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Illegalist Praxis

Notes on a Decade of Crime

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(I am, on occasion, asked about my time in with the worlds of the lawless. And while reticent to discuss any current activities that might be construed, by anyone, as being illegal; I realize that as regards my earlier shenanigans, the statute of limitations is in my corner. Before I begin, a disclaimer or two, first I never knowingly physically harmed anyone. Material harm? Property harm? Different story. Second, most of my criminal activities were driven by survival, in some cases by desperation—the need to eat, to obtain shelter, to keep a needle in my arm. It was only later that I realized the political ramifications of these actions; their moment as a rejection of nation-state and Capital. In effect, their resonance.—pzs)

Basic Terms

Robbery- Usually armed. The use of force or the threat of the use of force to get money or goods from a store or a person. Considered sloppy, violent, usually counter-productive by most of the people I ran with. Why threaten a person or business when you can walk away unharmed by just outsmarting them?

Burglary- Breaking into, entering, and relieving a domicile, office, or business of valuable property or cash.

Burn and Return- Shoplifting valuable goods from a store and then returning them for a cash refund. The vast majority of my crime-time fits into this category.

Shoplifting- Relieving a store or business of property (during business hours). Child's play—dangerous and stupid—would you trade a candy bar for a pair of handcuffs?

A quick philosophical footnote, money taken in crime is far sweeter than money earned. The fact that one relies on oneself, or a group, to outthink, outsmart and outbrave some stupid boss and his security precautions turns ill-gotten gains into reward beyond compare. Plus, the hours, while short and nerve wracking, are never boring.

Oddly, one of the best ways to begin a burglary is by getting a job in the store you plan to hit. In general places that have loads of cash, that deal with deposits in a lazy fashion, and that trust you just enough to let you know that the burglary alarms are, "just for show." After a week or two of drudgery, you're ready. The neighborhood is dead quiet at night, there are rear entrances that haven't been used in years, and hopefully those entrances have windows. Timing is key and I recommend between 3 and 4 in the morning on a Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday. The cops are all changing out shifts, the security guards (if any) are drinking coffee somewhere trying to stay awake, and the neighbors are all tucked in their beds. Windows can be easily removed by breaking through the glass with a cloth wrapped hammer and steel bars can be separated using a tire jack. If the back is lit by floodlights unscrew them. For windows placed high, use a car as a boost to reach them. A quick dash into the establishment—to exactly the place where you know the days cash receipts are hid—and out. A peek in the rear view mirror to make sure you you're clean—and gone. Like it never happened. The rewards from burglaries can be surprising, in one short twenty minute stint I walked off with

almost \$5,000. They can also be disheartening, one burglary took almost an hour and netted less than \$300—but that was the exception.

The Burn and Return is a form of crime unique to that bastion of suburban capitalism, the Box Store. In general Box Stores need to appeal to the suburban dweller who fancies him or herself a do-it-yourself type. Therefore their return policies are insanely lax—for the time when Joe Suburb buys an 80 watt fuse when a 40 watt was needed. Further, they usually require no sales receipt, and will dole out up to \$100 so long as person hasn't had a return in the previous week. As a friend of mine often commented, "Home Depot is the junkies ATM." How it goes is this—you saunter through a Box Store looking like a normal customer, pocket something worth about a hundred dollars and exit stage left. Drive to yet another Box Store of the same brand and return the thing. Trick is they will always look at your ID, likely a driver license to make sure that you haven't been returning goods at a freakishly rapid pace. Luckily, in the state I was living when these nefarious goings on occurred, the drivers license number was easily changed with a red felt-tip pen, some cigarette ash and a heart of pure forgery. As an example my driver's license number included three "8's" and these were easily changed to "6's" or "3's." I therefore had a whole universe of numerical permutations to use when returning shit I had stolen. It should be noted that when this was happening in the 90's that none of the Box Stores kept any centralized computer records at all. Going from one Loews to another was like going from one planet to another—"take me to your return line." I should also note that the security at these stores is horrible, one afternoon a group of friends and I, as part of a special order, decamped from a Home Depot with a bathtub, sink and mirror set—and no one paid any attention as we grumbled and pushed the heavy bathroom ensemble through a cordon of screaming theft detectors.

Finally, car theft. While this was an outlier on my experience it was important. Car theft—for law enforcement, is huge—producing its own fateful sounding charge—grand theft auto. Therefore it was only used when absolutely necessary—as in needing a car to reach a window, or to affect a getaway from a Box Store. The trick is, its pretty easy, because people are lazy. None of my friends or me had the skills to actually hot-wire a car, but we didn't need to. At that time an incredible number of people left their cars out on the street, unlocked and with the keys somewhere inside. It was crazy. One time two friends and I walked a street in the dead of night and found no less than three cars—on a single block—we could have stolen. We only took one. It should be noted that we always left the autos, unharmed, somewhere that they would be found—and in one case even left a thank you note. A Camaro I think—it was a sweet ride.

In closing these activities occurred a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away; in the 90's specifically, your criminal experience may vary. In my mind crime functions as a resonance between politics, desperation and fun. And what better way to triangulate insurrection? Many Happy Escapes.