racially from anywhere on three-yard, it would relay to where you stood within minutes, or even seconds. Turn, find a differently-raced inmate, and thrash. Throw all concern for self-preservation to the wind. And if you couldn't, or wouldn't, or were afraid to, roll it up and do the rest of your time hunted by your own people in a protective custody lockdown. To do time within CRC meant to exist within an always-collapsing chaos pit, ever reset through the intervention of the state and the incorporation of new bodies. And I lived there for five years. And we, as inmates, were universally perceived as the cause of the disorder which roiled the space, less-than-fully-human, as violent and uncivilized savages. We were perceived as utterly contagious with violence. And we were treated with something less than disdain because of it and subjected to pounding, degrading and inoculating punishments by the agents of the very state that had established the entropic conditions in which we found ourselves bound and immobilized.

During my time within CRC, I often reflected on the compounding effect of living within such tumultuous conditions, year after year. I didn't want CRC to ruin me, as I knew it had the potential to. Everywhere I looked, I was surrounded by the state-ruined. The mad and the terrified, the dissociated and the reactive-violent. Men stumbling through the dorm, self-medicating on heroin or state-medicated with Thorazine, effectively tranquilized for the same reason – to mute the profound psychological suffering inherent to our incarceration. I tried to prevent the worst excesses of being embedded in constant potential violence, as witness or as victim/participant, simply by being aware; through an acceptance that this place was actively injuring me in real time and I was powerless to escape it. I tried to think through and locate, specifically, the work that this traumatic chaos might be doing emotionally and psychologically,

and to buffer, if not counteract it, through thinking outside of it. Through trying to rationalize my physical and psychological responses to the chaos of the space. The belief that I could somehow mitigate profound trauma effects simply through an awareness of them was probably just an illusion I fostered that I had more control of my fate than I actually did; a compensatory belief that provided me some comfort as I was being slowly digested. I realize now, looking back, most of that experience impacted me in my body as it still does; in an occasional stutter and a creeping and ever-present anxiety. A bottled panic. Not so much in my thought about it. Instead, that place buried deep in my gut like a malignant parasite and colonized my nervous system, co-opting electrical signals and weaponizing them against me from the inside, a seizing anxiety that cripples and braces me outside of prison walls that I still can't entirely expunge from my flesh.

Once every couple of weeks, sometimes more and sometimes less, I dream that I am still held within CRC. That I have never left. My paperwork indicating the length of my sentence and my release date has been lost to the state. I feel utterly powerless as I have no idea who to appeal to within the vast carceral bureaucracy, no allies from the inside to call upon. In the dream, it is with a weighty despair that I realize it is well past my release date although I am not sure how far, and I solitarily wander the yard under a Blackened and starless night sky, partially blinded by institutional flood lights that pound down. I peer out through an electrified fence beneath a darkened gun tower and see nothing but an ocean of darkness, as if the world beyond the prison is itself ontologically incomplete or simply no longer exists. Its physical reality disappearing to the degree my memory of it fades. I am not sure how long I have been here, in this prison. There are others there with me, wandering isolated and in a stupor like ghosts or

the half-dead, confused, trying to remember where we are in time. Mumbling to themselves. Has it been months? I feel an increasing despair as the realization settles upon me that it really feels more like years. Where did the time go during my unconsciousness? What was I doing or what was being done to me? In the dream itself, I recognize what a great crime against any person it is to take their capacity to register time - to know how long they've been held, to know for certain how old they are, or even what year it is and I want to scream this truth to someone, anyone. I look down at my hands, and they begin to shrivel from age like a time-lapse video set to fast forward. Catching up my time loss and registering how long I've been here, in the prison. The reality of my abandonment hits me. There is no universal force, no arc of justice that will guarantee my release and save me from this materialist life-trap. All that exists are the decisions and the actions and the callous indifference of the human beings who hold me captive. My life has been stolen from me. The faded memory of me in the minds of family and friends on the street no longer impresses upon them desire enough to overcome the inertia of the prison that enfolds me and refuses to yield me up. They are worn down themselves, exhausted and despairing, and it has made their lives magnitudes easier just to forget my existence, to let me go as utterly lost to them. Upon waking from the dream, I can't easily shake the sensation that some part of my psychic life is bound to the prison. I recognize that it still does its demoralizing work. My soul remains fascinated as if under a carceral spell, and is circling 'round and 'round the prison, magnetized to the trauma of that awful place. In most of my waking life, I feel that I am well beyond the prison. I lose myself in activity and in my work, my day-to-day responsibilities and relationships. But when I stop moving and I must rest, the prison swallows me. If I can sleep at all. And there, my dreams tell me different.

In my more explicitly paranoid moments, I sometimes perceive and actually feel that I have never actually left the prison at all. I'm still interred in the hole at Chino and have gone utterly insane, and that I'm being held down on my rack by other inmates torturing me and am unable to bear my reality. That I'm dreaming this world as psychotic escape. The universe in which I exist, this shared life of ours – all my teaching and graduate school accomplishments, my family and the birth of my daughter, the experiences I've had and the people I know and love - is a fevered hallucination, a dissociation and a flight from the unbearable reality that I'm still locked up and I'm in the midst of a psychotic split while being abused and ripped apart. I proceed from the assumption that that is not the case, though the affective state still overtakes me.

I play a game with myself, sometimes, in quiet moments. I internally dialogue and attempt to see through the veil, to internally gather courage enough to see where I actually am - staring at the filthy greyed concrete walls of my freezing cell or through the bars at the yellowed-with-time opaque and barred windows of the Cypress overflow cell block in Chino. I try to accept my actual reality which I know is hovering out there just beyond my field of vision, and I will a return to sanity, an acceptance of my fate and the truth. *I never left the prison.* Which is quite an insane thing to do I suppose. An example of my own subjective annihilation, a surplus and extrajudicial sentence in excess of that imposed by the criminal court that I have tried to account for throughout this work; a form of psychic death that I carry for having been carceral-digested. The death of shared reality. It's been 15 years since I paroled, after all. And staying within this reality still feels, as a friend of mine from CRC described his own struggle with psychosis and paranoid fantasy, as attempting to hold inflated beach balls underwater - a

task that is sooner or later bound to fail. The prison has left its barbs deeply buried in my flesh, in all of ours, and they tend to catch on the most common of things as we move throughout the world and trip us spiraling. The hue of a light. The sound of sneakers scuffling. A smell.

By the time I paroled in 2005, Diesel and I had lived together in dorm 307 for the better part of three years. We both witnessed obscene amounts of violence during our time together. We even participated in some or were directly victimized by it. I never sought out violence, was never once an aggressor; it was always the expression of a terror and the immediate need to defend myself. Violences in CRC were most commonly inmate-on-inmate. Fights. Riots. Disciplining. Overdoses. Stabbings. Strangulations and numerous assaults. Extortions. Some sexualized violence. Thanatopolitical machinery within CRC *hummed*. The length of sentence varied greatly across the inmate population housed within our dorm, much more so than at Donovan, but we were all subjected to the surplus engine to varying degree no matter the sentence. Some were doing mere months for parole violations, fresh off the streets with reactivated addictions and suffering withdrawals from meth, crack, or heroin. These “short-termers” had previously paroled at a medium-security custody level, so that’s what they were returned to. For some of those “doing life on the installment plan,” paroling to the streets is like a hall pass. They have no intention of doing anything but “going on a run” - getting out of prison and getting high for as long as they can until they are caught absconding by their parole agents. No hope for a life outside of the prison circuit. They often tended to be less embedded within the constraining strictures of prison politics and were more likely to violate its taboos. They were “kicking dope” (withdrawing), seeking dope or otherwise in the throes of addiction with all of the potential drama that portends. Others of us were doing more significant stretches of

time, any number of years, and we tended to develop closer relationships because of it. We ran tighter programs and were habituated to the prison routine. We tended to be physically healthier because we ate regularly and we got our rest. We had come from higher custody and deeply disciplined, militant yards. Most of us had strenuous exercise routines. There existed an insider status amongst us, and we tended to look with disdain on those more transient inmates coming in and out of the system. Part of our attitude toward short-termers was resentment, they were getting out and could escape the pit well before we could. Many appeared to us to take that for granted. One further way the undifferentiated inmate population internally separated and defined itself, often through violence.

Those of us doing “real time” considered the dorm as “our house,” and like the lifers on any III or IV yard, we had a deeper investment in making the space livable. Diesel and I became friends, in large part, simply because we were both doing significant stretches of time and were invested in keeping peace within the dorm, in making the space habitable through managing the short-termers in our respective cars. And at a more personal level, there was something deeply familiar about him. Diesel reminded me of many of the guys that I played college football with just a few years prior. He was tall, 6’5”, with an easy muscularity. When I first met him, I asked if he had ever played. He said that he would have liked to, but that he was already getting into too much trouble as a kid and had spent most of his childhood going in and out of California Youth Authority and Juvenile Hall. He never graduated from high school and there was never enough consistency in his life to be on any team. Diesel was clearly hyperactive with a difficulty concentrating, and if he were school-age today, I imagine that Diesel would be diagnosed with ADHD and probably dyslexia. One of those precocious kids that was hard to nail

down and get to focus. He was still like that as an adult. So was I. Within prison, undiagnosed learning disorders are rampant, and those without significant learning issues, at least as it appeared to me, composed a rather distinct minority.

Diesel was also proud of his physique built up through years and years of a disciplined penitentiary work-out program - burpees and pull-ups, water bags and calisthenics - and whenever he entered the dorm or the yard, he would take his shirt off. It became something of a running joke, like that scene in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* where Sean Penn playing Jeff Spicoli takes his shirt off as soon as he enters the diner. "You had a shirt when you came in here, Diesel." He was covered in blue-Black prison ink accumulated over many years in multiple state-run institutions – images of motorcycles (Diesel rode a Harley on the street, identified as a "biker"), Viking warriors and runic symbols, calendars marking the passage of time behind bars, assorted lettering –tattooed from the top ridge of his neck down to his feet – sleeves, chest plate, down his legs and covering his back. Diesel was classically handsome, with Black hair that was kept cleanly cut at the inmate barber shop with a chiseled jaw line and piercing blue eyes. He was a bit older than me, in his mid-to-late 30's at the time. Younger than I am now, as I write this. The letters "SGV" prominently splayed across his chest meant that he hailed from the San Gabriel Valley, a neighbor to the San Fernando Valley where I was raised.

Within Southern California prisons, dependent on total number of inmates from any significant "car," self-organized inmate groupings by hometown, the SGV and SFV wood pile were more or less likely to "ride together." In CRC, we did so because there were too few of us respectively to ride independently. In other words, the SGV and SFV cars were mutually implicated in "handling our business;" a singular assemblage issuing beat downs, managing

Black market economies, breaking bread and walking the yard together as a unit. We comprised a subset within the larger woodpile prison gang, tasked with maintaining discipline and cohesion amongst “our own people” and schooling those peckerwoods from our hometowns who were just arriving into the prison on its politics and how to do their time without causing any problems for themselves or the larger woodpile. We banded together for protection from the swirling violence vortex that are any prison’s ordinary conditions, and this proximity of our respective hometowns also guaranteed Diesel and mine’s orbit were bound to become more tightly interlinked.

Diesel was also the “shot caller” for the 3-yard, setting agendas and issuing orders for the entirety of the woodpile - all white inmates on the 3-yard with the exception of the skinheads (“skins”) and the Nazi Low Riders (NLR), a prison gang composed of racially-militant white inmates with their own leadership and organizational structure with whom the woodpile shared an uneasy alliance. If the Woods, the vast majority of white inmates on any yard within the California prison system, had problems with any otherly-raced prison gang, it was Diesel who would negotiate with their respective shot caller in an attempt to prevent reciprocal, all-out race war. If a peckerwood needed to “get handled,” be corporally disciplined or rolled-up off the yard, it was Diesel who would “call the shot” and task someone, or a group of peckerwoods, with the violence. If negotiation with other prison gangs were made impossible, it was Diesel who would command the woodpile to “boot up;” to lace tight their state-issued boots and to grab whatever inmate-manufactured weaponry they had stashed within the dorm or buried on the yard and to prepare for reciprocal violence. Communications (kites) from the Aryan Brotherhood, gang leadership quarantined within the SHU, were tightly wrapped in

plastic bundles and smeared in Vaseline, and shoved up the asses of inmate-soldiers to be released back to the mainline and addressed to Diesel. Because he had “the keys to the yard,” Diesel had multiple sets of eyes on him all the time – from leadership within the SHU to make sure he was handling business on their behalf, from the wood pile on the yard for whom he shot-called to make sure he did so effectively, and from the members of otherly-raced prison gangs, constantly probing for any vulnerability in the race’s singular avatar and greatest representative.

Diesel bore the pronounced visibility and responsibility for the lives he administered with a particular ease. Or, at least it appeared as much on the surface. If I was in his position, I would have been a nervous wreck. Diesel wasn’t though. He was actually a bit of a clown, constantly cracking jokes and performing small pranks in the dorm trying to get a laugh. He played the guitar pretty well too, a hobby self-taught while in the system, and would make up humorous little free-style songs poking fun at other inmates that were housed with us. It was all in good fun. During the quiet of count time, he would sing them aloud and before long, he could get the whole dorm rolling with laughter, across races. The songs were often quite clever, relating the antics and the things people got up to day-to-day. “Do one about Sniper, Diesel!” Or, “Do one about Bam Bam!” He had an infectious sense of humor that seemed to make light of pretty ghastly circumstance, an affability that put me and others within the dorm at ease. Diesel actually diffused more potential racial conflagrations than I can count simply by making everyone involved laugh. There seemed to me a particular intelligence to it, the refined capacity to drive a humorous wedge into the most fraught of circumstances. It could make men perched at the edge of a spiraling violence vortex laugh together, and gave us all permission to

take a step back. It didn't always work, but it was surprising how often it did. We were often looking for any way out, any escape from potential riot. And Diesel's humor created some space for that. It seemed a profoundly human trait, learned through lived experience under tenuous and threatening circumstance; a riding over the top of a gravitational terror, a light-footed dancing amidst imminent violence and potentially great injury, or even death. His humor seemed to defy the law of that place, so unexpected that it could rewrite it out of pure audacity - if only for a split moment, but often the exact right moment. After all, who has the courage to laugh when all are terrified, when the fight or flight response is collectively activated, when all complexity and color and nuance is transmuted into diametrically opposed Black and white, immovable blocks? Diesel's humor was an alchemy of sorts, and it seemed to me that Diesel's sense of humor was his conscious connection to his trampled humanity. His very presence seemed to announce "I will never escape the prison. I have to be free to smile and to laugh here, because if not, then I will never be free to do so again." He wasn't willing to give up that part of himself, wherever he was. And it seemed this laughter was the primary way through which Diesel resisted that which the carceral state was imposing on him – crushing futility and an excruciating despair.

But that is not all it was. I also think Diesel's humor was a refined defense mechanism to keep the precarity and terror that he experienced, that we all did actually, at a psychological distance; a willful resistance to letting the affect-state of the carceral swamp swallow him up and drown him. While his humor demonstrated a profound strength that lifted spirits and cared for others, it also revealed Diesel's unwillingness to fully internalize the catastrophic seriousness of his circumstance. To come to terms with the absolute wreck that we were all

enmeshed in and that our lives had largely become. He ran from fully experiencing that day to day by joking it away. I think that was functional to a degree and helped to keep him sane, at least temporarily. But I also saw when the reality of our lives settled upon Diesel, the profound grief and terror in that. A realization that something was overwhelmingly wrong and intensely out of control. It was horrifying to watch him desperately thrash like a cornered animal when his position was revealed to himself. Literally thrash. It didn't happen often, a few times maybe. But enough for me to witness it as one of the ugliest things I've ever seen happen to a human being. A recognition of one's failed life while still in the prime of it, or a person subjectively experiencing their life that way, while still very young. So many years left to do in a cage. All hope gone. No beauty. All unforgiving concrete and steel. All potential annihilated. Dreamless. One's whole being refuses and rebels against the insight. With a profound and explosive destructive violence potential that explodes outward, in desperation. It wasn't only Diesel that experienced that futility. It was a secret that we all knew about one other and saw in ourselves, but never spoke of. What was to be said? There was a tenderness enough in the recognition and bonded us. This secret truth could unpredictably erupt, though. It could break a person and drive them mad, and it could break the space apart in explosive violence. Unlocatable screams from somewhere, anywhere in the facility in the middle of the night that were never spoken of the next day. People disappearing from the yard, rolling it up into ding wards and medical facilities. Literal strikings out against an "other," entirely unpredictably and for no apparent reason, self-and/or other annihilating. But what do I know of Diesel's internal life? Of anyone's, really, within that dreadful place? These are just thoughts, impressions that I had in the midst of a set of experiences that I think about more often than I would like. I'm not a psychologist or

any variant thereof, and I'm not passing judgement on how Diesel managed doing his time and survived the inhumanness of that poured concrete and razor wire. Joking too much was certainly a less noxious response in the repertoire of possible reactions to the annihilation of a human being's potential while still in the spring of life, ready at hand. From despairingly cutting one's own throat to ragefully slashing someone else's. And the entire spectrum of actions one could take in between.

All that is certainly not to say that his humor made him soft. Diesel was no "punk." Despite his habitual clowning around, Diesel was as hard as an iron plate. He wouldn't be shot-calling otherwise, and the Woodpile would have devoured him like a pack of wolves if they didn't respect his capacity for a furious and precise violence. His balled-up fists were massive and gnarled from decade's worth of clashes atop concrete floors in chained link carceral spaces; knuckles broken and smushed flat. On the street, Diesel worked as a carpenter and had a workers' hands because of it, calloused and rough. When Diesel slapped someone across the face, the ridges of hard and deadened skin in his palm could scratch and tear across the cheek like talons. His arm reach was obscenely long too, and he knew how to fully extend, open and throw his hips and express into a punch with utter abandon, generating maximal bodily distance from his target with maximal power, simultaneously. Diesel was a one-punch knockout god.

I once witnessed him explode in violence with stunning haste and entirely unpredictably while "clowning" with another peckerwood from the dorm, my friend Bobby. They were telling jokes back and forth at one another's expense, and Bobby took it too far; violating a taboo of prison politics though making reference to how "pretty" Diesel's mouth was, what in prison is

called “sex play.” He was implying a forced oral copulation. Even if joking, an inmate does not sex play another according to prison politics because some words and phrases in prison are fighting words, and if uttered and left unanswered with violence, bestow on their recipient the label of “punk,” or “lame.” An assignation that puts one in immediate and mortal danger. I don’t know if Bobby knew he was implicitly calling Diesel a punk, challenging him to a fight through what he said, but it didn’t matter. The line most certainly was crossed for everyone to see. Diesel went from light-heartedly joking with Bobby to casting his enormous fist outwards into empty space with such speed and crackling intensity in the immediate seconds after the words were spoken that the raw capacity of it frightened me and made me jump back in disbelief. Diesel’s unreasonably outsized fist smashed precisely into Bobby’s cheek bone with such force that, on impact, it collapsed Bobby’s eye socket like it was made of aluminum foil, and the power of the blow slid Bobby backwards on his feet making his sneakers scream, leaving a six-inch-long rubber burn mark underneath him. Bobby fell over backwards ungracefully, his body stiff with shock, unconscious to the world well before hitting the ground. Lights OUT. That skid mark stayed burnt into the floor of the dorm like a tribute to Diesel’s violence until the day I paroled some years later. For all I know it’s still there, a testament. I would occasionally notice it when walking into and out of the dorm to and from yard, and I would remember that strike, and I’m sure I’m not the only one. That kind of power signified as long-cultivated. The utter abandon that goes into throwing a punch like that – the harnessing of total fear, and the total relinquishment of concern for one’s own safety, trained and precise. For those who have never done so, it can be frightening to strike someone, to engage in any form of combat actually. It takes a lot of repetition to overcome an instinctive hesitancy

towards self-protection; the natural impulse is to punch half-heartedly or to pull back into oneself. To strike someone is to open oneself up in a very peculiar way then, because it is to invite retaliation. There is an intimacy in one-on-one violence, a counterintuitive vulnerability. To ensure that no retaliation comes, one must utterly abandon any concern for one's own self-preservation, forget themselves. And it feels a little like dying, or like jumping off a cliff when you can't see the net below. That is, to protect oneself most effectively in a fight, one must forego any concern for self-preservation. One must commit to the other with *abandon*. As the Southsider's shot-caller, Fat Boy, would warn me some months later in tense moments just prior to my having to physically square up with Diesel over another issue to be described below, although Diesel liked to joke and was always laughing about this or that, Diesel himself was "*no joke*." And Diesel knew that. But he didn't carry his capacity for furious violence like that, which I took as evidence of a fundamental decency. He didn't threaten people. He didn't lord his prowess over others. Which sometimes made people forget who he was. The most dangerous of us, he with the most damage-inflicting potential. He never sought out violence, and plainly didn't desire it. Instead, he tried to keep people together and peaceful with a genuine light-heartedness. But when his back was pushed back against the metaphoric wall, Diesel demonstrated a proficiency in "throwing hands," a trained capacity to unleash purposeful violence as quick as flipping a light switch, honed through years and years of carceral extremity and hardship.

Diesel and I also had a rather unique relationship for any prison yard. He was the shot-caller for the whites, and within the dorm, I was his number two. I was younger then, and physically imposing. I knew how to fight when forced to, and I was also doing a lot of time. Well

versed in prison politics and considered a “solid wood,” I knew the politics and wasn’t about to snitch on anyone. If a riot kicked off, I stood my ground and physically defended myself. I had already been in the system for five years and because considered as having “paid my dues,” I was granted a respect from other inmates across races simply for having survived in the system for so long. Many of the men I was housed with had come into CRC well after me, and would parole well before I did. If I was a lame, a snitch, or had bad paperwork like a sex crime on my jacket, I simply wouldn’t have made it on the yard for this long. I most certainly wouldn’t have made it out of the hole. I’d be rolled-up in protective custody as a “piece of shit,” maybe dead. Although I never looked for violence and tried at every turn to avoid it, enough men on the yard had seen me in a fight to know that I would “throw hands” rather than be dominated. The mark of a convict and the nucleus of the moral code has as its first principle the challenge: what will you do to guarantee your status as a solid convict? The answer must be a willingness to sacrifice biological integrity for the more abstract principle of status maintenance, one that refuses victimization. For if victimization is allowed, the biological threat is guaranteed to cascade and intensify, not only for self but for the other with whom unofficially contracted in any respective prison gang. In other words, and counterintuitively, one must be willing to risk biological safety in order to ensure it, for both self and other.

Because considered as solid and doing a number of years in prison, on those occasions where conflict arose, whether internal to the car or inter-rationally, Diesel would ask me for counsel - to think through possibilities to avoid full-scale riot. As a trusted Lieutenant within the dorm, it was also to be expected that I would be asked by the shot-caller to “put in work.” A lot of it. To smuggle and sell dope. To be “up in the mix” - rolling up child molesters, lames and

snitches, or otherwise living a prison gang life. At the time I met Diesel, I was by then also deeply invested in my studies. I was enrolled in correspondence courses through Ohio University as well as taking classes through Riverside Community college, which offered one or two courses every semester behind the walls of CRC. Outside of my course assigned texts, I was also taking deep dives into philosophy and critical theory, works examining the prison, social and political commentary and just about anything else that I thought would be helpful in deepening my analysis. I was voracious. I spent near every minute of my free time reading. Hours upon hours a day, absurd amounts of time. If my body and my eyes could physically permit the strain, I had a book open. After lights out, I would turn on my hanging lamp and read deep into the night. At some point, I gave away my personal television set because I couldn't bear to waste time that could be dedicated to consuming texts. I filled my locker to capacity with books sent by friends and family through institutional mail. As we were only allowed two cubic feet of property or it was made subject to institutional seizure, I began renting locker space from more indigent inmates for a few ramen packets a week in order to store my growing library. Even through completing my PhD, I have never matched the degree of intensity in my intellectual exploration, the drive and discipline that it took to make as much progress as I was able to make through my education as I did while at CRC. When I was out on the yard, I stayed out of the mix as much as I could. I would run lap after lap on the track, eight or ten miles a day wasn't uncommon. After running, I would hit the pull up and dip bars, performing dozens of sets on each. My headphones were always on. I didn't congregate with the woodpile unless explicitly called over in moments of high tension or riotous potential. I was in the best shape of my life, with a fantastic endurance and a sinewy strength.

Diesel saw how I conducted myself day after day for three years. I believe that he genuinely respected me for how I did my time. For staying out of trouble as much as I did. In my estimation, Diesel's respect grew from the fact that he saw me doing what he was told an inmate was "supposed to do" if they want to "turn their life around," whatever that means. What he thought maybe he himself he should be doing. That is, trying to build a life for himself with an eye towards the street - education as self-improvement, attempting to break the life-trap of recidivism. He saw me reading all the time, an activity that I know he admired because he told me so, but also an activity that he himself only felt insecurity around rooted in the failures of his own education. I imagine that educational institutions had probably failed Diesel in larger measure, though he was largely unaware of the fact. Diesel saw me doing what he felt he was *supposed* to be doing, but felt incapable. And I think it made him feel some admiration for me, as well as some guilt around what he was doing day-to-day.

Upon that recognition, Diesel, as the Woodpile shot-caller, had two clear choices before him. On the one hand, he could have wiped my existence from the yard. We were like twins in many ways, mirroring one another. We came from the same type of neighborhood. We talked the same, used many of the same expressions and intonations. We were close to the same age and we looked a lot alike. As a mirror potentially demonstrative of some perceived shortcoming or as a constant reminder of his own self-perceived failings, he could have simply shattered me so he didn't have to look at me anymore. He could have "asked" me, which really would have been to force me under the threat of violent banishment from the protective umbrella of the prison gang, to put in work. To go on missions. To assault, stab, or beat people. To be an active participant in contraband smuggling rings. He could have attempted to break me down and

prevented me from living the life I was trying to organize for myself while incarcerated. Which would have put not only my life, but my release date in greater jeopardy. He also could have disappeared my existence from the yard, repressed me from consciousness as a constant reminder of what he “should be doing,” simply by publicly challenging me. Calling me out as a “lame” in front of other inmates. If he had done so, we would have had to fight, there, on the spot as soon as the words left his lips. And win or lose, as shot-caller, he could have mobilized all other woods to direct their free-floating aggression towards me. My only play at that point would be to roll-up into protective custody. Diesel, in other words, was empowered through his informal position as “shot-caller” to make my life a living hell deep within the horrific bowels of the prison. Or if I refused rolling up to escape that fate, he could have had me killed or beaten to the point where I accepted the roll up in order to stay alive. And day after day, for years, I wondered if today would be the day that he would do so.

He didn't. In fact, whenever tensions emerged that required the woods wood to “put in work,” he *never* called upon me to do it. He would always task someone else with the issuance of violence. He relied on my input and he respected my negotiating and communication skills. But he didn't rely on me physically unless he saw absolutely no other choice. He would bring me along as back up into heated conversations. But when things needed to “get handled,” near universally, Diesel said something to me, and more importantly the other woods within hearing distance, along the lines of, “Yo, Timmy. Go back to your books, dawg. This shit ain't about you.” And because Diesel said it, the rest of the woodpile largely accepted. Whenever Diesel had the freedom to do so, he would use his power to shield me from the maelstrom of violence inherent to carceral space. Without Diesel's protection, I am quite convinced that I would not

be writing this today. And there is more than a good chance that I never would have made it out of prison, at all. I could have been killed. Or easily caught a third strike doing something that I had no desire to do. Many I knew had. It was as if Diesel had foreclosed the possibility of escaping the prison circuit, and instead, invested all hopes for his lost life and potential with me. He could still help me to succeed, contribute and “do something good,” whatever that maybe meant to him, through the act. And he actually, materially did. It worked. I hope he reads this from whatever torture pit he is most likely held within, and knows that. He, as much as anyone else, has helped to make this work possible.

That is not to say that drama was always avoidable. There were more fights. A riot in my future in which I could have been, in fact nearly was killed. A trip to Ad-Seg. The threat of new charges. Even as shot caller, Diesel couldn't shield me from all of the violence that the prison threw at us even though I think he wanted to, and certainly tried. No singular individual could within these state-collapsed and starved wolf-communities that are prison yards. But Diesel quite intentionally used his influence to minimize my exposure at every opportunity available to him. And I loved him for it. An uncommon, and deeply abiding love very rare and very particular, only possible within disastrous and calamitous situations. I felt guilty for the protection Diesel afforded, a survivor's guilt of sorts. I still do. At the time, I wanted to beg him to join me to leave all the prison gangster shit behind. But that's just not how prison works. And I knew that then as I know it now. It would have been absurd to even broach the conversation with him, as to do so would have forced his hand, and put both him and I in greater danger. It would have blown up the game we were running. The O.G.s in the SHU would have wiped Diesel out if he were to try and withdraw. Diesel's care for me was a profoundly decent gesture

and exquisitely human, repeated through time, to protect and invest in me like that. And it demonstrated a love that *costs*. Everything in prison costs more.

Diesel was also a heavy-use heroin addict. I discovered as much pretty early in our relationship. As I lay atop my rack reading in the dorm one early afternoon, my Bunkie, a Southsider named Flaco, handwaved some of the guys over to his bottom rack directly beneath mine. A mixed collection of six Southsiders and Woods filtered into the cramped space between bunks, sat and kneeled down wherever they could find space. “Hey Timmy, keep watch,” Flaco half-asked, half-commanded.

Requests within prison are framed in ways unique to spaces overdetermined by an always-present violence potential. To ask directly, “Can you keep watch?” signifies to the other a vulnerability in the form of a need. Instead, requests are often framed as commands. In doing so, the speaker attempts to project strength through solidity of voice so as to betray no weakness, an absence of vulnerability. Instead of saying:

“Can I borrow something to eat?” an inmate may say something like:

“Hey homie. Shoot me a soup.”

Instead of, “can I talk to you about something?”

The command/assertion is: “Hey wood, lemme’ holler at you real quick.”

Through telling me to “keep watch,” my bunkie was asking me to act as a look-out for the cop at the front of the dorm. I was to signal by enunciating “walking!” if he were to begin a walk-through. I was made immediately anxious by the request. I had no idea what the homies were up to, but it was assuredly something that would catch me more time if I were to be caught up in it. Having been asked to “keep watch,” I simply couldn’t refuse; to do so would

have come off as strange by convict norm and made me stand out as a lame. I discovered very early into doing my time that the surest way to keep safe was to respect the injunctions of prison politics so as not to stand out, but never too vigorously. Toe the line. Don't go looking to be up in the mix. Accede to such requests even with the potential risks they carry, for the risks in acquiescing were less immediate and catastrophic than were inherent in the act of refusing. Upon accepting, I would try my best not to get caught. I was usually successful, but not always.

I kept my gaze toward the cop shop without looking directly at it, watching the cop through my peripheral vision while attempting to appear as if I was not doing precisely that. I was also attempting, simultaneously, to steal passing glances at what the homeboys were up to for the same reason. Two threats to my physical well-being and my parole date, years away at this point, inmates on the one hand and guards on the other. Pinned between both of their demands, sandwiched between two sets of laws - the explicit and punishing institutional rules and its implicit underside, the violence of convict-organized prison politics and thanatopolitical machinery. Were the homies doing something relatively inconsequential, like tattooing or cutting tobacco packages down for resale, things that may lead to a mere loss of days or weeks of good time? Or were they engaged in something more severe, like crafting or stashing a weapon or hiding dope in my area – something that could lead to a D.A. referral for all inmates involved and a new criminal case that could potentially strike me out? The possibility of catching a life sentence over someone else's actions was a real threat within carceral space for all two-strikers like me and had to be guarded against. Whatever custodial rule they were breaking, I was made a part of it purely through physical proximity and would be held to account as if a primary and willing participant, all nuance be damned. There was no probable

cause, nor evidentiary procedure inside of the prison. No taking account of the conditions the state had established, with all of its myriad, impossible situations. No legal representation. No understanding nor recognition of the double-binds like this that we, as inmates, were constantly placed within. Punishments in carceral space were often collective in nature` and dealt in probabilities and cast a very wide net. These types of situations happened near daily and unpredictably. You just found yourself caught in the middle of them; thousands of traps with no good solution, carceral and machinic teeth in which you could get immediately caught and grinded; more time added to sentence through no active criminal intent. Merely through the desire to hold on to my release date on the one hand and to avoid physical attack and a roll-up on the other. It was the same for all of us, as these are the overarching conditions for any inmate deposited in media res within the mainline carceral thresher.

From within his pillow case, my bunkie pulled out a “rig,” prison slang for a hypodermic needle. He had been to sick call earlier in the week. After injecting an inmate diabetic, medical personnel must have been careless in disposing of the needle, leaving my bunkie an opportunity to snatch and smuggle it back to the dorm. I watched as one of the Southsiders pulled out his “paper,” a small issuance of Black-tar heroin, which they boiled down in some foil with a smuggled lighter, and drew into the syringe. I had never in my life seen anyone shoot dope. First, the Southsider who possessed the dope took his issue: tied his arm off with a cloth state-issued belt, slammed (injected) the dope, and released the belt tie making his vein pop. Round the circle, squatting and sitting at the foot of my rack they passed the rig not bothering with sterilization, redrawing issues and slamming dope one by one. I was shocked that they were all sharing the same needle but couldn’t act surprised. In a sense, we were all perceived as

contagious anyway, and this seemed to be a manifestation of the principle; an internalization of our supposed virality as already in some sense already diseased. We all shared savage contaminant blood. When they got to Diesel, he pulled off his state-issued work boot. He pulled his right foot up on the rack, spread the space between his toes, and inserted the needle and plunged. Diesel had apparently shot so many drugs in his life that the veins in the crook of his elbow had collapsed and were no longer discoverable for injecting. Shooting through the foot also hid track marks from custodial inspection during strip search.

A rather large shipment of heroin had hit 3-yard in recent days, smuggled in through visiting in cheeked balloons. I watched as for several days in a row, that same slamming circle shot their dope between different racks throughout the dorm. I always just minded my own business. Because they kept moving to different spots so as not to draw attention to themselves, I was fortunately never asked again to keep watch after that first time. But on like that it went. Day after day. Week after week. Sometimes the yard flusher with dope and sometimes less for the entirety of my years in CRC. Occasionally, someone would get busted high and get rolled up to the hole. Or a dope package would get intercepted in visiting. A package discovered during a random dorm search. But there was usually dope available on the yard to varying degree. You could always tell when a big package hit. There was an air of excitement amongst those using, more of those slamming circles going on, more inmates wearing sunglasses inside the dorm. More of the homies laid up on their racks with their tv's and headphones on, appearing to be napping but actually nodding out. Less trips to the chow hall for dinner and less time spent exercising on the yard. As far as Diesel went, he would get progressively more "sucked up," losing weight and musculature and get pretty skinny in those

dope flush periods. The dope would eventually go dry for a spell, for instance after an institutional lockdown when visiting was suspended, and the homies would suffer some withdrawal and go progressively inwards. They would sleep longer. Perhaps begin to look sickly, evincing a paler complexion, and were less talkative. After a few days of withdrawal, they would be back on the yard exercising, eating full meals in the chow hall again. Putting their weight back on. Waiting for the next big dope hit.

During one of the dope-flush periods, Fat Boy overdosed. He was the Southsider shot caller, assigned the rack directly across from mine. It was a few minutes before the four o'clock afternoon count when the homeboys noticed Fat Boy laid out and unresponsive, arms and legs draped haphazardly over the side of his rack, mouth agape and deathly pale. Count happened four times daily: once in the very early morning, again before lunch time, in the late afternoon before chow, and once in the evening before lights out at 10 pm. At the 4 pm count, every inmate within the dorm had to return to their rack, as the guard assigned to each dorm would walk through and tally the total number of inmates under their charge and report the number back to central command in order to make sure that no inmates had gone missing. Right before count on this particular day, I watched as those Southsiders that were a part of the dope shooting circle gathered agitatedly around Fat Boy's flaccid body. My Bunkie, Flaco, was one of them and knew that Fat Boy was "going out." Flaco grabbed a handful of Fat Boy's state-issued and loose-fitted button-down blue shirt, yanked him upwards into a sitting position as his arms hung limply by his side and his head rolled backwards, and leaned him against the back bar of the bed frame. With the front of his shirt clenched in hand, Flaco began slapping Fat Boy hard across the face, calling to him, trying to pierce the Morphean sleep.

“Fat Boy!” Whack!

“Wake up, homey. Hey, Fat Boy!” Then again. Whack!

Fat Boy stayed unresponsive. Another Southsider who lived in our dorm, Junior, pushed Flaco aside and took his place. He put his ear close to Fat boy’s lips, trying to ascertain whether he was breathing. He must not have sensed any breath escaping Fat Boy, because he took a step back, wrapped an arm round the center of his back to brace him, and with the butt of his open palm began to forcefully strike Fat Boy’s Chest cavity with a series of measured blows, trying to start his heart. In between the strikes, he administered breath, trying to expand his lungs, gangster CPR style. Then he would pound on his chest again. Fat boy’s body jarring and wincing under the blows.

“Hey, Fat Boy! Wake up homie! Fat Boy!” Screaming it into his face. Peeling back his eyelids.

After a few rounds of that, Flaco resumed his place, and returned to slapping him across the face, shaking him by the shoulders. Yelling his name, imploring him to open his eyes. Fat boy maintained unresponsiveness. Limp. Head rolling back and forth. Another Southsider ran to the shower and filled a tumbler with water. He came back to Fat boy’s rack, and doused him with it. Back to the shower for more. Junior resumed his gangster CPR.

“Count time!” the guard bellowed from out of the open door of the cop shop.

Within two minutes of the announcement, he would begin his walk through. The homies continued beating and slapping him for another minute or so, trying to revive him. With a minute left before the guard would start walking, they wiped Fat Boy down. With no real choice left to them, the homies propped a limp Fat Boy further up on his bed into sitting position, put

sunglasses on his face, crossed his arms across his chest and his legs at the knee, effectively balancing him, unconscious. They pulled his state-issued green blanket up over his legs and torso and tucked it into his arms as high as they could, and turned on his 13" personal television set, hung from inmate sewn straps underneath the top rack. They were trying to stage Fat Boy to look like he had fallen asleep watching tv. After assuring his balance in hope that he wouldn't tip over and fall to the floor, Flaco, Junior and the rest quickly dashed to their assigned racks in order to be counted.

As the C.O. began walking the dorm, we all held our breath in nervous anticipation of what would happen when he finally made it to Fat Boy's rack, about three-quarters of the way through the dorm. The guard slowly meandered as he always did, pausing in front of different bunks, making checks on the count sheet clipped to his plastic clipboard. Exchanging a word with different inmates here or there. It seemed to take an excessively long time, several minutes for him to finally arrive in front of Fat Boy's rack, and he paused for a beat. I thought he knew for sure that something was wrong with him. For those of us that were in the know at that point, I assume all the inmates in the dorm, it was quite obvious. Fat Boy was unnaturally still. Breathless, it seemed. His sunglasses were on while sleeping, a strange enough thing to do especially at four in the afternoon. His cheeks appeared drained of life and were ghastly white. His muscles were utterly slack. He looked like a corpse. All the guard had to do was signal toward him in some way, perhaps a hand wave or a head nod. Or call out in an attempt to illicit a response that surely wouldn't come. I half-hoped that he would as it might have saved Fat Boy's life. Despite the significant pause in front of Fat Boy's rack, he neither called out nor gestured. Maybe he didn't care enough to get involved. Indifference. Or maybe he was deluding

himself that all was as it should be. Or, perhaps, he genuinely didn't notice the signs.

Regardless, the guard counted Fat Boy and made his little notch on his clipboard and he moved on towards the completion of his task. Meandering through the last quarter of the dorm and back into his office and unceremoniously closed the door. The ordeal was far from over though. Unfortunately for Fat Boy, it would take about fifteen or twenty minutes before all the institutional tallies were made and central command announced "count clear," thus releasing us from our assigned racks. Before any of the homies could check on Fat Boy to see if he was still alive. Fifteen or twenty minutes for Fat Boy to sit there drowning to death within himself. There all kinds of ways inmates are abandoned to death within carceral space, and this was one of them.

The reader may reasonably wonder why we, as inmates within the dorm that knew what was going on, didn't call "man down?" Why didn't we signal for custodial attention in order to procure medical help? After all, not a single of the 99 of us did. How could we all watch Fat Boy die in front of us, is that not a symptom of our fundamental savagery? Our lack of compassion out of racial hatred or otherwise? That is certainly how custody would interpret our actions or lack thereof. The reason no one called for custodial assistance was because Fat Boy, if he were conscious, would have begged us not to. And everyone in that dorm was aware of that fact beforehand. Fat Boy was a two-striker like so many of us. Within carceral space, if suspected to be high, custody administers a compulsory drug test. If the urine tests positive for the presence of illicit narcotics, then the state will charge you with "internal possession." Being caught high on drugs within carceral space registers with the state in the exact same way as being caught with a pocket full of dope. And drug possession is a *striable offense*, a cruel

absurdity. For Fat Boy, not only was a trip to Ad-Seg or the SHU guaranteed if we called for help while he was overdosing plus time added to his original sentence, a series of tortures in themselves, but Fat Boy could potentially face a third strike and a 25-to-life sentence were we to do so. For getting high. That is, for self-medicating, muting the pain inherent to living within the entropic unbearableness that is carceral space. The homies reasoned, accurately it should be noted, that even if O.D.'ing, Fat Boy would not want them to call "man down" and would rather face potential death by overdose than face the time that would be levelled at him. Instead, his life was placed in the hands of the Southsider prison gang. A tragic situation and a terrifying one. An abandonment from state-issued medical care structurally overdetermined by a codified and vicious institutional response to drug addiction and self-medicating within the population it administers. The state has established those brutalizing conditions through its own policy and punitive drive that keeps the inmate population from seeking out a medical assistance that is overwritten by an obscene and vicious drive to punish. The state effectively plays a game of whack-a-mole with the addicted to issue them more time to further inscribe them deeper within the carceral belly; to seek medical attention in Fat Boy's case would be to pop one's head up and to unwillingly submit to a life sentence. Bonk. In this case, a medical assistance meant to guarantee the continuation of biological life was refused out of a drive towards a different and more essential form of self-protection. A refusal of the state imperative to strip one bare, inherent with a life sentence – even under the threat of cessation of biological continuation. Better no life than a bare, animal life behind bars.

Count finally cleared after about twenty minutes. With the cop out of sight and shouting distance, the homies rushed back to Fat Boy's side. Flaco resumed pounding on Fat

Boy's chest with an increased and rested full force - this time with the back of his fist in a downward, two-fisted hammering motion atop where he imagined his heart to be. The blows made me wince and were utterly severe. In days after, we would come to learn that in the process of trying to save his life, Flaco broke a couple of Fat Boy's ribs. He again began to administer untrained CPR as Junior had done previously, breathing in and expanding his lungs. Beating again. Slaps. Violently, terrified, with all the strength he could muster. It was as if Flaco thought that the harder he pounded, the more energy he expelled into it, the more likely he was to bring Fat Boy to consciousness. Junior took over when Flaco had reached physical exhaustion, shaking Fat boy violently and slapping him across the face repeatedly, first with the back and then the forefront of his hand. Peeling his eyelids back and open. Yelling in his face. Flaco and Junior then put shoulders underneath Fat Boy's armpits and wrapped their arms around his lower waist, lifted him to his feet, and began to try to walk him, Fat Boy's feet dragging across the floor like so much dead weight. Back to his rack, more gangster CPR. No cops anywhere.

After a few minutes, and the Southsiders taking shifts administering their blows because physically wearing themselves out attempting to beat him to life, Fat boy let out a desperate and yawning gasp for air. It sounded like something between a whimper and scream but in reverse, not expelling air but sucking it in. Like he was trying to swallow life whole, and it made a pathetic and terrible noise, utterly biological. Flaco and Junior rolled Fat Boy on his side and began slap-pounding his back like a newborn baby, and he began forcefully vomiting into a state-issued white towel held tenderly by another of the homies which was quickly balled-up and disposed of in the bathroom trashcan, only to be quickly replaced with another with a

trained and military-like efficiency. My bunkie repeatedly slapping his back, hard as a healthy grown man can do, purging poison.

“Breaaaaathe, Fat Boy,” Flaco said. “Breathe.”

Calmly, measuredly, tenderly, reassuring.

I realized after coming to consciousness of myself as a being in a prison at the conclusion of this horrific spectacle that my mouth was agape and eyes were wide open, evincing utter and frozen shock. I quickly grabbed ahold of myself and my self-presentation, and took a look around me to ensure that no one had registered my astonishment, my terror. I could hear and see the dorm coming back to life. People turning on radios, TV’s clicking on. The sound of lockers opening and closing. The din of conversation began to rise, eventually returning to its normal assaultive unbearableness. Just another day within CRC. Flaco, Junior and the rest of the homies saved Fat Boy’s life. And all of us within that dorm breathed a collective sigh of relief; we were happy that he didn’t die, no matter the prison gang. Of course, we couldn’t express any emotion about the events that had transpired. There was no celebration. There was no pat on Fat Boy’s back, nor for Flaco and Junior that had saved him. No recognition. We wouldn’t want to draw the attention of custody that anything out of the ordinary had happened, and we also didn’t want to step into Southsider business. To make them more uncomfortable than they already were or more embarrassed; everyone had seen them vulnerable and desperate, everyone had been watching. And I suppose nothing truly out of the ordinary did happen, at least for within the walls of any prison. And although pitted against one another through overarching institutional conditions, and at any moment we could be shredding one another with repurposed pieces of salvageable metal shards, there were still

things that were shared amongst us. Things that united us as inmate community as against them, the cops. Fat boy was very sick for a week or two, visibly struggling to breathe. He had to use a cane for months. He lost so much weight that he wasn't even fat anymore. But he eventually made a full recovery. And we were all happy that he didn't die that day. And that was understood by everyone, excepting the agents of the state.

Some months later, the yard was again flush with dope. The shooting circle using the same rig was back in full swing, Diesel included. Fat boy was still slamming, as was Flaco. I noticed tension begin to emerge within the circle over the course of a couple of days. Some muted but obviously fraught conversations one afternoon between Diesel and the rest. Diesel quite animated with hands in the air, a shrug. Scowls and head shakes. Although I couldn't hear what they were saying and didn't really want to, everyone involved was displaying defensive body language, arms crossed with greater distances between them. Diesel spinning on his heels and storming away to his rack, slamming his locker closed, sitting on his rack and despondently putting face in hands. The rest going about their business, slamming dope without him. Over the next few days, while they continued to pass the rig, Diesel was more and more on his rack, excluded. I saw him reading a book for the first time. Watching a lot of TV and avoiding the yard, none of which were good signs. Withdrawn from prison life and yard politics. Diesel never missed yard. Shot callers are required to be out there, so they know the business and the potential catastrophes of any given day. He was obviously "hard timing" and I caught him looking enviously at the members of the slamming circle going about their business more than once, an unmistakable frustration on his face. I put my head phones back on and returned to my books. Minded my own damned business. Up until then, it had been a winning strategy.

A day later, as I was lying atop my rack reading, I felt a tap against my shin. I looked up. My bunkie Flaco was standing there and he nodded his head, indicating that he had something he needed to say to me. I sat up on one elbow and pulled the headphones off of an ear. Everything signifies. My body language said that I was paying attention to my bunkie, but not entirely breaking from my own activity. A willingness to listen respectfully, yet a mild annoyance at the interruption. By then, such implicit communication was reflexive, a somatic language developed through repetition over years within these state-run institutions, easily read by convicts.

“What up, Bunkie?” I said.

“Yo, bunkie. Let me and Fat boy holler at you real quick,” said Flaco with expressive seriousness.

He waved his hand in a beckoning motion, and began walking over to Fat Boy’s rack, directly across the dorm from our own.

I jumped down from my rack, knelt down and began immediately lacing up my boots. My mind raced. I didn’t know what Fat Boy and Flaco wanted from me, but prison politics demanded that I boot up, signifying to any other that I was at-the-ready for immediate violence. I had never been asked to “sit down” with another race’s power structure quite like this, though. Why were they approaching me and not Diesel if there were a problem with the Woods? My stomach began to churn with anxiety. Could one of the Southsiders have a problem with me, specifically? It would be a violation of gangster protocol to come at me like this. Although I couldn’t think of anything that I had done to anyone in particular in recent hours, or days, you didn’t always know who you might have unintentionally “disrespected” through a

mere misunderstanding. Whatever Flaco and Fat Boy wanted with me, I knew it wasn't going to be anything good. That wasn't the tone. It was difficult to imagine the worst-case scenario, too. Whenever I had this feeling, it was often way worse than whatever I imagined.

As I made my way over, I saw Fat Boy sitting on his rack with a towel wrapped around his neck, and no shirt on. That all signified as well. Tattoos everywhere, from the top of his shaved head to his toes, blue-Black prison ink. The number 13 and the L.A. neighborhood that he came from. Clowns and the drama masks, laugh now and cry later. Aztec warriors. Portraits of his children's faces, images of naked women. As I made my way towards him, and half out of habit and half to see if I had any back up close by, I looked towards Diesel's rack. He was intently watching me make my way to Fat Boy with a fretted look on his face. But it was not a look that told me he was concerned for my safety or that I was in any danger. Otherwise, he would most likely have been moving towards us. Instead, he himself seemed afraid of something. If I wouldn't have been so taken by surprise by the Southsider's hail and locked within my own head because concerned for my safety, I might have better understood why. But at the time, it simply didn't register, just struck me as a bit strange. As I approached, Fat boy patted the space next to him on his lower bunk mattress, beckoning me, which was really commanding me to sit. To refuse would have elevated the tension. It would also make me appear afraid to do so. I took a seat next to the Southside shot-caller and sat up straight. I looked back at Flaco. He came to stand in the space behind me, strategically blocking my exit and boxing me in-between the bunks. His position also excluding others, friend or foe, from witnessing our conversation. And here, I had thought we had been friends. It reminded me of where I was and how loyalties actually flowed within carceral space. No matter how friendly

you were cross-racially, whether bunkie or not, the fundamental organizing principle amongst inmates was prison gang. I was now committed at this point, had gone too far into their territory, and whatever was going to happen was unavoidable and in their hands now. I couldn't quite make sense of how I found myself in such an ominous situation when less than a minute ago, I had been minding my own business and just trying to read some course assigned text.

"Hey wood. We've got a problem with Diesel."

Static. I felt static in my brain as my stomach plunged into a pit of nausea. It wasn't that I couldn't see straight, but more that the air itself seemed to thicken, become opaque and milky white. All the while, I consciously kept a stone face.

"Oh, ya? Whassup?" I said, projecting my voice so as to mask my fear.

Fat Boy went on to explain that over the past several months, Diesel had run up a sizable dope debt with the Southsiders. He said that they liked Diesel and respected him, and had been willing to front him dope based on a history of always making good on his outstanding obligations. With regards to his current debt, Diesel had told the Southsiders that he had arranged for a friend outside of the prison to send Western Union money orders to a Southsider's family member in order to cover it. It had been a couple of weeks now, and the money orders still hadn't arrived. Diesel told the Southsiders after a week had passed that he had made a mistake, given the friend an initially mistaken address. Diesel told them that after discovering his error, he gave the friend the new address, and promised that the money orders were now in the mail headed to their recipient. The Southsiders, wanting to give Diesel the benefit of the doubt, gave him another week to make payment. The money orders still hadn't

arrived after a week and a half. By now, no matter the initial and supposed confusion, the money should have been in-pocket and the Southsiders were out of patience. They believed they were getting played. And they had cut Diesel off. Fat Boy explained that although Diesel had always been a “solid wood,” it appeared that he was not making good on his debt this time and was doing “some dope fiend shit.”

Diesels behavior over the last few days began to make a lot more sense to me. His spending more time on his rack and less on the yard. His seemingly self-imposed isolation. The walls were closing in around him. It would also explain his reading, his trying to “do the right thing.” He was trying to magically influence his reality by getting on the “right path,” something that a lot of us did when we were faced with life-threatening circumstances beyond our control. It may look like a gangster suddenly picking up a bible or joining an inmate prayer group. All of a sudden writing letters home and spending more time on the phone. Expending all their energy into their institutional work assignment. Trying to escape the trap asymmetrically through relying on a mysterious power, some god or force outside of themselves. Praying and making promises to turn one’s life around if only they could escape this one time. Diesel was in debt, likely kicking dope and suffering some withdrawal symptoms by this point, and didn’t have any solution to the unfolding disaster in which he was embedded.

“Yo, Timmy. We like Diesel. He’s a good dude. But he’s gotta get checked. Either the woods handle it, or we will,” said Fat Boy, with some combination of conviction, empathy and an elevated menace.

And there it was. I felt an invisible, steel trap close around me. I was being presented with a petrifying ultimatum. The Southsider’s had approached me because I was next in line of

the Wood's command structure within the dorm, Diesel's number two. Up until that point, I had never considered having to assume this role; I had never imagined the possibility of our shot-caller violating prison politics so deeply. Either we, the woods, assumed Diesel's debt and corporally disciplined him in order to balance the ledger with the Southside, or they were going to launch a collective assault against him. Unless we, I in particular, did something to disrupt the chain of events now unfolding, we all faced potential catastrophe that very day, white and Brown. That is because the Southsiders putting hands on Diesel did not mean just that. The violence would not stay contained. The greatest inmate-invoked prohibition within carceral space is the putting of hands on a member of another prison gang, another race. Fat boy was telling me that the Southsiders were prepared to "kick off" the whole yard over Diesel's debt; to initiate a chain reaction through attacking him that would lead to total and reciprocal violence in the form of prison riot, woodpile against Sureños. War of all-against-all. Not only would Diesel suffer, but every white and southern Mexican on the yard would be risking great bodily injury and the loss of good time, a potential D.A. referral, and possibly death. For as soon as any Southsider "put their hands" on Diesel, all woods within sight of the incident would rush into the fray. The Southsiders understood that. In response, the Southsiders would rush in. A cascading and entropic collapse of carceral space. All would indeed dive in, or be subjected to an after-the-fact disciplining by their own people; beat downs at a minimum, more likely a potential stabbing and a roll-up as a "piece of shit." Not rushing in would ensure a loss of "solid" status marking one as a lame within prison space, and no matter the institution and the time passed, the jacket would stick - thereafter, the only possible outcome to be forever hunted in protective custody.

“Alright man,” I said. “Lemme’ check-in with Diesel and see what’s up.”

Once again, I had to consciously project my voice so as not to betray the trembling fear that coursed throughout me and made me feel sick to my stomach. I stood up. Reality seemed to become less so, my executive brain functions shutting off as the fight or flight response was activating. Preparing for assured violence in my experience is like entering a dream state of sorts – one must not be fully aware. Thinking grows foggy, and must be somewhat inhibited in order to act. Or, at least that’s what it always felt like. The mind going numb as the body is flooded with those conflict chemicals meant to assure survival through the defense from and issuance of violence.

My response to Fat Boy was non-committal on the surface, and intended to be so. It was the performance of an existent boundary, the simulation of strength. I didn’t want to give Fat Boy the impression that I, or that the woodpile of whom I was now made the default representative, were weak. That we just took their word for it. That we would assault Diesel, take out one of our own based solely on what they had said or because we were afraid to riot with them. We couldn’t be perceived as too afraid to risk it all. That would only invite predation and send the signal that we could be “punked.” I was personally giving my word to Fat Boy that I would approach Diesel about what he had claimed, and that I would investigate what happened the best that I could. And that if Fat Boy’s version of events proved to be true, then we, the Woods, would handle it. What worried me most in those first moments was Fat Boy’s reaction after saying I would follow up. He was totally fine with that, confident in the truth of what he had said, thus implying that I would discover as much as well. I felt like I was falling deeper into a darkened pit. On top of the fact that everything Fat Boy had said felt true enough

during the enunciation, it would explain the tension amongst the slamming circle that I had witnessed in days prior. The look of fear in Diesel's eyes as he saw me approaching Fat Boy's rack just moments ago. As I got up and walked away from Fat Boy's bunk, Flaco let me pass with a head nod. As he did so, I felt the eyes of every Southsider in the dorm fall upon me. I realized then that they were all well aware of this conversation before it had happened; that they had already been discussing, strategizing, and were prepared for violence as a collective. That gave the Southsider's significant advantage should a riot actually kick off. For the other woods in the dorm, things would just explode from seemingly out of nowhere, and they'd be playing catch up - jumping off of their racks, trying to put on shoes while Southsiders would already have shanks and assorted weapons in hand, butchering them. I stood up as straight as I could, kept my eyes forward as if I didn't notice the stares. I walked away with my chest puffed out and intentionally put a little swagger, some rhythm into my step. All signified, a conscious performance that I wasn't afraid. A style in my movement which signaled physical competence – a demonstration of coordination and grace of movement - which meant I could fight. An unhurried pace signified a familiarity within threatening situations. I wasn't quite terrified anymore. Instead, I was going blind. Adrenaline was taking over, bestowing a surreal and dissociative calm as I was made hyperaware of myself and my movements, watching myself through a closed and imaginary feedback loop.

I passed by Diesel without looking though I felt his eyes on me, pleading through his gaze for some contact, some reassurance. I didn't grant it. I did not want to get caught in a conversation with him as it would have tipped my hand and could spiral out of control in any number of ways. Instead, I made my way straight to Johnny's rack. Johnny was a young

peckerwood gangster, 19 years old. Although young, Johnny was a heavy hitter. A 6'3" 275 lb. corn-fed white boy from the impoverished methamphetamine-saturated farmlands of central California with bright red hair and boyish freckles, in prison for assault with a deadly weapon. He came from a long line of gangsters, his father an active and high-ranking member of a central California biker gang charter. Johnny was, in other words, tracked from birth and never *not* going to prison; it was pure rite of passage for him and always expected. Johnny had been sentenced as an adult at the age of 16, and was nearing the end of his first prison term. He was regularly up in the mix on the yard, and Diesel had him under his wing as an apprentice of sorts. Diesel knew his father from another stint at another prison years prior, and out of respect for the father, was teaching Johnny how to be a stand-up convict. Under Diesel's wing, Johnny never shot dope. I don't know if that was through his own choice, or if Diesel was protecting him from drug addiction through imposing a prohibition against it as he had protected me, albeit in an entirely different way. That seemed more likely.

I let Johnny know about the conversation with Fat Boy. I told him pretty matter-of-factly about Diesel's outstanding drug debt and that the Southsider's were ready to "kick it off." I didn't have the time, nor the desire, to handle it more delicately. By the time I was done bringing Johnny up to speed, his face had gone deathly white and his eyes were as big as saucers. His symbolic universe was torn asunder, and Diesel's precarity meant the death of a metaphoric father, the anchor stabilizing his environment. The world was turned topsy-turvy. This was his first time facing a potential riot, but Johnny understood the implications. Either we regulate Diesel, or we riot with the Southsiders. The only two options. Violence was guaranteed either way, as was *his* participation in it. It was a real welcome to the big-leagues moment. Prior

to that, Johnny had been running around the yard acting a fool. Drinking pruno with the homeboys. Gambling. Playing sports on the yard, working out with the wood pile. Prison had been a game. A violent one, but nonetheless. He was used to violence, had been raised within it. But this froze him. I felt like I almost needed to grab his hand to get him to move. He stood there in front of me, speechless, looking like he was five years old and needing to be told what to do.

“We gotta talk to Diesel, homeboy,” I said.

Giving him a direction, collapsing the chaos he was experiencing into an action.

I beckoned for him to come with my hand, and without waiting for a response or a hesitating question that would have been simply a delay tactic to forestall the inevitable, I spun on my heels and started walking over to Diesel’s rack. From behind me, I heard a lumbering thump shake the elevated tile floor as big boy Johnny bounded off his top rack and began clamoring into his state-issued boots as quickly as possible. I knew that I couldn’t approach Diesel on my own. This needed to be a collective conversation amongst the woods, as all us were implicated if things were to go south. We would all be scrapping, all facing Southsider shanks, all facing the hole. Both Johnny and I approaching would signal to Diesel that this was more than just me talking to him, but a collective conversation amongst the entirety of the Woodpile prison gang, represented by his number two and chief muscle.

Diesel saw Johnny and I approaching and he ripped off his headphones and jumped up from his rack, and put on an air of benign affability. He extended his hand and shook with me in a vigorously warm embrace with a big, charismatic smile across his face. Performing as if he had

not a single care in the world. Neither Jonny nor I were smiling. In fact, I thought Johnny might explode from anxiety.

“What’s up, Timmy? Johnny?”

“Yo, Diesel. We’ve gotta talk to you about something for a minute, big dawg,” I said.

He could tell by my tone that the ruse was over. That look of desperation I had seen a few times started to peak through. Beads of sweat on his brow betrayed him, whether from the heroin withdrawal or from a recognition of what was about to happen I don’t know. I asked about the debt and to do so felt like invading his privacy. I had never exchanged a word with Diesel about his drug use, and he had certainly never volunteered the information at any point prior. It wasn’t that it was a big secret, I just wasn’t a part of the whole prison-dope life. And I always felt that knowing too much could only lead to potential problems. I could sense his embarrassment in having to talk about his addiction with me from a position of vulnerability. He proceeded to give me the same set of excuses that he gave Fat Boy, just a little altered. The money orders were on the way. There was no initial confusion about an address, actually. His homeboy on the street had told him it was paid on his behalf, but he actually lied to Diesel and never actually sent it. He had made new arrangements for his sister to cover it, and the money order was in the mail. I knew beforehand that Diesel would do that, and I instantly felt sorry for him. His excuses were transparent and felt desperate. I wanted him to stop talking, hoped he would, but I let him finish out of respect. I knew that he was trying to talk his way out of the trap, to push the deception that he was now running on me back up through the chain. To get me to believe that money orders were actually on the way. If he could, maybe I would take the

explanation back to Fat Boy and the Southsiders and argue the case on his behalf. It could perhaps buy him some more time, a few more days in which to figure out a solution.

I also knew that going back to the Southsiders was a dead end. That bridge was entirely burnt. For them to call me over as they did, to make clear that we were on the edge of riot, meant that they were committed to that course of action. It was too dangerous a thing to say otherwise and in-itself could have kicked off a riot right then and there. They only did so because they felt fully taken advantage of, and needed to balance the scales for their own self-protection; to demonstrate they were not vulnerable to predation. To allow another racialized prison gang to “get over” in prison through not paying a debt would mean that others would try within overarching conditions of scarcity; without establishing a firm boundary through the threat or actuality of violence, the entirety of the prison gang would be made vulnerable and be considered as weak by the others on the yard. Their backs were against the metaphoric wall, too. And they had given Diesel plenty of time. Three or four days should have been enough to make payment and it had been weeks. The simple fact of the matter was that blood was going to be spilt now, one way or another. *Either Diesel’s blood as a singular victim, or contagious and reciprocal violence would consume the yard and we would all be made to bleed.*

“Diesel. Its too late, dawg. The Southsiders are ready to kick it off *now*,” I said.

I nodded my head upward, and around. To signal to Diesel to take a look around us. He turned and took in the dorm and saw all of the Southsider eyes on us. Felt the perched and potentially tipping-over energy.

I was trying to express to Diesel both an empathy and a concern for our situation simultaneously, as well as an unwavering and unmanipulable conviction. To express to him that

I wasn't forming any judgement on the game he was running, but that it just didn't materially matter. It simply wasn't going to work. It couldn't, even if I had wanted it to. No matter what we did here, the Southsiders were going to jump. Their decision was made, and they felt that they had no choice within the overarching carceral logics which structured the space. I wanted him to recognize the precarity of our situation, that we were all made vulnerable. Not only every single white and Hispanic inmate in the dorm, but composing the entirety of the three-yard and the rest of the institution when the violence went "contagious." *Thousands* of us. So that Diesel would, even if he resisted the conclusion, at least understand the reasons for what we felt we needed to do. To recognize that we had no choice. That was very important to me, in that moment. Diesel made one last ditch effort to maintain control of the situation and to save face. He stood up taller and puffed his chest out a bit and looked 'round the dorm as a scowl came over his usually jovial face. He looked all of a sudden like the old Diesel - in command and powerful, not withdrawn and dope-sick. He projected his voice louder than it had been so that others in the dorm, including the Southsiders, were sure to hear.

"Fuck it, then! If the Ese's wanna throw down, we can all get down!"

My chin dropped to my chest as my stomach plummeted. An energy pulse of pure tension emanated from where we stood and cascaded outward, bringing everyone within the dorm to subsequent and progressive attention. Southsiders standing up off their racks or jumping down respectively. Whites and Blacks also taking notice, unaware of what had been going on, now alerted that something was very, very wrong. Men pulling off headphones, turning down radios and television sets. Others seeing their actions, and themselves becoming alert. A silence fell over the dorm as everyone looked towards us and waited. The sounds of

lockers clicking open and the grabbing of unforgiving objects and slamming shut, the lacing tight of boots. Here we all were once again, perched over our entropy.

I knew without a doubt and in that exact moment what had to be done. My sympathy, materially and in these circumstances, meant nothing. Absolutely nothing. If we didn't check Diesel, all the men in that dorm and on that yard were in mortal danger; good friends and acquaintances, even people I despised. All those I had lived with for years and saw every day, shared meals with and slept next to. All those that I walked the yard with and relied upon in one capacity or another, all would be subjected to brutal and indiscriminate violence. Friend or enemy, we would all be consumed by it. We would all go to the hole, disappeared for months into deeper and utterly despairing lockups/quarantines from the violence outbreak, magnitudes more dangerous where the violence intensity of thanatopolitical machinery would be ratcheted to its absolute peak. Starved. Where all energy is dedicated to simply surviving. Threatened constantly from all sides and injured. We would spend weeks or even months freezing, isolated and unsure of our fate. I had been to the hole twice already, and had suffered months of psychological and physical torture within which time barely crawled along. Literally counting seconds and minutes to break the mind-warping, tortuous boredom and profound isolation. Terrified. My family and the families of all these men not knowing for weeks, or perhaps even months, what had happened to us. Not knowing why their loved ones were no longer calling home, sending letters, and were completely out of contact. Showing up to visit us, only to be told that we had been transferred to ad-seg, with no further information given them. The risk to life and limb we all faced, whether white or Brown. The whisper of Dionysus,

the god of mob violence who was there in the dorm with us, demanding a blood sacrifice and appeasement or the unleashing of his murderous frenzy.

I raised my eyes to meet Diesel's squarely. I had to. I didn't know how he would react when I said what I was going to say next. It was certainly possible that he might attack me upon the utterance which would throw the whole woodpile, as socio-symbolic system, into disarray. I wanted him to know, through the unwavering look in my eye, that I would meet him halfway; that if he were to attack me in that moment, that he would meet my resistance. My holding his gaze without showing my fear may, in fact, be the only thing to prevent the attack. But I was afraid, absolutely, as afraid as anybody could be. I stood up straighter, rolled my shoulders back.

"It's not going to go *down* like that, homeboy." Directness. An expressive Sadness.

Matter of fact. A seizure of his power.

He instantly understood. The woodpile was going to discipline him, issue an inoculative dose of violence to prevent a ravaging one. I saw a look of fear flash across his face. Then betrayal, as he looked back and forth between Johnny and I, wanting to register whether or not we were both in agreement on this course of action. These two whom he had invested so much in and protected. A sadness that was quickly suppressed upon realizing that was, indeed, the case. Then, an anger. All these emotions flashing across Diesel's face in a matter of seconds as we stared eye to eye. And then something I will never forget, totally unexpected. A testament to Diesel's character, difficult to understand the significance of for those who have never been in a prison, a war, a gang fight or some other space overdetermined by an always-present violence potential.

“Alright then, fuck it! Timmy. Johnny. Mikey. Come on! Let’s handle this shit.”

Diesel ordered his own checking. He understood why it needed to happen. And not only did he mandate it as shot-caller, thus reestablishing and fortifying his position, he selected the three largest and most capable fighters in the dorm – myself, Johnny, and Mikey to beat him. Mikey was another of the solid woods with a recognized capacity for efficient violence, a hardened gangster with years in the carceral system under his belt. If Diesel was going to take a disciplining, it was going to be from the best strikers that the dorm had to offer. There would be no weaseling out or using his position as shot-caller to make it easier on himself. It was a matter of his own honor at this point. He would subject himself to the same logics, the same rules, the same discipline that he imposed on others for all to see and bear witness to. Within those conditions, it was totally unexpected, yet retroactively the obviously correct thing to do within the logics of that space. And it took voluminous amounts of courage. And it would also guarantee that after the checking, Diesel would maintain his position. That he was so committed to honoring the taboos and injunctions of prison politics, that as a sovereign of sorts, even he would subject himself to them – thus enriching his authority to impose them upon others in the future.

The reader might wonder why Diesel tasked three of us with his beating? Disciplinings within prison are not one-on-one fights, they are collective beat downs. The prison gang cannot risk that the to-be-disciplined may win the fight, and therefore, not take the lesson. In all reality, Diesel probably could have beaten any of us individually. The best outcome we could hope for in a one-on-one fight would be a draw, in which both parties would be left bloody and exhausted. No, he who is to be checked *must lose* according to prison politics. And the victim

must understand that it is the entirety of the prison gang that is imposing the action, collectively agreed upon, as materialized in the very collective number issuing actual strikes. Instead of undermining the entirety of the woodpile's socio-symbolic order by lopping off its head, Diesel reconstituted and guaranteed that very order, as its head, through subjecting himself to its logics.

Diesel ripped off his shirt, spun on his heels and bounded in long strides towards the dorm's interior bathroom, the blind-spot out of sight of the cop shop in which such assaults usually happened. His entire demeanor had shifted. False affability that turned to fear had now turned aggressive. I felt my stomach drop again. It had been difficult enough to face up to the series of conversations which had gotten us to this point. They took some courage. Only to face the awful reality that now we had to do the cursed thing. And it was not going to be an easy task even for three of us. Diesel was shot-calling 3-yard for the simple reason that he was the most fearsome of us. And he was in there waiting.

Mikey had jumped off his rack after Diesel's beckoning and made it over to Johnny and I standing at the foot of Diesel's vacated rack. I quickly explained to him why Diesel needed to get checked. He didn't talk much anyway, and with this, he stayed a gangster and didn't ask any questions. He just nodded. I assume he probably knew this was coming to some degree and was probably well aware of Diesel's debt as he was more up in the drug mix than I had been. The three of us made our way toward the blind-spot bathroom to issue our intra-racial beat down of the 3-yard shot-caller. Every inmate in the dorm had their eyes locked on us as we walked, and were eerily silent with apprehension. Yet also relieved that it was not they that were either the to-be recipients of violence, nor the ones tasked with its issuance. I had often

felt the same. Relieved not to be involved during so many other violent acts that I had given witness to in this very space. At some point it was everyone's turn, though. The violence of the space preexisted the human beings in it and it settled on people arbitrarily. Eventually, all of us. Either as victim or as executioner.

We were halfway to the bathroom when Fat boy grabbed me by my upper arm, braced and held me, as Johnny and Mikey continued on their way forward. I hadn't seen him standing there as I was passing and his grab startled me. I turned my head and looked him in the eye, instantly aware of how I must look to him and wanting to break the gaze. I knew my panic was showing and I didn't want him to see me afraid, so was overcompensating. Trying to suppress my terror. I must have looked insane, eyes peeled open and twitching with repressed fear, and absolutely pumping breath; trying to get on top of my adrenal glands distributing an overwhelming surge of cortisol. Holding beach balls underwater.

"Be *careful*, Timmy," Fat Boy whispered in my ear as he pulled me close, calm and measured. In an experienced tone meant to pierce through my fight-or-flight response and to be heard; expressive of an authentic concern and a deep warning:

"Diesel is *no joke*."

Him saying as much shifted something in me and I realized more clearly than before what I was about to walk into. I had been proceeding too haphazardly in trying to suppress my fear. Devoid of my wits. Blind. I needed to be able to *see* clearly, be fully aware to avoid great injury. While Fat Boy's intervention allowed me to come down a bit, and it probably made me safer as a result, I was simultaneously made degrees more afraid in direct proportion to the degree I was made less blind.

I nodded my head in recognition, the best I could do amidst the complicated relation I now enjoyed with Fat Boy – him quite literally ushering me into this situation, yet he also expressing a concern for my safety and trying to help me. Needing to stay up, be agitated to perform physically in a fight, yet needing to be calm and observant to watch Diesel and be prepared for whatever may come, assuredly violent. I ripped my arm from Fat Boy's grip, nodded my head in recognition of what he had said and done for me; the best I could do in that moment, and bounded forward so as to catch up with Johnny and Mikey. We hit the corner simultaneously and turned into the blind-spot bathroom together.

Diesel was there waiting for us, all 6'5" of him, standing in front of our dorm's multiple man shower about halfway down the length of its side wall. His body was charged with potential energy and he was shirtless, rocking back and forth in baggy grey sweat pants cut off at the knee and leather boots laced tight enough to cut off the blood supply to his feet. Soaked in sweat. As we turned the corner and approached, he raised his hands in his menacing and well-learned boxing stance that we had all seen before, just never as squared up at *us*. Elbows tucked close to his sides and his massive pummeling fists bobbing scarred knuckles outward in front of his chin in vertical ellipses, ready to strike. I was on the far-left flank as we approached, Johnny in the middle, and Mikey on the far side from me, and as we approached Diesel in a v-formation, we raised our hands as well and I balled mine tightly, finger nails digging into my palm.

"Yo, man. I'm sorry, dawg. But we gotta handle this shit," I said.

I was half apologizing in advance for what we were about to do to him, and half trying to protect us in some limited measure through getting Diesel to audibly acknowledge that we had

no choice in this. That he had brought down this chain of events on all of us. No such acknowledgement was given.

“Whatever, holmes! Let’s fucking DO this!” replied Diesel through gritted teeth, drip-sweating pure adrenaline.

According to prison politics, a checking is not simply three guys beating the non-resistant. The victim *must* fight back, they must demonstrate the will to fight against overwhelming odds. It’s not really important whether or not you win any particular fight in prison. Everyone loses a fight once in a while. What is important is that you stand up for yourself with the resources at your disposal, your own hands. Taking a checking is one of the mechanisms through which one’s commitment to this principle is tested and given witness to by others on the yard. Any to-be-disciplined inmate has to fight as desperately as they can and be physically defeated for it to successfully conclude. They must have their will broken, there, during the act. It is utterly tragic, despairing to see someone broken through violence. Even more so to be a part of stripping someone in this way. It is also physically strenuous for everyone involved and profoundly more dangerous than a simple beat down. We were going to have to *conquer* Diesel, fight with him as he thrashed until he authentically could not anymore, physically and emotionally. Until he was utterly despondent and shattered beneath us.

We approached him slowly, too hesitantly. None of us wanted to be the first to throw a punch at Diesel. One the one hand, we were scared of him. And on the other, none of us were particularly angry with him or had any desire to fight. He hadn’t *done* anything to us, personally. Yet we kept moving forward, each expecting the other to do it. To throw that first punch. We kept inching until we had closed within striking distance, Diesel’s and not ours it should be

noted, because of that absurdly long reach of his. Diesel was the first to throw and unleashed a devastating right cross that seemed to emerge from nowhere with such ferocious speed that I didn't even see it until it had already connected squarely with Johnny's cheek bone, blasting out the center of our formation. Johnny must not have seen it coming either because he didn't flinch, and the blow sent him tripping and stumbling backward over his feet until colliding lower back first with the unforgiving steel sink basin several feet behind him, buckling him over it backwards, and then collapsing him forward to the ground wailing and grasping at his back in agony. All I thought to myself is "one down." Fat Boy's warning that Diesel was no joke made more than an abstract sense now.

Mikey and I exchanged a glance in mutual shock and shared recognition that we were in real trouble. We could both be beaten this way very quickly. All Diesel needed to do was land two more of those devastating punches. And that would be an utterly catastrophic outcome. Diesel, running out from the blind spot enraged and spitting fire at overcoming his checking, all the Southsiders in the dorm thrown into a panic knowing that it had failed and rushing at him to finish the job. The whites reacting and throwing in. Utter, entropic chaos as the dorm would explode in absolute pandemonium with the dipshit cop in the office reading a magazine or some shit. We looked back towards Diesel. He gestured us forward with both fists, still in his fighting stance, fists upwards and clenched.

"Come on, Woods! COME ON!" he said. I hate being called a wood.

Mikey and I charged. I lunged at Diesel, and through no intent or foresight, luckily ducked under the right hook he simultaneously threw by burying my shoulder into the rightward side of his rib cage. I wrapped my arms around him, drove my feet, and as he was

propelled backwards, I could feel him repeatedly striking downward on the back of my head and round the shoulders with a jackhammering and pointed elbow. Mikey pursued and was throwing wild left and right combination punches at Diesel's face and head, a few connecting but most missing as Diesel was being propelled backwards through my assault. Mikey probably struck me in the process as much as he did his intended target. Diesel's back foot caught on the lip of the shower entrance, he lost his balance and began to fall backwards into it, and I fell forward with him. We both lost control and smashed full force into the rear shower wall, the back of his head impacting against the tile first with a sickening thump, and then my face. Stark whiteness for a moment and I found myself all of a sudden face-first on the ground and could feel the cold wetness soaking through my shirt and crotch from the shower floor. I pushed up off the dewy tiles and away from Diesel, and did a quick but disoriented turn around to get my bearings, squared off again and raised my hands against Diesel, who had already somehow gotten to his feet and was there waiting for me. Blood began to cascade down from the top of my forehead, into my face and into my eyes and I was dizzy. I remember how cool the blood felt, and I wondered about the exchange; how much cool blood could I lose this way before the relief turned on itself and transmuted into light-headedness and loss of consciousness? Thinking grows strange in the midst of a fist-fight, utilitarian and abstract simultaneously, lightning fast, but never entirely shuts off. Johnny was also back up by this point and had reestablished his position at the center of us, and was spitting blood like an angry bull in a cartoon, snorting steam and hoof digging. Furious. We were back to the positions we had started if a bit worse for wear and blood was pouring from his Diesel's head as well, from somewhere. And then the thought occurred to me that it was my blood on him.

Fear had vacated by this point of the checking. All that was left was frustration, and anger and adrenaline. Partly Diesel's anger directed at us for checking him, and we at Diesel for putting us in this situation. But the emotions were more free-floating than all that. It was an anger directed at nothing if not the overarching absurdity of our situation, this forced fight that none of us wanted a part of. None of us had any organic animosity towards the other. It was also an impossible situation, utterly ridiculous that we needed to strenuously exert ourselves through violence to the maximal degree possible in an attempt to injure one another within the overarching injunction that we were to do so as quietly as possible so as not to attract any guard attention. Win or lose the fight, we would gain nothing. We would fight furiously, for our lives, and stay exactly where we were. With years over all of our heads left to do. What a waste. I could feel the eyes of other inmates watching us and I knew some were taking voyeuristic pleasure in watching us degrade ourselves in this way. Some always did. People bound within such annihilative conditions adapt to them, and enjoyments grow progressively perverse as people submit to carcerality. That made me very angry too. I could have spun and blindly attacked any of those taking pleasure at our expense no matter the racial assignation, and that would have made more sense to me than attacking Diesel. At least I had some genuine anger towards them in that very moment.

Then, all of a sudden, something came over me like a wave. Despondency. Fatigue. Utter exhaustion. As I stood there, part of this three-man wolf pack circling my friend and cinching the net tighter, all the energy to fight fled from my body. My spirit sagged. I felt as tired as I had ever been. Empty and with a howling pain growing somewhere between my stomach and chest. As I watched Diesel bouncing and shaking with rage before us, it was clear

that he was still hyper-activated, practically vibrating with such an intensity that I thought it would shake his teeth loose. Shaking fists at us, and bent-kneed. He was saying something to us, at us, but I couldn't quite make it out; sound had grown hollow, tinny and distant as I was made more aware of the sound of my own breathing. I stole glances from the corner of my eye at Johnny and Mikey as they were moving closer, and they were still riding adrenaline as our net drew tighter. I seemed to be the only one overtaken in this way. I took an automatic step forward with them, further into danger, not knowing what I could or even should do. My hands began to slip downward and unclench, they felt so damned heavy all of a sudden, made of lead. I couldn't bear to hold them up a second longer. My shoulders sagged and lost tension. I felt stinging acid tears well up in my eyeballs, and that awful pain in the throat from a suppressed and stifled cry. I hadn't felt that in some time, maybe years, and it was like the muscles required to do so evinced greater pain after having been atrophied for so long. It hurt terribly, like a thousand automatized razors slicing back and forth trying to escape my throat.

We were back within striking distance again, both Diesel's and ours. Diesel threw another right cross at Johnny, this one just a bit slower than the first, and this time Johnny was ready for it. He ducked under, and exploded from his crouched position with a devastating right hook that bashed into the side of Diesel's temple with such power that it buckled Diesel's knees and sent him stumbling backwards. Johnny was terribly strong after all and had connected cleanly, with full force. Mikey, upon sensing blood in the water, pursued and began raining blows on Diesel's face, head, neck and shoulders - left, right, left as Diesel went backwards raising his arms in defense, slamming into the shower wall, yet again, and slid downwards to the floor and tried to cover up. It was pitiful. Sad. Terrifying. Johnny and I both closed tighter,

and Johnny began hammering down on Diesel with furious strikes with a horrifying rapidity. Wild, haymaker, powerful hooks rocking diesel back and forth like a hung slab of meat. I couldn't raise my hands. I couldn't hit Diesel. I stood there at the ready to do so, but entirely, physically unable. With his right fist, Diesel was throwing blows outward and anywhere in our direction, easily parried or avoided due to his compromised position, and with the other, he was beginning to raise a defense; trying to shield his face and his head from Mikey and Johnny's overwhelming assault. That signified that things were starting to give. Diesel was shifting from offense to defense. But erecting a defense when being attacked by three is impossible, a failed strategy. There would never come any moment in which Diesel could successfully ward off *all* the blows, take a breath, and gather himself. Any defense, especially only half of one with the other arm still punching wildly will be eventually worn down through sheer rapidity and volume of blows.

I can still see Diesel there, right underneath us. Underneath me. The blows from Mikey and Johnny unpredictable as to where they might land and increasing in velocity and accuracy. More and more were now were making direct contact with soft parts of the flesh and vulnerable tissue. Blood. Grotesque and immediate swelling. The absolute fear that Mikey and Johnny had previously felt had now transmuted into explosive and quickened violence. They had gotten on top of things and were trying to end this, expressing and transforming their terror and anger with their fists like a chemical reaction or water turning to vapor.

To properly discipline Diesel according to prison politics, I should have been assaulting him too. All three of us should have kept punching until his spirit was broken through physical incapacitation. Until there was no doubt that the lesson had been internalized, that he had

been “checked.” But I just couldn’t. It was hard enough to continue standing there. I wanted to close my eyes, disappear. I was so tired. A sense of drowning despair and crushing futility had overtaken me, and I wanted to scream “stop!” or to throw my arms around Diesel’s body and to take the blows upon my back and shield him. Better to throw in with Diesel, to be beaten and bluntly pounded to death and be annihilated rather than issue another strike. But I knew I couldn’t do that. I knew that Diesel wouldn’t want it, not anymore. He wanted this checking to go down, he had ordered it. It was how he was going to crawl from the debt hole that he had dug for himself, that he had been falling deeper and deeper into over the last several weeks. Through the disciplining, he was making good on his obligations to the Southsiders. He was returning to solid status. And we were more than halfway through the reprehensible transformation. We had come so far, and if I were to stop it now, it would have aborted the process. The Southside would see that he hadn’t been broken. My merciful intervention would be interpreted by them as the woodpile protecting one of their own, a breach of informal contract. Letting Diesel off too easy. It would be perceived as a further taking advantage, the Woodpile trying to punk the Southsiders, disrespect. Despite all of the physical pain, the anguish, the humiliation and the trauma we had all just gone through, we would still riot.

In addition, if I were to throw myself atop of Diesel in order to protect him from our assault, Johnny and Mikey would not know how to interpret my actions. This was my shot-call at its root. They could draw two possible conclusions in the moment, reflexively react in two ways there in the midst of it. On the one hand, they might conclude that I was calling it as over and that the checking was successfully completed. Which, through my years of experience in the system, I knew that it just wasn’t yet. We would still riot, and after, both they and I would

be held to account not only by the other woods on the yard, but by Diesel himself for not having successfully completed the task. On the other hand, they might just start fist-bombing me. For understanding I that had preemptively aborted it, for not letting the checking go down; for demonstrating too much empathy, which would have been read as weakness. I would be considered as soft, a lame that could no longer handle the inescapable brutality of prison life. Like Nietzsche, the philosopher of pitilessness throwing his arms around that whipped horse, I would be seen as having been *broken*. By my imprisonment. And I would be rolled up off the yard, at least stomped out as a “punk” and maybe stabbed. I would be considered as a liability to the Wood Pile, no longer able to defend myself or anyone else, a chink our collective armor. I would come to occupy the preexistent carceral-established subject position of “lame,” an iteration of the larger category, “piece of shit.”

I wouldn't say I consciously thought about all this in the moment. It was more like an interlocking set of impressions all occurring simultaneously as I watched fists rain down. A reading of what was occurring in front of me informed by years within these atrociously inhuman conditions. But I also knew that I couldn't hit Diesel. I wouldn't. All the will to do so had utterly evacuated me. Another double bind, then. I can't stop this beating, and I can't participate either. Either choice had utterly horrendous consequences. Instead, I did the only thing that I could think to do. I raised my hands out to the side, hovering above Diesel like a referee in a boxing match with knees bent, leaned forward at the hip. Looking closely and feeling for that energy exchange - when Diesel's body and spirit would sag, finally broken and his life quite literally at our mercy. That moment when I knew it would be over and when I could call it. I watched Johnny and Mikey beat him. Revisiting this event takes energy from me

now, as it did then. It makes me melancholy beyond description, and it is difficult to find the strength to continue to type; my mind grows muddled and it is more and more difficult to find the right words to express the affect state or anything else about this.

I hovered there over Diesel as Johnny and Mikey threw furiously. They were so wrapped in the exchange that they didn't take notice I was no longer contributing. A small mercy, I suppose. I could have been checked for that alone. There was a guilt in that too. I was making them carry the weight for the three of us, another vicious double-bind within these overarching conditions. Guilty for striking, and guilty for not doing so, not only because of what we were doing to Diesel, but because I wasn't pulling my weight. Johnny and Mikey didn't want to be doing this either. Why did I get to opt-out when I had called them in? Diesel tried his best to resist, but he was on his ass by this point and growing tired very quickly. He raised his other hand in defense. All he could do now was cover his face. It would be over soon, I thought. They just needed to beat the rest of his will out of him. On like that it went. For forty-five seconds? A minute maybe? Perhaps it was only 15 seconds, I don't know. It was entirely too long to receive furious blows to the face and head, four fists pounding in rapidity. Blood and sweat and spittle everywhere. Human liquid. And then, very distinctly, Johnny threw a furious blow to the jaw snuck round the side of Diesel's defenses and I could see his lights begin to go out. His consciousness sputtering. His arms covering his battered face began to sag. His shoulders lost some tension and were going slack as he fell completely back and against the shower wall. I hadn't noticed, but in the fury, one of the shower heads turned on, and was soaking us, him, down there on the floor. Diesel's blood diluting in the water, streaming down his face and into his eyes, running down his naked torso to the shower floor and down the drain. Behind his

defensive arm shield, I could see his eyeballs rolling back and into his head as he struggled to stay conscious, underneath eyelids that eventually closed. The blows still rained down, but slower –Johnny and Mikey were also trying to assess whether Diesel had been broken, as well. After a few breaths and between measured strikes, Diesel’s right eyelid opened, just a crack. And with that one eye, he looked upwards toward me off to his right side, standing there, stupefied and despondent with my arms out, waiting. Diesel was utterly neutral, barely conscious. He wasn’t feeling pain anymore, just physically rocked back and forth from the force of the well-placed impacts. The only sound the exhalation of his breath from the blows. He was operating at a base level of awareness and calm like the anti-buddha, his gaze detached from his body not through any spiritual practice, but through a battering violence separating his spirit from his body. A floating consciousness. And with an unmistakable look, with one eye, he communicated to me. “End it, Timmy. *Please*. That’s enough. I’ve had enough.” It was over.

“He’s GOOD! He’s good!” I screamed from the pit of me at Mikey and Johnny.

My strength returned immediately, and with all the force I could muster, I shoved Johnny sideways into Mikey, jarring them both, breaking off and intervening in the attack. With the cessation of the blows, Diesel, from his seated position, slumped further over and into the pooling water, utterly destroyed. Broken. I got down on my knees and threw both arms around him, underneath each armpit and clasped my hands behind his back. I could feel the blood streaming from his face, from his nose and mouth. Not dripping, running like a faucet against the back of my neck as I embraced him. I began trying to lift him to his feet, to get him off of that filthy shower floor, to squat him upward. He didn’t belong in that muck and I was irrationally desperate to get him out of it. To make him stand in order to wake him up, to keep

him from losing consciousness. Slapping him on his back, signaling to him like morse code, a steady stream of signals to keep his brain awake. I don't know why I thought to do that, it was like an archetype in my head, a preexistent information packet instantly released in my brain on how to react in these annihilative situations. But he was just so damned heavy, I couldn't lift him by myself. We both slipped in the water and fell back down to the ground. I could feel the entire dorm staring at me but doing nothing, could feel Johnny and Mikey off to my right, taken aback. I was growing angry again, what were they staring at? It was over, why weren't they helping me? I kept trying to lift Diesel, so much dead weight in and out of consciousness. His head rolling back and forth, smashing forward into my shoulder, and then back, slapping the shower tile with a thud. I couldn't get a grip on him. I placed my hand behind his head tenderly as one protects an infant's skull, threw my arm around his waist and tried to stand.

"Help me, motherfucker!" I screamed, in demand. At both Mikey and Johnny, or whoever else was listening, whoever would help.

My words and unnerved tone woke Mikey, bloody knuckled and wide-eyed, from his own trancelike and shocked contemplation at the bloody flesh-portrait that he had helped to install. He rushed forward to assist me and grabbed Diesel by the arm and threw it over his shoulder, and wrapped both of his arms around Diesel's waist bear-hug style and we began to lift together. We got Diesel's ass off the floor and a shift. I felt Diesel slide his booted feet underneath himself attempting to balance on his own. Shaky. I felt relief like a weighty beam of terror that stretched across my back that was pushing me ever downward had broken. Tears broke from my eyes which I wiped against Diesel's blood-soaked shoulder so as to hide them. I felt Diesel throw his arms around our shoulders, an embrace as much as it was a collapse into

us, feeling blindly for leverage, and for help. And he began to push upwards with whatever strength that he had left in him. His legs were trembling and wobbly beneath him, and they looked so weak – pointed knees, like those of an old man, feeble and trembling. As if the secret truth of Diesel’s actual state, his being, was revealing itself. He was so tired. Not from the beating. From all of it. Prison life. He was still bent over at the waist, put his hands to his hips, but bearing most of his own weight. A deep breath. Diesel raised his head upward to take in the world through eyes swollen shut, and we leaned him fully back against the shower wall, and held him up by his shoulders for support.

Johnny came from behind us, seemingly from out of nowhere, and split the distance between Mikey and I. And propelling himself forward, with the bottom rubber sole of his state-issued work boot, he kick-stomped Diesel full-force in the mouth as soon as he had raised his eyes to look up. Mikey and I felt Diesel torn from our grasp, watched him slam backwards headfirst with a sickening crack against the tiled blue shower wall as his arms exploded outward, heard his breath forcefully expel from the impact and watched helplessly as he slid all the way back down coming to a stop slumping forward and pouring blood from his mouth within the shower floor muck that we had just spent so much energy trying to extract him from. I was utterly aghast. Mikey was in shock, just staring.

“WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING, MAN?!” I wailed in confusion, in comprehensive despair, in rage.

Sometimes, what happens in real world fights is counterintuitive. It’s not like the movies. Violence as I have experienced it was often unpredictable, it can unfold nonlinearly and be utterly surreal. I fully expected that the blow had certainly knocked Diesel unconscious.

Maybe killed him. Instead, the blow woke Diesel and absolutely enraged him. I don't know where the reserve energy came from and it didn't seem within the realm of the possible. Pure fury. Diesel jumped up to his feet faster than I was in any way prepared for or even expecting, spattering sweat and blood droplets from his face swollen and grotesque, and with one massive hand for each of us, he shoved Mikey and I to his left and right side respectively. And with one giant stride forward with those long legs of his, Diesel lit off a devastating right hand that upon impact seemed to shatter Johnny's face, and sent little white shards of teeth flying into the air eventually tinkling along the concrete floor as he fell backwards and collapsed, pooling blood from out of his mouth like a decapitated sprinkler head.

As Johnny gurgled his own blood unconscious, Diesel stood there astride him like an insane Colossus, his right fist clenched and raised, shaking it down at him. Screaming down at unconscious Johnny with blood pouring from his head and face, his torso utterly saturated. Literally insane.

"Am I a piece of shit? Am I a MOTHERFUCKING PIECE OF SHIT?!"

"YOU DON'T KICK A SOLID MOTHERFUCKER IN THE FACE, WOOD! YOU DON'T PUT YOUR BOOT ON ME!" Making himself angrier with each venomously spit syllable from his grotesquely swollen lips.

Both Mikey and I woke from our shock which couldn't have lasted more than a few seconds but felt like a slow-motion eternity, and we fell upon Diesel. We wrapped him up as he fought and thrashed against us with all his might trying to get to Johnny; to straddle the youngster so as to beat him to death. It took all the strength we had to restrain him, like trying to grapple a fearsome tornado or a raging bull. We dragged him from out of the bathroom

kicking and screaming, literally lifting his feet off the ground as he bucked against us, and back toward his rack. As we made our way out of the bathroom, the voyeurs that I was so angry with during the disciplining were no longer taking pleasure in the spectacle. Things had gotten completely out of control, and were very dangerous. They were tangibly afraid and gave us a wide berth as we passed. By the time we got to Diesel's rack, the whole dorm had fallen utterly silent. No cops anywhere. It was impossible for any cop at this point not to have registered the violence, just impossible. Diesel was inconsolable. Screaming. Literally psychotic. I called a few of the other woods over to help us. And we kept Diesel there at the rack. Physically, by force, to keep him from going after Johnny. He wouldn't strike any of us, wouldn't go at the entirety of the Woodpile. He wouldn't want to erupt the symbolic order that he had just helped to reconstitute by dragging it into entropic violence, a civil war. For forty-five minutes, we cleaned him up, tended to his wounds. We wiped him down. Talked with him, more at him actually. He wasn't listening, I think it was physically impossible for him to. We calmed him somatically. Touched him. Put hands to his knee, rubbed his back. Brought him water. Put cold rags to his face and wiped the blood from him. At some point, Johnny stumbled from out of the bathroom and barreled to his rack collapsing atop of it. Biting down on a wet and rolled-up state-issued white towel, soaked through deep red with his blood. No one went to check on him as he was now in bad standing with the woodpile for his own violation of convict code – kicking a “good Wood” in the face. Abandoned. On one of the trips to the water fountain I saw Fat Boy sitting at his rack. I looked at him, and he at me. With solemnity, he threw me a simple head nod that communicated everything. The beef was squashed between the Woods and Southsiders. The debt was paid. Dionysus, the god of frenzied mob violence, had accepted Diesel's willing self-

sacrifice and had returned to his transcendental plane. And for this day at least, there would be no war of all-against-all. No prison race riot.

Within a few days, Diesel was back on the yard, shot calling. Battered and bruised with his position refortified through his willing subjection to our beating of him. He was still enraged. Humiliated by Johnny's after the fact assault. It is a well-known principle of prison politics that when disciplining a solid convict, you don't treat them with the same disdain you would treat some "piece of shit:" a rat, lame, or a child molester. Never kick them in the face or stomp them out, put filthy boots to them. You could feel the energy coming off of Diesel like heat from a fever and it felt unpredictable. Like at any time, he would just stop playing the game. Stop abiding the rules and attack. Anyone. Johnny, within his own rage at getting blasted so viciously earlier in the checking, was still buzzing angry in those first moments after it concluded and was out of control. And he had made a terrible mistake by kicking Diesel. Since then, he had tried to apologize. Diesel would have attacked Johnny then and there if we hadn't been there to restrain him. All the anger that Diesel had felt towards the three of us for disciplining him was collapsed on a singular source. All the rage at the Southsiders for demanding his checking in the first place, sublimated and polarized towards a singular victim, Johnny. The despair and self-hatred he felt around his addiction, targeted on a surrogate. I implored Diesel to forgive the kid, tried to convey to him that Johnny didn't know any better and still had a lot to learn. I claimed that Johnny was unaware of this particular taboo in prison politics, though I wasn't sure if that was actually the case. It didn't matter. All that rage and humiliation, he couldn't swallow it; it was making his spirit choke. It had to be displaced. The violation of convict code had happened

for all in the dorm to see and an accounting needed to be made for Johnny to be reintegrated back within the woodpile, for the community to be made whole again.

Diesel called the shot.

“Hey Timmy. I’m gonna need you guys to handle Johnny.”

Diesel didn’t look at us when he ordered the violence. Instead, off in the distance through the prison’s perimeter fence practically blind with two Blackened eyes swollen nearly entirely shut and hidden behind his purple-lensed Kay Dee sunglasses. He didn’t want us to see what he was feeling inside. How out of control he was with rage, humiliation, self-hatred. He wasn’t cracking jokes anymore, no more smiles and laughter. We took that from him. Blood needed to be spilt. Vengeance. It was either that or we all fight, the woodpile tearing itself apart in reciprocal and contagious violence with the collapse of our socio-symbolic order, the shot caller indiscriminately attacking other woods. Diesel tasked Mikey and I with the violence in order to take a sublimated revenge for what we had done to him. He would never admit as much, of course. And that was the only time he ever ordered me to discipline anybody, beside himself.

When they recalled us back to the dorm at the termination of yard, Mikey and I made our way over to Johnny’s rack. He knew why we were there.

“Come on, man. You know what time it is,” I said.

He didn’t try and argue or plead his case. He wanted out of the tension, too; to let this reprehensible process run its course and be done with it. My homeboy thumper joined this time, and the four of us entered that same bathroom, that same blind spot where we had beaten Diesel. Spots of our blood still dotting the concrete floor from a few days prior, like a

human slaughterhouse. And in that moment, I thought that this space was a “blind spot” not only to the cops who established the boundaries, set the game and patrolled this place. But to everyone, out there, in the free world. For if people saw the violences that occurred within these state-established pits and in their names, if they knew what we were abandoned to and made to suffer, there is no chance anyone would support this. Let alone understand it. They would recoil in horror, and demand its cessation. If they only knew. No one would tolerate this hellish pit as in some sense necessary. So much waste. Of life, of energy, of potential. Our community, set to spinning like a self-annihilating top. But civil society couldn’t see into our blind spots. No one knew what we were made to suffer within that vanished space of lawlessness existing right at the heart of the legal order. And on that day, we sacrificed another of our own as the logic went recursive and instantiated in a nested form; we bloodied our bare hands once again within these obscene carceral logics. We did so within a self-protective drive meant to prevent a greater, reciprocal violence from consuming the space – the scars on my hands looking back at me from the keyboard as I relate these events, each one priming some appalling, sacrificial memory, or the failure of the violent mechanism to protect us from catastrophe.

Abstract:

Having narrated the emotionally devastating experience of “checking” my friend “Diesel” in chapter five, in this chapter I will read the bloody, reprehensible episode as through René Girard’s framework for understanding sacrificial violence. According to Girard, sacrificial violence displaces preexistent communal violence onto an acceptable object, a marginalized individual inside/outside of the community who functions as an attractor for all of the hostilities that threaten the community with entropic collapse. In our case as inmate population, the always-potential prison riot. Through getting into a drug debt with another prison gang, Diesel was marginalized from his own, and therefore functioned as a “lightning rod,” attracting all of the animosities that would otherwise have (eventually) been indiscriminately expressed between us through war of all-against-all. This chapter makes the argument that the dominant form of violence roiling carceral space is, in its essence, sacrificial. And further, that as tragic and brutal as inmate-on-inmate human sacrifice may be, the practice guarantees inmate-community coherence through time within a vacuum of functional law, or, in the absence of any independent, third-party judicial apparatus able to mediate disputes between prison gangs. Further, this chapter will argue that the inmate, as type, constitutes a sacrificeable category of human being. That is, through an ideological attribution of both savagery and contamination, the inmate is rendered as something less-than-fully-human, marginalized inside/outside of civil society, and therefore functions as receptacle for the displacement of all the tensions, animosities and antagonisms roiling white-supremacist, neoliberalized social space. The prison and its dominant, internal violence, as through Girard’s sacrificial frame, is thus revealed as an industrialized system of organized human sacrifice, or, the prison and its concrete cell-blocks as the sacrificial stone allowing United States civil society itself to cohere through time through a series of ever-displaced sacrificial acts of violence.

Chapter Six – The Sacrificial Stone, pt. 2

René Girard and the Social Function of Sacrificial Violence

All concepts of impurity stem ultimately from the community’s fear of a perpetual cycle of violence arising in its midst. The menace is always the same and provokes the same set of responses, the same sacrificial gestures designed to redirect the violence onto inconsequential victims. - Rene Girard, Violence and the Sacred

Rene Girard’s *Violence and the Sacred* is an interdisciplinary study of sacrificial violence, published in 1972. Interested in understanding the social function of sacrificial ritual as against an ethnocentric common sense and a scholarly literature of the period that viewed sacrifice as rooted in irrationality, superstition or outright savage blood thirst, Girard sets out to interpret varied mythologies, cultural forms and ethnological studies of differing communities

throughout the world engaged in such practices in order to better understand their reason for being and what the people who practiced sacrifice hope(d) to achieve. Girard successfully extrapolates from these varied practices a set of core logics that constitute sacrificial rites, and further, develops a hypothesis about the role sacrifice plays not only in the formation but the reproduction of varied forms of community through time.

According to Girard in *Violence and the Sacred* (1977), all community begins with a literal collective murder; that “sacred mob violence formed the origin of the polis” (p. 307). As a disorganized mob becomes a singular community through a unanimous and murderous violence of the all-against-the-one, then the sacrificed victim becomes sacred – venerated after death – for having bestowed peace and cohesion to a newly formed community only appearing to itself retroactively through the murderous act. Subsequent ritualized sacrifice whether of human or animal – that is, nascent culture - is nothing but the reenactment of this originary, culturally-generative murder. Cultural memory of the originary sacrifice may grow progressively opaquer over time; the original act forgotten by subsequent generations as a series of ritualized substitutions and displacements mask the sacrificial subject whose death founded the community. But despite the opacity surrounding the ritual for those descendants many generations removed, sacrifice still functions. It does so through displacing a preexistent communal violence onto an acceptable object, a marginalized individual simultaneously inside/outside of the community who functions as an attractor for “all the internal tensions, feuds, and rivalries pent up within the community” (Girard, 1977. P. 7). As with the originary murder, the sacrifice of this marginalized individual (re)orders community amidst a rising tide of

indifferentiation and prevents its slide into reciprocal violence, or, the mutual expression of all of the community's internal tensions in an entropic war of all-against-all.

Although fascinating, it is not my intent to relate the vast breadth of Girard's work. I am certainly not an ethnologist and I am not particularly interested in critiquing the universalism of his claims. Instead, what is of interest for this study of the contemporary prison is very particular, namely, Girard's explication of those essential logics that he claims as constitutive of sacrificial violence – why it arises in particular cultures and what those who practice sacrificial rites hope to achieve. I argue that the logics that Girard traces as organizing sacrificial rites are the most precise explanatory device for rendering transparent the *social function* of inmate-on-inmate violence within carceral space. Said simply, and as I asserted at the beginning of this chapter as well as hinted at throughout my narrativization of the collective beating of my friend Diesel in which I was an ambivalent participant, the dominant form of inmate-on-inmate violence within the contemporary prison is *sacrificial*. We sacrificed Diesel that day to prevent a greater catastrophe from overtaking us all, an anger of the gods if you will. The god nothing more than reciprocal mob violence taking form as a prison riot. We did not sacrifice Diesel because we, as inmates, in any sense adored violence or were bloodthirsty; we had no desire to engage in any of it. We are not "savages." Instead, we did so to keep the god that *is* reciprocal violence in his transcendental realm, *away from us*. Off the yard. Our battering of Diesel prevented the riot's instantiation, and a few days later, we sacrificed Johnny for the same reason. All around me, for all the many years in which I was incarcerated, sacrifice after bloody human sacrifice was performed and given witness to, no matter the racial assignation. All prison "gangs" – Black, Brown, White, "Other" - sacrificing their own marginalized/extruded to

keep the racialized prison gangs from tearing at each other's throats in a total, entropic collapse of carceral space. And, sometimes, the offerings failed. Dionysus, the god of frenzied mob violence, did not accept our bloodied sacrifice and was still furious. And entropic violence consumed us all as the god was made imminent.

As all prisons are constructed as "originary communities" (Esposito) or states of nature (Hobbes), "primitive" or archaic communities (Girard) –all different euphemisms for the same type of object more or less racist - the same forces that call forth sacrificial rites within archaic community are once again, or more precisely, ever-originally made present within the prison as manufactured state of nature (see chapter three). As those archaic communities that practice sacrificial rites are thought from our "civilized" vantage to be irrational - given to superstition, bad understanding, or are otherwise bloodthirsty - in other words savage - so it is with inmates and our violence, equally misunderstood and attributed a comparable savage bloodthirst. As I described in visceral detail in the previous chapter, sacrificial violence within prison is certainly bloody. But is not without reason. As sacrificial rites make archaic community possible through preventing its slide into an entropic chaos of the each-against-the-all through evacuating the community's internal tensions and antagonisms, within the prison and quite tragically, it is inmate sacrificial violence that constitutes inmate community and makes daily life within possible at all through the exact same procedure. As the taboos, commandments, and prohibitions of archaic community (which, to an outsider, may appear arbitrary or even nonsensical) emerge in order to prevent those situations that give rise to reciprocal violence, so it was with our "prison politics." A set of taboos, commandments, and prohibitions meant to short-circuit the possibility of race riot. What follows is in no sense meant to excuse prison

violence, nor is it an apology for the organized and brutal racism between inmates within carceral space. They shouldn't exist and are preventable if we have any genuine interest as a society in doing so. But to eliminate these brutal dynamics and complexes, we have to understand the logic that calls them forth in the first place, and their social function. Their reason for being. Some new system need replace prison politics and the sacrificial mechanism in order to stabilize daily inmate experience and community, as nature abhors a vacuum. A vacuum made to appear through state-organized abandonment of the inmate population, an exposure of human beings within a gun-tower secured and perfectly predictable, emergent *lawlessness*.

What follows is an attempt to locate responsibility for carceral violence, which I will argue is, in its essence, sacrificial, back where it belongs: with the state and the originary conditions it has established. Namely, the manufacture of an artificial state of nature, a biomechanical machine producing of sacrificial violence as bloody end product within the context of an overwhelming indifference to the fate of its rendered less-than-fully-human, savage-contaminant life. And as a savage attribution is applied to the inmate community for engaging in (sacrificial) violence, a further brutalizing and degrading state punishment is thereby ideologically justified. This despite sacrificial violence's absolutely overdetermined and perfectly predictable nature. In a very real sense, its imposed and terrible burden for inmates and inescapable necessity. What we were effectively and universally sentenced to was violence in varied and perverse forms - whether as victim or as executioner - most likely both if serving any significant amount of time. A delegated system of state-organized violence effectively demanded that we go butcher one another, or riot. If we, as civil society, genuinely desire to

prevent the obscene and annihilative violence of carceral space, the solution is not to punish those embedded and drowned individuals for particular acts, as if inmates existed entirely disconnected from the larger, state-established carceral environment that calls it forth. To do so is to address an effect as opposed to sacrificial violence's primary cause. Instead, to eliminate the everyday violence of carceral space, we must undermine and rewrite those originary conditions, the imposition of scarcity atop a forcefully bounded and undifferentiated population with the state enjoying a monopoly over movement within conditions of functional lawlessness leading to an always-potential riot. An originary framework that overdetermines sacrificial violence as a material necessity so as to *prevent* this greater state-organized violence, always haunting and plaguing us, from subsuming the field. We must recognize that the dominant form of violence within the prison, sacrificial violence is, against common sense, nothing more than "an instrument of prevention in the struggle against (a larger) violence" (Girard, 1977, p. 17) deployed by inmates. Total entropic collapse organized as statecraft, carceral space organized as riot machine, is *resisted* through inmate-on-inmate sacrificial violence. "The (sacrificial) rite is directed toward order and tranquility, not violence. It strives to achieve violence solely in order to eliminate it" (Girard, 1977, p. 132). An incomprehensively tragic situation, and an utterly terrifying one for those of us bound and splayed within the carceral interior. Monstrous. And what the prison *is*, in its essence, is abandoning human beings to be devoured by this machinery. And for this reason, perhaps above all others, the prison need be abolished. For there is no reforming a riot machine without dismantling the organizing logics of the prison itself.

Archaic Versus Modern Communities

According to René Girard, that which differentiates modern from archaic communities is not any absence of internal violence or its dissipation over time, some modern progression beyond our earlier and violent propensities as human beings. Violence, according to Girard, is endemic to all human culture. What separates the modern from the archaic is simply a differing cultural institution for managing the threat of catastrophic violence inherent to human beings living in common. But to make sense of why internal violence poses a cataclysmic threat to any community in the first place, we must first understand something about the nature of violence as Girard conceives it.

Similar to those critical criminologists discussed in chapter four who advocate for the medicalization of our societal response to the “plague” of criminality, for Girard, violence is *contagious*. But it is contagious in a radically different sense than they argue. Take, for example, any community devoid of an independent, third-party judicial system; a society in which the “terrible obligation of vengeance” (Girard, 1977, p. 21) rests with the victim him/herself or their relations. The community may be an archaic one that simply never instituted such a system for any variety of reasons. And although Girard never explicitly references the prison in *Violence and the Sacred*, I argue it may also be an inmate population, structurally abandoned and exposed outside of any functional law. In the vacuum of an independent, third-party judicial system - its non-existence, ineffectiveness, or withdrawal - violence, or the need to take revenge in order to balance the scales of a previous and violent (perceived) injustice, can easily spiral out of control. When the burden of taking vengeance lies with the injured themselves or their relations, violence is quite likely to go reciprocal, to initiate a series of back-and-forth

reprisals, because "... the only satisfactory revenge for spilt blood is the spilling of the blood of the killer... Vengeance professes to be an act of reprisal, and every reprisal calls for another reprisal" (Girard, 1977, p. 14). More specifically,

Vengeance... is an interminable, infinitely repetitive process. Every time it turns up in some part of the community, it threatens to involve the whole social body. There is the risk that the act of vengeance will initiate a chain reaction whose consequences will quickly prove fatal to any society of modest size. The multiplication of reprisals instantaneously puts the very existence of a society in jeopardy. (Girard, 1977, p. 15)

When a victim (or their relations in their place) takes vengeance, it is unlikely to put an end to things. It is, instead, a beginning of sorts; the first (or second, third, fourth, ad infinitum) link in a chain of unfolding events. Take the case of a murder. In a community lacking an independent, third party to the conflict empowered to attribute guilt and enforce punishment, if my brother is killed, I am likely to kill the perpetrator in return. But the relations of the murderer whom I have slain are unlikely to understand my vengeance as just. They will, instead, perceive it as itself a great injustice. My victim's relations - family, friends and allies - will most likely have internalized the justifications for the murder of my brother as itself an accounting for some previous harm that I take no account of. "The crime to which the act of vengeance addresses itself is almost never an unprecedented offence; in almost every case it has been committed in revenge for some prior crime" (Girard, 1977, p. 14). To ask human beings to transcend their own maelstrom of grief and rage, to understand the death of a loved one from their killer's perspective - to consider the death of their relation as somehow *justified* - is simply to ask too much of human beings in all the frailty of our reason and emotional entanglements. So, in return, the relations of my victim would come to demand the spilling of my blood. To which a further bloodied vengeance would be demanded by my own relations.

An “interminable, infinitely repetitive process” will have been initiated. Violence will have gone reciprocal – and it is in this sense that Girard means *contagious* - with no natural conclusion written into the unfolding of events. The blood feud. Every member of the modestly-sized community is forced to take sides as it fractures against itself into warring factions; epiphenomenal violence accrues, injustices and reprisals multiply as the community is overtaken by a spiraling and entropic violence. A *plague* of violent indifferentiation will have befallen the community. To an outsider of any community at war with itself, victims and perpetrators would appear as indistinguishable, like twins mirroring one another in their claims of injury and imitating one another in their violent retribution. Echoing one another in pointed blame for the crisis. One must imagine Oedipus arriving in Thebes, each blaming the other for the plague which has befallen the city. Which, for Girard, is nothing but reciprocal violence itself.

Men always find it distasteful to admit that the “reasons” on both sides of a dispute are equally valid - which is to say that *violence operates without reason*.
(Girard, 46)

The “cause” of this violence disease/plague will eventually be lost to all as it was always unverifiable because never agreed upon to begin with. No independent, third-party power to the conflict exists to establish the objective “truth” of events and apportion responsibility to the guilty. Once unleashed, violence itself orders the field and finds its justifications, structuring the potential actions and freedoms of the human beings within its folds. Each bloodletting as effect, in turn, becomes its own cause as the chain of reciprocity expands and intensifies, demanding ever more blood to appease itself, yet, is by its very nature, inexhaustible. And for that reason, as effect becomes cause, the “reasons” for the violence on each side are held to all the more

severely. “They” are at fault and I must have vengeance asserted at any point in the chain by each and every one, the cycle regenerated anew with each bloodletting.

Two Braking Mechanisms

All human culture is beset by an internal violence potential that threatens to spiral out of control and rip the community apart in an undifferentiated void of no-sense. All cultural distinctions are made to evaporate in a maelstrom of violence as each and every one is made mirrors of one another; twins, reflecting each other’s aggressiveness and in demands for vengeance. “If there are really such events... some sort of braking mechanism, an automatic control that goes into effect before everything is destroyed, must be built into them” (Girard, 1977, p. 67).

Earlier, I drew attention to Girard’s distinguishment of modern societies from archaic ones as simply that differing cultural institution each has instituted for managing the same threat of cascading violence internal to them both. What cultural institution separates a modern society from an archaic one, according to Girard? The answer is, of course, *the presence of a modern judicial system* (Girard, 1977, p. 4). Modern societies like our own have in place an *independent* and *sovereign* body “capable of taking the place of the injured party and taking upon itself the responsibility for revenge” (Girard, 1977, p. 4). The judicial system is our “braking mechanism” upon a reciprocal violence that, if left to itself, will envelop the community and destroy it. Within a functioning modernist judicial system, the cycle of interminable vengeance is undermined, because, the “terrible obligations of vengeance” with its “terrible urgency” (Girard, 1977, p. 21) no longer falls upon the victim and/or their relations

themselves; we are not required to take matters into our own hands. It is the police, the courts and the prison that are meant to assign guilt and to administer punishment. That is, to take vengeance on behalf of the aggrieved.

For us the circle (of vengeance and reprisals) has been broken. We owe our good fortune to one of our social institutions above all: our judicial system, which serves to *deflect the menace of vengeance*. The system does not suppress vengeance; rather, it *effectively limits it to a single act of reprisal*, enacted by a sovereign authority specializing in this particular function. The decisions of the judiciary are invariably presented as *the final word on vengeance*. (My emphasis) (Girard, 1977, p.15)

This “single act of reprisal” is the key. Once the judicial system as independent, third party intervenes and breaks the dyad of a party in conflict, that terminates the exchange. Conflict between the victim and the perpetrator is structurally exhausted because the aggrieved party’s need to for revenge is satisfied through an independent body not a member to the conflict. A third party against which no vengeance may be sought by the found-to-be-guilty. The interminable cycle of reprisals is short-circuited then, and once punishment for guilt has been attributed, the injured party has had their vengeance and has no cause to pursue the matter further.

For Girard, archaic societies are simply those without a third party, independent judicial system. “As long as there exists no sovereign and independent body capable of taking the place of the injured party and taking upon itself the responsibility for revenge, the danger of interminable escalation remains” (Girard, 1977, p. 17). That is because the burden of vengeance still lies with the aggrieved. But it is not the case that archaic communities, in lieu of a modern judicial system, lack any mechanism for forestalling the cycle of violent reprisals. In place of a modern judicial system, archaic societies have developed a differing form of braking

mechanism, similarly tasked with interrupting the violence contagion. The system which interrupts the “interminable, infinitely repetitive process” of revenge in an archaic society is a *sacrificial* system.

Between the archaic community and the modern then, two systems for controlling the violence inherent to human community and breaking the chain of violent reciprocity. The modern-judicial and the archaic-sacrificial. That is, “the judicial system and the institution of sacrifice share the same function” (Girard, 1977, p. 23). And although a modern justice system may be more effective in curtailing violent reciprocity inherent within human community, it is not the case that the sacrificial system was simply an expression of a savage violence and irrationality. Sacrifice actually *works* to forestall community-annihilative violence. But how? What are the specific mechanisms through which sacrificial violence functions to interrupt the chain of violent reprisals? What exactly is human sacrifice?

The Sacrificial System

As is evident in my recounting of those anxious moments just prior to our collective battering of my friend Diesel while incarcerated at the California Rehabilitation Center, there are particular moments in any community lacking a modern judicial system that are especially thick with enmity. Violence lurks just beneath the surface of things and is easily triggered by the most insignificant of events; a wayward glance misread or a whisper paranoically interpreted threatening to drag the whole community into an entropic exchange of explosive retaliations. Moments in which “the social fabric of the community is threatened” with annihilation (Girard,

1077, p. 18). The sacrificial system is called forth in these extraordinarily fraught moments in order to preempt spiraling violence, or to stall out its transmissibility if already set loose.

Sacrificial violence is first and foremost a *polarization* of the varied animosities distributed throughout the entire community that position each against the other. And it is a channeling of those aggressions towards “a single victim who substitutes for all the others” (Girard, 1977, p. 161). Instead of everyone potentially being made victim in a war of all-against-all, now only one, the sacrificial victim, will bear the brunt of these indiscriminate ferocities. Sacrificial violence is, in other words, a *substitution* of the one for the many; the victim an attractor of sorts for all of the “dissensions, rivalries, jealousies, and quarrels within the community” (Girard, 1077, p. 8). This solitary, *surrogate* victim is selected *arbitrarily*, and all members of the community must convince themselves of the surrogate’s guilt and unite against them in condemnation. And through their sacrifice, the victim comes to function as containment and disappearance vessel for this communally-redirected violence. The formula of sacrificial violence, then, is “unanimity-minus-one of the surrogate victim” (Girard, 1977, p. 259). A communal cohesiveness emergent after the act that, prior to the sacrifice, was threatened with being rendered apart through reciprocal violence.

The selection of the surrogate victim is arbitrary (Girard, 1977, p. 257) in the specific sense that the victim is not “responsible” for the enmity plaguing the community, as these tensions preexist any particular individual and reside in the spiraling and contagious nature of violence itself. The sacrificial victim is, in other words, *innocent*. And like a pure potentiality that roams the community as field, sacrificial violence collapses like a steel trap upon some particular, innocent member of the community as it has on many others in the past, and will do

so upon others in the future. The system of sacrificial violence temporarily forestalls violence and apportions blame, and it evacuates the community of its hostilities. But does not entirely eliminate it. The community's own violence and antagonisms are regenerative and will eventually demand appeasement through fresh blood.

In archaic communities, whole categories of people were reserved as sacrificial subjects (Girard, 1977, p. 12). On the one hand, what makes someone "sacrificeable" is their degree of *integration* within community. The victim must closely enough resemble members of the community in order to function as stand-ins for them in order to successfully receive, contain and purge the community's violence. But on the other hand, surrogate victims must also be just different enough so that they are not easily confused with proper community members themselves. That is, they must bear some mark of dissimilarity. For the directing of collective violence towards a proper member of the community, would undoubtedly initiate the very chain of reprisals meant to be avoided through the rite. "'Impure' violence will mingle with the 'sacred' violence of the rights, turning the latter into a scandalous accomplice in the process of pollution, even a kind of catalyst in the propagation of further impurity" (Girard, 1977, p. 39).

For the rite to function properly, the sacrificial victim must call forth a delicate set of associations, then. They must be inside of the community but marginalized, outside but not entirely excluded. Simultaneously both inside/outside or inclusively-excluded. A formula that should be familiar by this point, as it is the logic constitutive of *Homo Sacer* for Giorgio Agamben (chapter three), for an *inoculative procedure* within Esposito's immunitarian paradigm (chapter four), and for the construction of the *inmate-savage* as ontological type. Through the process of an inclusive-exclusion within/without community then, a sacrificial

surrogate is made a “‘good conductor’ in the sense that metal is a good conductor of electricity” (Girard, 1977, p. 39) for attracting the violence that plagues the community - capturing and disappearing it outside of itself.

The second quality rendering human beings as sacrificeable, deeply related to the first, is that the community must be able to subject the surrogate to an act of violence *without any fear of reprisal*. Because marginalized, sacrificial subjects lack the “social bonds that link the rest of their inhabitants,” (Girard, 1977, p. 12) the death of the victim “does not automatically entail an act of vengeance” (Girard, 1977, p. 13). The sacrificial victim is, therefore, chosen from a category of subjects whose dominant characteristic is their *incapacity to propagate further violence*. The sacrificial act short-circuits violent retribution because there exists no one in the community to seek it; violence’s inherent capacity to go reciprocal in the absence of a braking mechanism is reduced to a single and unanimous act of polarized communal violence. In this way, as with a sovereign and third-party judicial system, the chain of violent reciprocity is undermined, but in an entirely novel way. Human sacrifice is then, at its roots, *the community’s polarization and issuance of its own violence and its exhaustion against individuals poised simultaneously inside/outside of the community without initiating a chain of violent reprisals*.

A community finds itself perched over an entropic void, yet again. A potential war of all-against-all lurks just beneath the surface of things. One member of the community accuses another of being responsible for the troubles that threatens to tear the community asunder, a marginalized individual lacking social ties strong enough to collectively combat the accusation. Another member of the community agrees. Two enemies within ear-shot, who were just moments prior at one another’s throats, turn from facing each other in hostility towards the

marginalized individual. Through mimesis and the accumulating weight of social agreement, they also charge this emerging surrogate as being the root cause of their own antagonism. It was this “other” who pitted them against one another all along. Agreement spreads outward and consumes the community; it is this marginalized individual who is responsible for their crisis. They alone have brought this plague of enmity and violence, disordered things. And the community must be purged of their presence for any semblance of peace to return, to avoid total entropic catastrophe. Essential to understand, for the sacrificial rite to properly function, there must be unanimity, “everybody must agree on the selection of the guilty individual” (Girard, 1977, p. 83).

Once the scapegoat has been unanimously agreed upon as the source of the community’s trouble, the community discharges its violence against them. Whereas prior to the act, myriad conflicts and tensions roiled the community and threatened to drag it into an entropic void, now, after the rite, a community (re)appears united in its aggressions and (re)ordered as against the surrogate; the contaminating element purged and their own hostilities with it. Sacrificial violence is therefore (re)generative of community, allowing it to realize itself united in purpose and accusation as against the sacrificial victim. And through the sacrificial act, a potential reciprocal violence that threatened the community’s existence is evacuated.

Inmate Sacrificial Violence

Men do not worship violence as such... Violence is venerated in so far as it offers men what little peace they can ever expect. - Rene Girard, Violence and the Sacred

Having reviewed René Girard's theorization of the logic composing sacrificial violence, the present direction of my analysis should be clear. To read the vicious, collective beating of my friend Diesel through the sacrificial frame. Not as some unique act of violence disconnected from the rest, but as model for making sense of the dominant form of inmate violence roiling the prison as, in its essence, sacrificial. Simply tracing the logic of sacrificial violence as Girard understood it has most likely enabled the reader to make some intuitive associations between sacrificial violence and that to which Diesel was subjected. They are explicit and on the surface. But in order to make the case that archaic sacrificial and carceral violence share a precisely homologous structure, the exact same reason for being and social function – to forestall violent reciprocity - there are still particular elements of the homology that need be run down in greater detail. The work towards which I will now turn.

For Girard, sacrificial systems emerge as braking mechanism on reciprocal violence in those societies *lacking an independent and sovereign third-party judicial system*. Therefore, to make the case that inmate violence is largely sacrificial in nature, I must first demonstrate that the lived experience for any inmate on the prison yard is that of *lawlessness, carceral space as a judicial vacuum*. To someone who has never been incarcerated or is unfamiliar with how prisons operate internally, it may perhaps seem strange to describe the prison yard as a space of functional lawlessness. After all, the prison is a physical territory and infrastructure erected and bounded by the state and it is inundated with agents of the judiciary - correctional officers and custodial administration. There is a custodially-enforced disciplinary code. Inmates are remanded into custody by the judicial system, itself. In what sense, then, is the prison lacking

an independent and sovereign judicial system? Where does its *experiential* lawlessness come from?

Although the judicial system gives form to the prison and populates it, I argue that the contemporary prison is a space of *functional* lawlessness, existing right at the heart of the legal order. Formally, a type of judicial system does indeed exist for inmates. Any inmate may inform to custody about any issue they are having with another, or even their victimization at another's hand. They may invite custodial administration into the conflict to break the dyad, as "independent" third-party to any inmate conflict. But that system of intervention is rendered entirely dysfunctional because, according to inmate-organized prison politics, to do so is "snitching." Inmates themselves have raised a prohibition against relying on custody as third party to any inmate dispute. To do so is to invite attack from other inmates as a "rat." Because inmates may not approach custody under the threat of physical violence, the lived reality for the vast majority of inmates is an absence of a functional third-party system able to mediate and disrupt inmate conflict and violent reciprocity. That simple fact alone is enough to describe any inmate's experience within the carceral belly as one of lived, functional lawlessness.

But if we were to stop our analysis of the carceral judicial vacuum at this point, then it would appear that the reason why there is no third-party braking system on reciprocal violence between inmates is inmates ourselves - that we undermine the interior-to-the-carceral judicial system. That is certainly the reflexive response of the carceral state and its apologists. But to uncritically adopt that position would be to confine our analysis only to the surface of things. And it would entirely miss the point. Instead, we have also to understand *why* we inmates have invoked the prohibition.

Inmates have invoked a prohibition against taking demands for vengeance to custody because the mediation apparatus within the prison - guards and custodial administration - are anything but a neutral, independent party. Prison guards and custodial administration are, instead, that very apparatus tasked by civil society with the *punishment* of the inmate population. Because of this preeminent mandate to punish, *both parties to any inmate antagonism are structurally always-already guilty in the eyes of the agents of the law that organize carceral space*. The judicial system within prison, if it can even be called that, exists primarily to find evidence and opportunity for the application of additional punishment to the maximal degree possible for *both perpetrator and victim alike*. The issuance of additional time to sentence, new criminal charges (D.A. referral) or inscription deeper within machinery of carceral reuptake and pain distribution (see chapter one) - from the mainline yard to the SHU, for instance. In other words, the mandate to punish collides with and overwrites the third-party objectivity necessary to a *functional* judicial system. For as third-party to any inmate dispute, custody may, *at their own and individual discretion*, choose whether or not to take upon themselves demands for vengeance from the inmate victim, simply because *all* inmates are always-already guilty.

To clarify my meaning, take for example the state-organized inmate rape of Eddie Dillard by Wayne Robertson as described in chapter one. Eddie was a pure victim of Robertson. And in his victimization, he asked custody to intervene as third party, to break the dyad of potential inmate versus inmate violence. At first, he asked guards to preempt the possibility of his rape, and after custody refused, to take vengeance against his rapist on his behalf after the fact. Instead, custody *further* exposed him to his victimizer – locked him back within his cell

even after Eddie signaled that he had been raped and he was likely to be so again. Guards, in all of their empowered discretion, simply refused to break the chain of violent reciprocity - to take vengeance into *their* hands - and instead told Eddie that he needed to take his revenge for *himself*: "you can hit a woman but you can't fight him back?" Reading the reprehensible event through the sacrificial frame then, custody, as potential third-party mediating apparatus, *reinserted Eddie back within a logic chain necessitating either reciprocal violence or his guaranteed continued victimization and potential annihilation*. In Eddie's case, approaching custody as if an independent party to the conflict as opposed to its primary organizer with a vested interest in his degradation and punishment, even as *victim*, merely agitated and mobilized the custodial apparatus to ratchet upward the intensity of its thanatopolitical machinery. And although the rape of Eddie is a shocking case, it is not a novel one. It is, instead, exemplary of the normative function of the mediating system within carceral space. Any inmate-on-inmate victimization can always be justified by custody as not only legitimate, but further, facilitated by it as a proper punishment at individual guard discretion befitting some previous crime committed by the victim. In the case of Eddie Dillard, his kicking of a guard in another institution. As the logic goes, we were all guilty of *something*, or we wouldn't be in prison in the first place.

From an inmate's perspective then, bringing any complaint to custody always invites an unpredictable response, or more specifically, an always-potential attack - either directly from guards or as delegated through custodially-administered thanatopolitical machinery. And for these two reasons - the individual discretion vested with custodial administration and their structural *hatred* for inmates as always-already guilty for *something* or other - the inmate

population has established a firm boundary against approaching custody as an independent party; a boundary itself patrolled by inmate-on-inmate violence. In other words, and in the real-world of the prison as opposed to some abstract notion about what inmates *should* do (if they were more “civilized” and less savage they would take their problems to guards), taking a demand for vengeance to custody is often *initiative of inmate-on-inmate violence as opposed to breaking the chain of violent reciprocity*. For two reasons. First, because snitching will get you killed by another inmate. That’s an inmate violence, not its cessation. And second, because the very sight of an inmate “complaining” to custody about mistreatment at another inmate’s hands is quite likely to agitate the surplus punishing apparatus as we were considered as less-than-human savages, underserving of the status of victimhood. Through custodial eyes, we couldn’t occupy the subject position of victim and inmate simultaneously – it was an impossibility. We inmates knew that. And we acted accordingly through installing a prohibition against relying upon custodial intervention as mediation mechanism for any inmate-to-inmate antagonism.

Which brings up a larger point with regards to the prohibition against “snitching.” As I discussed in chapter one, a prison stripped to its most essential logics is the imposition of scarcity atop a captive population and a refusing of people’s escape from the condition. Just because someone is incarcerated does not mean that they will accept imposed lack and the suffering it entails. They won’t necessarily consent to it for themselves and, more essentially, certainly not for those others who are materially dependent upon them, who they feel a responsibility to. We inmates have families. Spouses. Children. Elderly parents. And whether in a prison or not, human beings often have an often irresistible need to provide for loved ones.

Inmates will, in other words, generally try and minimize their relations' exposure to the state-imposed impoverishment that they themselves are made to suffer because incarcerated. And often, we did so through organizing illicit economies behind prison walls so as to escape material and psychological deprivation, not only for self but for our people. And *most of the victimizations that occur within carceral space are Black-market affairs, deals gone bad*. As was the case with Diesel.

If an inmate is victimized within an illicit-market exchange – beaten over a drug debt, robbed of their contraband, attacked for disrupting someone's smuggling network, etc. – then that victim is structurally unable to appeal to custody for remediation of the wrong simply because that inmate is already-guilty in the eyes of custody for having engaged in the illicit exchange. They are not considered as a victim but are instead viewed as themselves responsible for the epiphenomenal violence they were made to suffer because they “shouldn't have been doing whatever they were doing” that led to the violence in the first place. Remediating a structurally imposed lack, whether for themselves or their relations, is not recognized by the carceral state as a legitimate activity and is itself punishable. As all inmates are to varying degree embedded within illicit economies so as to remediate a lack organized by the carceral formation as its primary *raison d'être*, all inmates exist to varying degree outside of any law, within relations *not* rationalized through a third-party mediation mechanism. If the dominant form of violence within carceral space is to do with victimizations within illicit economic exchanges, then *most victimizations within prison occur within a lived experience of functional lawlessness* – inmate victims as sandwiched between their victimizer(s) and a law that is instead transmuted predatory towards them for having engaged the Black market in the

first place. Whole illicit economies emerge on any prison yard, and the disciplinary code exists *outside* of these markets, taking a hostile and predatory orientation towards them, mandated with their disruption and eradication as opposed to rationalizing the exchanges *within* them. In other words, *the imposition of scarcity indirectly, yet assuredly, reinstalls human beings within a chain of violent reciprocity.*

Also, there is no impartial judge interior to the prison. No jury of one's peers gathered from the community of the accused to hear evidence for any particular "crime." To be anything of the kind, a jury would have to be composed of other inmates, unimaginable under current institutional configuration and mandate. The barest of claims against any inmate, the word of a "rat" whether true or not for instance, is enough "evidence" for custody to issue a brutalizing punishment. There is no vociferous representation available within the prison, whether prosecuting the case or as defending the accused. Instead, the judge, the jury and the executioner of the "law" within carceral space are those very custodial agents charged with managing, punishing and containing the prison population. It is the functional equivalent of, within civil society, having the police act as judge, jury and executioner; Derek Chauvin with total power and absolute impunity over those they arrest. For this reason too, inmates have raised a prohibition against relying on custody to mediate disputes and to enact revenge in the case of any victimization. Just saying any inmates name out loud to custody may bring the brutal fist of the carceral state down upon that person, justifiably or not.

Further, from the perspective of the prison gangs, custody is considered as something akin to another gang - the most powerful roaming the carceral interior. We existed in an antagonistic relationship towards them and they towards us. They were the "goon squad" or

the gang in green. Justifiably so, for there is significant evidence to indicate that is precisely how guards think of themselves (see chapters one and three). At a more abstract level, prison guards are a distilled version of that very system of legitimized violence – the police, the jail and the court - that has captured and concentrated the inmate population in the first place, gloves off. To cooperate with it at any point was to legitimize the very apparatus that held us all captive. Relying on custody to mediate disputes would be, in other words, to retroactively justify our own arrests and mistreatment - the stranglehold the prison held over all our lives with its punishing and surplus violence. To seek out guards as a third-party mediator in any dispute with another inmate is, quite literally, to ask your captors for assistance and therefore, to utterly submit and cooperate with the very forces *mandated* to injure us, primarily extra-judicially.

What all this translates to, with regards to the day-to-day experience of any inmate within the carceral thresher, is a lived experience of functional lawlessness. There was no third-party, independent judicial system to rely upon to break the chain of violent reciprocity. My narration of my time spent within CRC in the first half of chapter five intended to describe the experience of living for a number of years within functional lawlessness. The always unpredictable, catastrophic violence and the predation, the hunger and the terror. The compounding psychological traumas and the suffering. Inmates themselves have invoked a prohibition on the use of the custodial administration as braking mechanism on reciprocal violence because it is entirely dysfunctional and predatory, itself initiative of the very reciprocal violence modern judicial systems attempt to short-circuit. All of these dysfunctional factors commingle and reinforce one another to produce an overdetermined, daily experience of

functional lawlessness for any inmate walking the prison yard; *the essential function of the law, to mediate disputes and to enact revenge on behalf of the victimized as entirely absent for human beings within carceral space*. Therefore, the “terrible obligations of vengeance” with its “terrible urgency” (Girard, 1977, p. 21) falls squarely back to the inmate victim and/or their relations. We were *required* to take matters into our own hands. The interminable cycle of vengeance remains intact within the carceral thresher, in fact, is reconstituted anew and, in large measure, defines what a prison *is*, in its very essence. *The prison is nothing but the reestablishment of a chain of violent reciprocity through abandoning human beings into a state-manufactured ordinary or archaic community devoid of a functional, third-party judicial system*. And it was here, within this carceral state organized experiential lawlessness that Diesel was subjected to his thrashing.

An act of Communal Violence that Polarized Hostilities toward an Arbitrary Victim

Having established that prison yards are lacking a third-party, independent judicial system functioning as braking mechanism on reciprocal violence, the first condition necessary to describe Diesel’s beating as sacrificial is therefore met. Also recognizing that the inmate community is not self-annihilating - that it persists through time and has developed a proto-culture of its own (prison politics, etc.) - it stands to reason that the mechanism of sacrificial violence is called forth as that differing form of braking mechanism meant to provide the inmate community with what “little peace they can ever expect.” The next step necessary to demonstrate that the violence directed against Diesel was sacrificial is to establish that it was *a*

collective act of violence that *polarized and displaced communal tensions and antagonisms* toward Diesel as *surrogate victim*, selected *arbitrarily* from a *sacrificeable class* of individuals.

Diesel's beating was certainly an *act of violence*, that's apparent enough. And it is was collective as there were three of us tasked with his assault. But for the violence against Diesel to be considered as sacrificial, it needed to be collective in two very specific senses. On the one hand, it had to have been a representative violence – each *strike issued on behalf of all the members of the community*. And on the other hand, that Diesel *stood in place of that self-same community in order to receive violence that would otherwise have been expressed indiscriminately against all of its members*. Instead of each and every one made both victim and executioner in a catastrophic and reciprocal violence, only one surrogate victim towards which all communal violence was displaced, and through the act, eliminated. What larger community were the three of us representing with our strikes? And if Diesel was indeed a surrogate victim, what community did he stand-in for by taking this mauling upon himself?

As stated in my recounting of the bloody and reprehensible episode, Diesel, along with every other inmate in that dorm, knew that Johnny, Mikey and I we were acting as representatives of the entire Woodpile prison gang through the disciplining. Prison gangs are authoritarian organizations, one of their primary mandates the prevention of entropic violence outbreak. That the decision to beat Diesel in order to forestall a riot with the Southsiders was issued from the top of the organizational schema and involved relatively few of us without consulting the totality of its members didn't make it any less representative. And with each blow that Diesel took upon himself, he did so in place of all the members of the Woodpile that would otherwise have been subjected to a riot's indiscriminate ferocity. But Diesel's assault was

collective in an even larger sense. His debt, after all, was owed to the Southsiders. Through asking us to discipline Diesel on their behalf, Fat Boy and the Southsiders effectively (re)articulated a community, Woodpile *and* Southsiders, in a “unanimity-minus-one” relation. That is, through the brutal act, relations between the two prison gangs – a larger inmate population, or community - were stabilized, regenerated anew, as against Diesel the surrogate victim. The beating of Diesel was collective in the precise sense that it enabled two potentially warring factions to cohere as a temporarily stable assemblage; the beating itself defined the collectivity and differentiated it as against a scapegoat who polarized violence that would otherwise have been expressed indiscriminately between us and ripped our community apart. The violence between prison gangs was effectively exhausted through a singular, violent act and it is in this sense that Diesel’s beating qualifies as *sacrificial*. All the community issuing its own violences against the one, and this one standing in place for the community through gathering-to-himself all of the community’s violence, and disappearing it – the chain of reciprocity short-circuited, allowing the community to escape entropic collapse and to persist through time. In fact, all throughout carceral space, the only inmate community actually existent is brought forth and stabilized through this exact, recurring mechanism that keeps emergent prison gangs from annihilating one another. Community stability within prison is always purchased with a scapegoat’s blood.

For violence to be sacrificial, it must also be *arbitrary*. In what sense was Diesel’s beating arbitrary? After all, his thrashing appears as if dispensed for a very specific reason, the accumulation of a sizable drug debt to another racialized prison gang. While it is certainly true that Diesel was beaten in relation to his outstanding debt, that is only a partial explanation. To

interpret the violence to which Diesel was subjected as being *caused* by his debt is, in a sense, to play violence's game. It is to stay trapped within a mythic narrative that sees the violence against the sacrificial victim as somehow *justified*. As Girard argues, within societies that practice sacrifice, "violence operates without reason" (Girard, 1977, p. 46). Which is to say that Diesel's debt was no reason at all, so much as *a necessary justification, an illusion of causality that allowed the sacrificial system to function*. According to Girard, sacrificial violence requires some degree of *misunderstanding* in order to function properly - specifically, the false belief that the victim is actually responsible for the enmity and potential violence that threatens to overwhelm and annihilate the community. Diesel, through accumulating the debt and failing to make payment, was certainly responsible for an *increase in tension* between our prison gangs. But he was not responsible for its *existence*. That is, the violence to which Diesel was subjected was *arbitrary* in the very specific sense that all of the hostilities between the Woods and the Southsiders, all the "dissensions, rivalries, jealousies, and quarrels" (Girard, 1977, p. 8) which roiled our inmate community *preexisted* Diesel's debt. Antagonisms between prison gangs were the very air we breathed; we existed in a permanent state of tension along a spectrum of intensity that ratcheted upwards and downwards over time and through particular events and happenings, rather unpredictably. No singular instance - the running up of a debt, a disrespectful word spoken, rumors of a wrong doing, even a particular assault - are *responsible* for the enmity. These specific events are more like catalysts - matches thrown into tinder that can ignite. But only within conditions in which we existed as *always* perched over a violence vortex as the carceral's very condition of being.

As described throughout the entirety of this work, the hostility between racialized prison gangs is an overdetermined product of the originary conditions of carcerality itself. Race riot within prison is indirectly organized by the state through the imposition of scarcity atop a captive and undifferentiated population. In other words, the inmate population was always-already riven through with tensions, animosities, and potential reciprocal violence *prior* to Diesel's debt because of what the prison *is* in its very essence, how it functions at its most elementary level. Diesel was not responsible for the animosities, in fact had nothing to do with them except to be embedded and victimized by them as were the rest of us. Instead, all of this preexistent and potential violence, through the assignation of his "guilt" by the collective, were collapsed on Diesel like steel pincers as they had been collapsed on others in the past and would do upon others in the future. Sacrificial violence is ever regenerative because it emerges organically from the inmate population only secondarily and in defensive response to the baseline logics of carcerality, which are a constant input and set the field towards entropy.

The violence against Diesel was *arbitrary* because it polarized this preexistent tension and animosity established by statecraft and redirected it against Diesel as its *perceived causal agent*, a marginalized individual simultaneously inside/outside of the community. Although not responsible for the potential violence plaguing us, the debt Diesel accumulated *stood out* from the community and marginalized him, allowing him to "stand-in"; the debt functioning as a lightning rod, channeling all the varied free-floating hostilities between the two prison gangs toward himself as singular victim. Diesel was universally perceived as the cause of the hostilities distributed scattershot throughout our community in that very particular moment, and the subsequent violence was displaced towards him, and him alone. Threatened with our own

immediate and entropic annihilation, it was quite easy to convince ourselves that it was Diesel who was responsible for our enmity. If Diesel hadn't assumed the debt, there would be stability between Woods and Southsiders. If Diesel would have only paid off his debt, then there would be peace. Diesel was the contaminating element and the community needed to be cleansed of him. And if he weren't made subject of a unitary and purifying violence, we would collapse into a riotous state *because* of him.

But communal stability within overarching conditions of imposed lack and indifferentiation is structurally *impossible*. We would always and repeatedly be brought to the edge of riot again and again because the baseline logics of carcerality demand it. With or without Diesel's debt, we would have been at one another's throats for some other misattributed "reason" that failed to take into account, disappeared actually, the organizing logics of the prison itself as primary and causal agent. In fact, we were. Within a year of Diesel's sacrifice, I was near beaten to death at the bottom of a flesh pile in a riot with the Southsiders over an entirely different "reason." I felt the bottom of Fat Boy's and Flaco's rubber soled boots as they stomped my face and body in unison. "You're DEAD, wood" they repeated over and over as they did so. The prison, as thanatopolitical machine, produces one thing most consistently, always-potential riot. And inmates, in order to short-circuit these state-organized atrocities, displace all the myriad, disordered hostilities between prison gangs against recurrent inmate scapegoats imputed responsibility for the tension over and over again in the absence of a functional, third-party juridical mechanism. The violence against Diesel was sacrificial in the precise sense that it forestalled state-organized riot, evacuated the community of tensions that preexisted his debt; he involuntarily conducted and drew communal violence to himself like

metal is a good conductor of electricity. But despite his sacrifice by our community, riot eventually regenerated as it was guaranteed too. Terribly quickly, actually.

Which brings up a larger and, perhaps, most essential point. Sacrificing Diesel was something that we, as inmates, could actually *do* to forestall and evacuate an annihilative violence organized by the carceral state. In fact, it was the only action that we could even perceive on the horizon of possibility. We *had* to beat Diesel or riot. What was unthinkable in that very moment would be to engage with the agency directly responsible for the organization of our myriad hostilities and antagonisms. After all, it was prison guards and custodial administration that stripped us of our identities, rendering us indistinguishable twins in our aggression. It was the carceral state that bound and immobilized us in a degradation pit, providing only material and psychological resource enough to sustain the barest of life. It was agents of the state that would execute us if we tried to escape the condition. The illusion that Diesel was responsible for the animosities that plagued us functioned to prevent a deeper realization. That our real nemesis, the agency responsible for organizing our always-potential collapse into war of each-against-everyone was the carceral state.

That is to say, we didn't "convince" ourselves that Diesel was responsible for our enmity. Instead, as inmate community, that is simply how we organically perceived events. And that perception was, in a sense, involuntary. Reflexive. Naturalized. The carceral state enjoys an overwhelming balance of force, and if we inmates were to engage in struggle against it - violent or otherwise - we knew, from experience, that we would be utterly crushed. Gunned down, brutalized and/or disappeared forever. Because of the experiential impossibility of resistance to the carceral state, the very structure of our imagination was deeply bounded and greatly

delimited. Our horizons of possible resistance collapsed. We simply couldn't conceive that which was utterly hopeless anyway, challenging the actual source of our enmity. Our actual resistance to entropic violence and the riot machinery in which we were embedded was therefore confined to an arena in which our actions could have some beneficial, actual, material effect. And we could hope to survive. This collapse of any potential resistance from the carceral state itself as the source of our enmity towards the scapegoating mechanism, overdetermined by the carceral state's overwhelming balance of force, was not a conscious displacement. It was just the way we reflexively interpreted our lived world and our condition. The fault lay with Diesel, not the prison. Not the state. For us inmates, the power of the carceral state was utterly naturalized, and we operated within the imaginative bounds that it had established because we could not even conceive of anything outside of its asphyxiating power.

And this displacement was *functional* in a rather perverse way. On the one hand, it allowed the sacrificial mechanism to function. If we actually experienced Diesel as innocent, then the sacrificial mechanism simply wouldn't exhaust our violence. Instead, the community would remain charged with hostility with nowhere to displace it until it boiled over, one way or another. And it was functional in another sense, or, perhaps dysfunctional dependent on which side of the prison's perimeter fence one sits. Our reflexive perception of the Diesel's guilt allowed us to maintain a rather tragic form of false, psychological dignity within conditions of utter deprivation. Scapegoating one another as the cause of the hostility which plagued and saturated us, although incomprehensively bloody and brutal and terribly dangerous, generated an illusion of having more agency than we actually did. It created some psychic room for the perception that our conflicts and our internecine wars actually mattered. That we had some

control over our fate while imprisoned and that these violent acts were of our own choice; our own actions for our own essential reasons. Instead of seeing through the illusion of the scapegoat's guilt toward the carceral state as the site of our plague and our impotence in resistance, we slaughtered inmate victim after victim to prevent a greater realization which is psychologically crushing: total powerlessness, an utter lack of meaningful agency as existent within the carceral state's perfectly totalitarian social configuration. That even as "gangsters" with all of our cultivated and real courage, our trained and blood-earned capacity for refined violence, our losses and bruises and suffering, we were, as against the carceral state, utterly powerless. No matter how individually strong, how "gangster" we were. Yes, the inmate-on-inmate sacrificial mechanism was functional in that it often prevented a larger and reciprocal violence from consuming the field, inmate race riot. But it was not simply that. Sacrificial violence also worked to forestall another and larger form of reciprocal violence – all inmates, across races, united in a struggle against the carceral Leviathan itself as the cause of our enmity and uniting in a cross-racial, abolitionist struggle.

Said in a different way, inmate sacrificial violence is a form of delegated violence that works on behalf of the carceral state to both ideologically and quite materially short-circuit a potentially abolitionist, revolutionary resistance from inside of the carceral belly. As the dominant form of violence within carceral space, sacrificial violence, in the last instance, protects the carceral state through attributing blame to a series of ever renewable inmate-surrogate victims for the potential annihilation the state itself organizes. Through the sacrificial mechanism then, a conflict properly expressed between inmates and the carceral state was effectively displaced, and as opposed to engaging in a struggle against the prison we were

instead subjectified as prison gangsters; informally deputized by the carceral state as self-executioners - a form of unconscious, self-annihilating counterinsurgency force. Consciously, we sacrificed one another in our own short-term, delimited interest to prevent entropic race riot from consuming the field and to guarantee communal stability. But also, at a larger scale and quite unconsciously, our sacrificial violence effectively exhausted energies potentially articulated toward an interior to the prison, abolitionist resistance. The carceral state redirecting defiance back inwards against itself through erecting such an edifice of overwhelming violence that inmates can't even perceive the possibility of confronting it. And it is within this margin of impossibility that convict code and prison politics emerge, including the sacrificial mechanism and that gangster subjectivity providing some semblance of agency and dignity within conditions of absolutely annihilative, indifferenciating oppression. Without sacrificial violence then, for the inmate population, *either madness within a total subjection to the carceral thresher or an abolitionist violence directed towards ripping down the prison from the inside*. Or, a third way – civil society (all of us) working to organize a decent and functional society in which the prison and its originary logics are abolished and the sacrificial violence mechanism is rendered entirely unnecessary.

Returning to the question at hand, if Diesel's beating was arbitrary in the specific sense that he was not responsible for the enmity and potential violence that pitted Southsider and Woodpile against one another, then why him? How did Diesel come to be selected as sacrificial victim as opposed to anyone else within that dorm? Within the prison as sacrificial community, certain classes of inmate are reserved as sacrificial subjects - marginalized individuals simultaneously inclusively-excluded who lack social bonds strong enough to seek vengeance on

their behalf. The sacrificial victim within prison, as with archaic community, is therefore chosen from a category of inmates whose dominant characteristic is their *incapacity to propagate further violence*. Those marginalized inmates who may be submitted to a communal act of violence without leading to a propagation of further reprisals because they lack the necessary social relations necessary to avenge them, the sacrificial class, is composed of “rats,” “lames,” child molesters and those who violate the taboos of prison politics. These inmates comprise a sacrificial category known as “pieces of shit,” fecal matter as abject, contaminating object. The contagion, in this case, reciprocal violence. “Pieces of shit” are those inmates through which the state-organized and preexistent tensions of the prison yard are purged by the larger inmate community in a decontaminating violence.

More specifically, through assuming a debt to another racialized prison gang, Diesel violated a taboo of prison politics. And in so doing, he inadvertently adopted a preexistent subject position within the “piece of shit” sacrificial category. Diesel was inside of the community because an inmate like the rest of us. But through violating the debt taboo, he was driven outside of the protection of the Woodpile prison gang; marginalized or made to sit simultaneously both inside/outside of the community. And as such, Diesel was alienated from those social bonds necessary to avenge him should he be victimized through an act of violence. It was the Woodpile in fact, those of us that would normally be tasked with vengeance on his behalf that would come to subject Diesel to violence through the disciplining. Therefore, an act of violence against Diesel could not result in a series of violent reprisals because no one existed to seek it. A single and unanimous act of violence directed against Diesel, as indebted to another racialized prison gang and therefore marginalized, would short circuit the chain of

violent reciprocity, or “trick” the accumulated tension and potentially community-annihilative violence between Southsider and Woodpile into exhausting itself on a singular source, and thus stabilize or even regenerate anew our inmate community.

And it is the same with all those other subject positions considered as “pieces of shit” within the prison: the rat, lame, and child molester. They are all inside of the community because inmates. But all bear a certain *mark of dissimilarity* and are marginalized by the greater inmate community. The child molester is considered as an abject, less-than-human monstrosity by other inmates because preying on the most defenseless of society and fundamentally perverse. The lame is perceived as lacking the courage necessary to defend themselves through violence, a coward, and is therefore marginalized. The snitch is a less-than-fully human “rat,” a notorious bearer of contamination, tainted through their relation and reliance upon custody. And those who violate prison politics are, in a sense, made contagious because they violate those commandments and taboos meant to prevent violence outbreak. All these subject positions bear marks of difference. All of these inmate subject positions are marginalized, “pieces of shit” simultaneously located inside/outside of the inmate community and are regularly subjected to vicious acts of violence by the larger inmate community. These violences never threaten to spiral out of control in community-annihilating violence because these inmates universally lack those necessary social bonds necessary to propagate retribution, outside of the protection afforded by the prison gang. Sacrificial violence directed against this category of inmates thus defines the inmate community and guarantees its stability through time through a series of continuously reproduced unanimity-minus-one acts of violence. The accumulated, preexistent communal violence, organized by the state, is repeatedly and

machine-like displaced and exhausted through these inmates as sacrificial subjects again and over again without ever initiating a chain of reprisals; a pressure release valve allowing the inmate community to cohere through time, minus the “piece of shit.”

What all of this implies is that the prison, when read through the sacrificial frame, is a machinery for the production of a series of sacrificial victims and displacing violences. The carceral state organizes those conditions by which the inmate community, absent a third-party, functional juridical mechanism that has itself been transmuted predatory through an investment in seeing us suffer, is always threatened with entropic violence. To protect against that annihilative potential, the inmate population consistently and throughout carceral space attributes blame and displaces internal tensions against “pieces of shit” as responsible for our tensions; an ontological/sacrificial category inhering within carceral space whose dominant and shared characteristic is their incapacity to propagate further violence. Sacrificial violence functions to displace and exhaust tensions otherwise guaranteed to boil over in one of two ways: either inmate war of all-against-all, or inmates storming the gates of the prison itself. Within conditions of state imposed indifferenciation then, inmates, no matter the racialized prison gang in which made carceral subject, come to define themselves as prison gangsters as against the rat, the lame, the child molester and against those less-than- “solid” inmates who violate the taboos of prison politics. They (we) do so through the only self-constituting mechanisms available within carceral space, a series of self-differentiating forms of violence – roll-ups, disciplining, stabbings, group level assaults, etc. Gangster subjectivity is a pure negative, a void - nothing but this negating violence as issued against this sacrifice-able class of individuals, in pure differential in opposition to them. The solid convict as *not* a piece of shit,

rat, lame or child molester as demonstrated through a pummeling of them. Further, the inmate community ensures its stability against entropic violence every day and everywhere throughout the entire carceral system through engaging in a series of displacing and exhaustive communal violence against these “pieces of shit” - sacrificial subjects imputed responsibility for the plague of violence that was our very condition of being because incarcerated.

At this point, the question may reasonably be asked: aside from those criminologists interested in understanding prison violence for its own sake, what is the larger significance of all of this? Why should prison activists, abolitionist scholars and other readers interested in engaging the prison think critically about inmate sacrificial violence? And how does an understanding of the sacrificial mechanism contribute to a larger critique of the social function of the contemporary prison in the United States? All human beings sentenced to prison are, to varying degree and over time, exposed to a logic that demands either sacrifice or riot. And following the lead of many theorists around the contemporary prison, I argued in chapter two that the primary targets of carceral capture, sequestration and death-abandonment are rendered economically superfluous, largely racialized subpopulations under neoliberal restructuring. When we describe the prison as “a system of racialized social control,” then, we must recognize that it is predominantly young Black and Brown human beings, as well as those suffering significant mental health issues and the drug-addicted that are abandoned to the prison’s annihilative machinery as described here. Many scholars thinking contemporary carcerality use terms like “genocidal” to describe the prison. And they are not wrong for doing so. But descriptions of the prison as an active and murderous institution cannot coexist easily alongside descriptions of the prison as a warehouse, passively storing inmates. The two terms,

a genocidal institution or a warehouse, in some sense work against one another. Either the prison statically warehouses, or it actively kills. And this confusion, I believe, arises in part because we lack a good theory of how the prison *kills*. For these reasons, understanding inmate violence as sacrificial, as a *displacement* of state-organized and murderous riot is essential because it is the dominant mechanism through which inmate death is realized within contemporary carceral space. It is through sacrificial violence or the failure of the violence-displacing mechanism and entopic riot that inmates are killed and/or subjected to madness inducing and battering corporal violence.

In the beginning of this chapter, I also intimated that United States white-supremacist civil society, as community, is continually cleansed and made anew through the regularly recurring sacrifice of largely racialized human beings at *multiple and recursive scales*. So far, I have confined my analysis to the sacrifice of individual, inmate subjects. At the ground level, so to speak, from inside the carceral threshers. I have yet to discuss how the prison, as sacrificial chamber at a grander scale, is constitutive of civil society, itself. To reiterate, sacrificial violence is the displacement of “all the internal tensions, feuds, and rivalries pent up within the community” (Girard, 1977. P. 7) toward an innocent surrogate victim, a scapegoat perceived as responsible for the enmity and potential violence plaguing the community. As described in detail chapter two, neoliberal restructuring has generated profound economic insecurity and ever-increasing anxiety throughout white-supremacist social space, its own ““dissensions, rivalries, jealousies, and quarrels within the community.” To challenge the actual source of this disorder and rampant insecurity would necessitate an engagement with the neoliberal state, and capital itself. Instead, and as a collective, we structurally displace neoliberally generated,

internal hostilities toward the largely racialized criminal subject as surrogate victim, rendered as sacrificial class of human beings. In exact structural homology to inmates who, at a lesser and recursive scale, can't properly conceive of resisting the power of the carceral formation through the bounding of our imaginations in a relation of total powerlessness so we sacrificed our own, civil subjects, all of us, do the same. That is, reading neoliberal restructuring and the subsequent rise of the prison as the "catchall solution to social problems" through the sacrificial frame reveals that the inmate population is nothing but a sacrificial category established by civil society in order to displace a potentially socialist, revolutionary engagement. The inmate population as scapegoat, inside of community but bearing significant marks of difference (skin color, lack of economic embeddedness, madness) which prohibit absolute inclusion, inclusively-excluded within white-supremacist community. At multiple and recursive scales then, constitutive of civil society itself and down into that very blind spot bathroom where we repeatedly bloodied our hands, the carceral formation is a sacrificial chamber in which a series of collective forms of violence threatening to rip the community apart, whether that community be the larger civil society itself or the inmate population, are displaced towards a series of inmate victims lacking the capacity to defend themselves through the propagation of vengeance.

What predominantly young, Black and Brown people of color, the poor, the mad, the addicted and the otherwise abandoned are sentenced to is an exposure outside of civil society and its law within an always-failing and collapsed community; a proto-community suspended in identity-less chaos. Where one-by-one, we were all demanded to sacrifice one another at the altar of white-supremacist community cohesion. And not only do we, as a "civil" society

demand the sacrifice, we compel inmates hold the knife themselves. Each inmate knowing damned well, at some point and unpredictably, it will be their turn. That, amongst the other reasons cited in this work, is a primary reason why any society wishing to call itself civilized must abolish the prison. It is a perpetually ravenous, sacrificial stone – quite unimaginable in the scale of its organized monstrosity and utter disdain for the human life within its folds.

Conclusion

As a culture, we have yet to come to terms with our own violence. Not simply the barbarous and foundational violence of our nation's earliest history, genocide against the indigenous population and the enslavement of millions of Africans amongst other atrocities, but an unfolding and white-supremacist *savagery* that is ever-recurring; regenerative of the social formation through the propagation of brutality and death - social, corporal and psychological - primarily directed against a racialized other. Specifically, our white-supremacist culture is organized through a constituting, yet largely unrecognized-as-such carceral violence that makes the very notion of an individual citizen-subject within the United States coherent with itself and guarantees its experiential reality through inscribing a parsing and differential opposition right into the core of the social body. This unconscious, yet constitutive violence establishes an "abyssal divide," demarcating a particular "us" from an abject "them;" those citizen-subjects on whose behalf said forms of violence are performed, and on the other hand, its state-incapacitated and rendered largely silent victims. The victimization doubles down - folds in on itself and is amplified - through our shared cultural misrecognition: an incapacity to recognize carceral sacrifice and tortures as fundamentally illegitimate and our victims *as* victims. Despite any assignation of criminal "guilt," which is quite beside the point. "Their" crimes and the violence we perform against inmates are two different issues entirely, and there are any variety of ways that we could collectively respond towards those (us) citizen-subjects who have broken the (always recalibrating) law besides a brutal dehumanization, a making strange and "other" in the process. There exist a variety of solutions more effective towards

realizing our stated goal of crime's suppression and remediation. Reactions less costly both economically and socially as well as to our moral standing within the community of nations, profoundly more just than simply abandoning human beings within brutalist-concrete pits proficiently organized toward a guaranteed and emergent lawlessness and lethal, sacrificial violence. Whether that violence come by inmate hand, an executioners' gun tower, or the snuffing pit that is the SHU. It is beyond the scope of this work to elucidate all of the alternatives in their respective merits and shortcomings, but there are plenty of activists and theorists around the prison doing precisely that invaluable theoretical work. There are also plenty of real-world examples, not only throughout history, but contemporaneously and throughout the world, for anyone willing to take the time to look. No, the absolute and violent lunacy of the United States' contemporary prison system is not some historically overdetermined given, it is not our fate. It is an active choice that we, as a collective and through our cultivated indifference, are making as against a multitude of possibilities, whether we are aware of making this particular choice or not.

The "us" is composed of those civil subjects outside of the prison and its armaments of surveillance, capture, control and death abandonment (including probation and parole, the jails and the court system), and the "them," those bound and abandoned to the prison's iron core; that significant minority of close to eight million people, disproportionately Black and Brown, being slowly digested to variant degree dependent on length of sentence and depth of inscription within the belly of *our* monstrous and cannibalistic Leviathan. A Leviathan that is, it should be noted, *nothing but us*, and is a primary condition of our very being as citizen subjects within the neoliberalized, American project. Our particular selves - as social, economic and

cultural beings - are made possible through the contemporary prison and its panoply of sacrificial atrocities. We could be different beings with different lives, but without a doubt, certainly not the same without this peculiar institution as socioeconomic ground. We are all tied up in one another, bound in an ever-contracting and asphyxiating carceral knot. And we can't breathe.

The previous chapters have drawn significant attention to varied forms of violence both within and without the carceral perimeter, the thanatopolitical machinery of inmate-on-inmate violence and extrajudicial police executions for example, in order to render them less opaque, to describe why they are set in motion and how they emerge. But more work is still needed to be done to come to terms with the specific and heretofore practically *unspeakable* nature of carceral violence. What forces overdetermine the prison's unique and perverse brutality as an inevitability under current institutional configuration, beyond racist and ideological tropes articulating the essential savageness of inmates? In other words, if we are to escape ideologically useful fantasies and myopias generative of, and a precondition for, the expression of civil society's own ferocities, themselves loosely organized under the principle that it is morally justifiable to express collective violence against the violent, as "inoculation," then the question still remains to be answered: why is the prison such an incomprehensibly violent space? And with each cell, each yard a sort of diorama of human degradation that we, as a collective, peer into and use as screen to indulge in horrific and violent fantasies, why is such an institution a "common-sense" and functional necessity within American-style democracy? For the prison, in all its catastrophic miscreation, *is* overwhelmingly deemed as necessary by our countrymen and women and our political representatives. Of this, there should be no doubt at

this late stage of the institution's development, despite how extraordinary the claim may appear to those of us who have seen its outrageous and terrifying visage up close. How bizarre and hostile the claim of necessity feels to those of us who, without respite, continue to feel the prison's putrid breath tickling the back of our necks as we run from it. Always running away, in any and all direction, gathering the shredded pieces of what remains of our tattered lives to keep them from falling back within the gaping penitentiary maw that gives perpetual, automatized and mechanical, unceasing chase. As the formerly incarcerated, we are, after all, hunted. Quite interminably. What those who are given to abstraction call "recidivism." Really, tracked down, seized, and apprehended only to be forcefully thrust *back* within the state's thanatopolitical machinery, carceral tubes and teeth, having barely escaped them with our breath intact, and with our now fragmented and battered minds.

If one of our explicit, collective goals as a "democratic" and "humane" society is to reduce the horror of violence in all of its arbitrariness and its mercilessness, as we indeed claim in the broad daylight of our supposed reason and decency, it is my argument that in some significant measure, we don't know where to begin. That is because, as a culture, we lack the language to even conceptualize carceral violence for what it is: indiscriminate and vicious. The violence of carceral space is monstrous beyond immediate recognition, deeply unfamiliar to those subjects embedded within civil society, and for that reason, amongst others more explicitly ideological, remain largely unseen. We simply can't process them sufficiently because we lack the specific language and concepts nimble enough to give them proper cognitive form. Our discourse around the prison largely circles from a safe remove then, never approaching the Real of carceral space, the prison as a concretized and sublime horror, as it is veiled within a

well-intentioned discourse of an abstracting sociology, criminology or related disciplines. It is in part due to this carceral aphasia that our culture's constitutive and differentiating forms of violence do not register, cloaked in the deceptive robes of "justice" or embedded within technocratic arguments of a false necessity.

In large measure, that's what this work has been about. A narrativization of the contemporary prison from its insides in order to compliment those more distanced sociological analyses which are prominent in prison studies, critical race theory and any of the other disciplines that have dipped their toe into the carceral maelstrom, as essential as they may be. To develop a new set of concepts, largely biopolitical – 1) emergent *thanatopolitical machinery* of inmate on inmate violence, 2) the *manufactured state of nature* and *iterations of savagery* (the positive content of the merely negative, "something less-than-human" ontological status that inmates enjoy), 3) the *recursive carceral quarantine* meant to isolate, contain and eradicate from civil society the inmate, not as fully human being, but as *individual particle of the violence contagion* threatening to subsume civil society in an *undifferentiated void of nonsense*, and 4) the prison as *a sacrificial stone* meant to displace the internal antagonisms of a social formation that renders lives ever more precarious along a sliding scale, most disastrously impacting those racialized subjects pinned to the lower tier of the United States' class register - that allow us to think the prison differently; to capture in discourse an element of the contemporary carceral that has escaped us. The prison as the expression of a collectively organized and thrashing violence emanating from within civil society, for its own reasons and according to its own constitutive, neoliberal logics. To make plain an understanding of the prison not as a warehouse, but as a brutalizing machine productive of varied death-states:

social, psychological and biological. The intent of this work has been to conceptualize the prison through the standpoint of my own epistemological position as an excon, subjective as it may be, as one amongst many, many millions who have been processed through it – chewed up, digested, excreted – focusing attention on those elements of the incarcerated experience that may not register as primary to an outsider, or perhaps may not even raise to a level of critical awareness no matter how well intentioned and politically astute the critic. To supplement critical analyses of the prison with a view from its bloody insides that is something more than a personal narrative or some piece of disaster tourism meant to provoke merely liberal sentimentality or pity but is in itself largely devoid of theory and contextualization; a position I associate with an implicit injunction to “leave the thinking to the experts.” As if all an excon should do is give rich detail and eyewitness accounts for criminologists/anthropologists/sociologists, etc. to examine and interpret.

Instead, a seizing of that critical theory that I have come across over the last twenty or so years in my own intellectual exploration and thinking through the prison, that spoke to my experience, and an attempt to read my own carceral pinning and abandonment through these theoretical frames. Even if not explicitly referencing the experience of state imprisonment, as with the work of Giorgio Agamben, René Girard and Roberto Esposito, the parallels between their idea sets and the experience of being in prison I found to be uncanny; in fact, I couldn't read their works without immediately recognizing how their concepts illuminated elements of my own incarceration, couldn't help but to use them to make sense of it. This work has attempted to register and inscribe the overwhelming experience of being abandoned towards an indifferent death within the carceral hell pit, and to let the affect-state of my abandonment

direct and organize my own thought and critical inquiry; to let the experience of imprisonment – capture, immobilization, subjection to death-producing technologies, etc. - guide the theorization and let it foreground those organizing principles of contemporary carcerality as *revealed* through and to my particular embedded subject position. Said as simply and straightforwardly as I can, as inmates we were *abandoned* outside of the law through having been seized by it, a strange and counter-intuitive dialectical reversal interior to the application of the law itself. We were constantly and everywhere within carceral space *pitted against one another*, a punishment more severe than that imposed by any court - in fact, universally subverting it. We were treated as less-than-fully-human, as if *contagious*, infected with the violence disease most primarily, amongst a series of attributed literal and metaphoric contaminations and handled from a safe remove; repeatedly forced to traverse the interior catacombs/quarantines of the prison, inside and back out of ever-deeper and darker, isolative lock-ups, a closed carceral circuit of profound and tortuous despair. What did any of this experience have to do with my sentence? And as the dominant punishment mechanism to which I was subjected was not officially sanctioned by any state court, but existed as a kind of unspoken yet everywhere accepted normality as “just the way it is in prison,” where did this savage underside of the law come from? What forces overdetermined this experiential carceral reality and stabilized it?

To do time was also to be surrounded by a series of *emergent forms of violence and myriad forms of death*. Stripped of our rights universally (social death), and regularly of our sanity (psychological death), and sometimes, even our breath (biological death). These experiences and affective states demanded an accounting. What exactly was this place of

reddened wrath and hidden tears in which I was forcefully entombed? What was happening in this dismal and violently explosive space? Not only to me or to any individual inmate, but as type, as “inmate population” in any particular California prison, or as a subpopulation of the larger social formation? What logics organized the carceral environment and our collective experiences universally, no matter the particular crime charged nor sentence imposed? And, in order to make these experiences signify something beyond the mere aesthetics of a torture porn, I intended to break the solipsism of inmate experience, or the consensus belief that what happens in prison is somehow disconnected from what happens outside of its walls. Instead, what did this violence that we were subjected to have to say, if anything, about the larger social formation that is United States civil society? It’s desires? A civil society in which the contemporary prison emerges as a temporarily stable assemblage, like a whirlpool forming above the drain of an emptying bath tub - appearing as distinct and as an autonomous thing, but only materialized as through the interplay of the social, economic and cultural forces which surround it?

The result, in this analysis, is a shift in focus. It is the creation of new concepts that intend, first and foremost, to shift critical understanding of the contemporary prison from a largely *passive* institution, statically warehousing people, towards a recognition of the prison as an *active* thanatopolitical project or whirring machine issuing varied sacrificial deaths for those bodies and subjects rendered superfluous under neoliberalism: the racialized subproletariat, the mentally ill or perhaps non-normative, and those otherwise abandoned human beings by an ever-restructuring and flesh-purging capital. We move explicitly into the theoretical realm of the biopolitical when we recognize that these myriad forms of carceral death are realized not

for their own sake and disconnected from civil society, but so that others, citizen-subjects of our white-supremacist sociality, may *live*. Carceral rendering of human flesh not as disconnected from us, somewhere “out there” that happens to “them,” but as an incision into the body politic to promote its (although delimited) health and vitality. That carceral violence and death is the primary precondition that makes contemporary American life possible through the sacrifice of some “others” (amongst a host of other alternatives or ways to organize the state and social life), if only a particular and qualified form of life for those citizen-subjects as embedded and constituted within the American project. And as opposed to a sociological or criminological analysis which stops at the fence, emphasizing primarily how people came to be in prison in the first place and a silence as to the experience within the Blackened death-box, an emphasis on the violence *within* the prison guiding and framing the theorization, *revealing of carceral logics through the yard and back out*. Through the violence. Through the atrocity, responsibility for which is normally laid at the feet of its victims, the inmate population. Or written off by a more liberal-minded or humanist critique as yes, the responsibility of inmates, but an entirely understandable phenomena based on a series of individual traumas experienced (familial, social, psychological etc.). Instead, responsibility for the atrocity placed back where it belongs – inmate-on-inmate violence not as a predictable consequence stemming from some fundamental inhumanity, a less-than-fully-human savagery of inmates as different ontological type or as trauma response of profoundly damaged *individuals* (although it may be that, in part), but inmate-on-inmate violence as the perfectly predictable, and ideologically essential, consequence of the carceral state’s very organizational schema for the series of lawless spaces that it totalizes and administers. Prison violence as an overdetermined and emergent

phenomenon, guaranteed within state-established conditions. As opposed to a position wholly denied access to the thresher, the preferred observation position to the carceral state for any attempted critical analysis of the prison for transparent reasons, the denial of transparency, a view from inside of its grinding jaw, shank in hand. I argue that one cannot adequately speak of the prison, the thing-in-itself *and* its societal function, unless one takes account of the absolute horrific perversity of interior-to-the-prison violence, the ripping apart of one another to which we were all subjected, no matter the crime nor the sentence; a state technology reminiscent of nothing less than an organized Hieronymus Bosch hellscape. That is, viewing the prison as a warehouse as opposed to a death machine obscures its *societal* function. The carceral state is a machinic and bladed blender of human bodies. The war of all against all, staged and manufactured in *state*-totalized spaces, is a *state*-organized and emergent barbarity. Inmate-on-inmate violence is not evidence of some ontological savagery, nor is it simply the result of concentrating traumatized, or otherwise-ruined individuals. Thrown into the prison, carceral logics *overtake*. Each and every one, no matter the person, is made either a victim or an executioner within sacrificial logics. Inmate-on-inmate violence is a statecraft, the weaponization and steering of what Ruth Wilson Gilmore calls “organized abandonment,” distilled and exemplified through the gladiator fight through which I began this inquiry, but not exclusively. These logics saturate the prison, calling forth myriad forms of violence within the carceral perimeter, all of the particular and local manifestations from individual fights up through full-scale prison riots merely nested parts of a whole that when taken together reveal the contemporary prison as nothing less than a (sub)population culling tool, as daunting and

outrageous as it sounds. A penitentiary scythe slashing through neoliberalized and white-supremacist social space.

It should also be recognized that the hands that pound and shape this work are stained with a blood that, without having been pinned within that detestable thresher, simply would not have been spilt. Whether it was their blood or my own, which at this point, is indistinguishable and thickened and covers us all. Instead, as I have attempted to write about the prison as *the* stabilizing and reproducing institution for neoliberalized U.S. civil society, I have also occupied a scarred subject position that sees the prison as through the gore in my eye, red and purple tinted, and tried to make sense of what I, and those who were with me, felt, saw, heard, smelled, tasted and experienced. The prison is nothing but metal and blood. The taste of metal as blood accumulates in the mouth, hot and cold simultaneously, ragefully spit against concrete and filth-stained floors under piercing, unyielding halogen lights that are left on twenty-four hours a day reflecting off of unforgiving steel and putrid wash basins. Inhuman. Whirring cameras and wet iron. A plunging and nauseating fear into a bottomless desperation that tries to get on top of things, which looks sometimes like unreasonable rage. It always has its reasons. Throbbing and pointed bone contusions in shoulder joints or the soft part of the thigh and on the forehead that swells over the eyes; shattered teeth and a screeching pain as one draws an exasperated breath in the midst of a struggle to the death that one wants no part of in the first place, that one is forced into through one's very embeddedness. Held down and screaming towards the vacated heavens for mercy. The contemporary prison is the perfect degradation of human beings through a forceful unleashing them upon one another – whether in the SHU pit, the cell or the yard. It is a bestialization

within refortified concrete and razor-wired spaces ravenous for flesh. In darkened corners that have not seen the sanitizing effects of daylight since their erection, always damp, whether freezing or sweltering. Don't speak to me of panoptic systems, there is no docility here, in the prison. So much Shame. Absolute madness and the breaking of human beings. A normalized, cortisol-saturating and body seizing terror to which one either succumbs and implodes and is psychologically or physically crushed, or explodes out from. No other choice exists. Spasmodic violence and death. The prison simply should not exist. Not in any society dedicated towards achieving any ideal of justice, however we may come to define and instantiate the term. And if we have any genuine interest in building a more decent society, we *must* begin with dismantling the prison, stone by stone, until nothing is left but the hauntings of those who survived the place. And let the prison die with our memories of it.

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