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**Medieval violence and Criminology: using the Middle Ages to understand contemporary 'motiveless' crime.**

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**ABSTRACT**

Traditionally criminology has regarded criminal actions as deriving from rational or opportunistic motivations. However, many crimes are still identified as seemingly 'motiveless'. These frequently feature extreme violence and remorseless perpetrators. The aim of this essay is to adopt an investigation of medieval violence as a tool to explore the sentiments behind contemporary motiveless crime. The article reviews both medieval and contemporary sources. It argues that understanding the spectacle element in medieval violence can help us decode the 'motivelessness' in crime today.

*Key words:* motiveless violence; Middle Ages; Criminology; Transgression; Spectacle

In medieval Europe, torture was not just a form of punishment or a deterrent for serious crimes like treason, sexual violence, homicide and arson, but also a sanguinary, collective experience: ordinary people would gather together in order to witness the torments inflicted upon the criminal. The delinquent's abdomen could be sawed when s/he was still alive, the body could be dismembered, eyes excavated, the agonizing body stabbed with incandescent pokers. A thrilled public would take part to this physical and psychological humiliation by insulting the condemned or cheering at the violence... a form of attraction for a society whose social life was based on mainly feudal and religious duties and where entertainment mainly occurred during restricted periods (e.g. festivals). In contemporary Europe, physical violence is no longer a form of 'lawful' control: oppression, segregation or social cleansing have all replaced violence, giving rise, at times, to violent forms of resistance. Society attempts to find motivations for that type of brutal crime that does not emerge as a consequence of unemployment, social inequality, political extremism or poverty; these are, in fact, not only regarded as the cardinal pillars of criminological discussions, but also the main crime explanations that Power finds it easy to engage with. Crime for crime's sake is dismissed as 'motiveless'. Is this really so?

The aim of this essay is to explore how an investigation of violence in the Middle Ages can inform our understanding of 'motiveless' violence today. Has society moved away from the bi-dimensional relationship between deviance and entertainment?

Using a hermeneutic interpretation framework (Gadamer, 2011, Betti, 1955), this essay will explore descriptions of medieval brutality (in both primary and secondary sources, and art), along with contemporary accounts of seemingly 'motiveless' crime. Arguing the importance of language as a mediated means to understand our historical culture, and ourselves, Gadamer (2011) suggested that it is not possible to assess how contemporaries understood a particular historical work. Decades and centuries of interpretation give us a more complex vision of history. This is, however, an opportunity rather than a deficiency: Gadamer claimed this allows us to develop what he defined as truth of self-understanding. Betti (1955) argued that texts are objectified representations of human intentions and to interpret them is to give them life. As interpreters, we may overcome our personal views so that we can ensure our understanding of the text. Finally, this work has considered Lorde's concept of biomythography (Lorde, 1982) in its interpretation of sources: our accounts and interpretations are not simply factual, but are rather shaped by our emotions, culture and imagination. In other words, they are subject to what Du Bose Brunner (1998) calls human resignification, an inevitable reinterpretation of events.

Theoretically, the work will attempt to establish a bridge between medievalism and cultural criminology by discussing the elements of spectacle/carnival, pain and excitement. These elements (as my examples will emphasize) are common features of both medieval and contemporary violence. The essay will raise the question of whether these elements can help us decode the seemingly 'motivelessness' of some contemporary crimes.

Contributions to the study of criminology have emphasized the need to move away from a static administrative approach to the study of crime (Presdee, 2004) to an approach that sets humankind and human emotions at the center of a criminological discourse. Cultural criminology evolved as a response to this need: it looks at criminal behavior and the bodies involved with the criminal justice system in terms of culture. Ferrell (1999) discussed the processes by which crime becomes a form of culture and culture becomes criminalized. Questions about whether graffiti art is 'proper' art or a simple criminal activity are an example of the processes discussed by Ferrell. The birth of cultural criminology has also encouraged scholars to engage with scholarly work on excitement and transgression: in *The Seductions of Crime*, Katz (1988) explored the sensuality of criminal behavior, arguing that emotions (thrills, excitement) constitute the reason for youth crime. Presdee (2000) in *Cultural Criminology and the Carnival of Crime* associated the excitement of transgression with the dynamics of chaos historically underpinning the carnival. In 2003, Young attempted to give a structural context to the notion of transgression as understood by criminology (Young, 2003). In his discussion, however, Young remained within the domains of sociology of deviance and criminology without really attempting to explore the idea of transgression from a more philosophical or historical perspective. Picart (2007) suggested that society's on-going infatuation with evil and blood-lust and the growing popularity of crime favors the emergence of a Gothic criminology.

There is something missing in all this. It is a deep understanding of where these ideas of transgression and excitement come from. Criminology has based its investigation of the reasons for criminal behavior on fairly recent contributions: these come from the field of sociology of deviance or psychology or from statistical analysis. The need to investigate violence in medieval times emerges from the fact that human nature has always embraced aggressive behavior: today we may enjoy scenes of extreme violence in films, but we struggle to understand when individuals actively engage with criminal behaviors that we cannot associate with a rational motivation. Medieval history tells us that nailing a cat to a post was a form of entertainment at the time, as was being

a spectator of a capital punishment display. Today, reports of sadistic behavior, such as cruelty to animals, understandably shock us, mainly because we cannot make sense of them. From a criminological perspective, this inability to discuss violence for violence's sake constitutes the starting point of my discussion. Georges Bataille's work on Eroticism (1957/2002), Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection (1980/1982) and Roger Caillois' idea of the festival (1959/2001) all attempt to define the euphoric experience of transgression; they tell us how its fascination has always been part of our social landscape. They argued that historically humankind has always had a tendency to be fascinated by transgressive acts: these provoke both revulsion and curiosity. The need to transgress is almost 'healthy': society, through the institution of (religious) festivals, has always allowed people to have periods where order and regulations were suspended (eg. carnival before lent). This was done because after the excesses of transgression, people felt the need to go back to law and order. "Moderation is a fatal thing. Nothing works like excess" (Wilde, 1892/1996): law and order were reinforced by the period of excessive debauchery. Whereas the contrast between "despair and distracted joy, between cruelty and pious tenderness" (Huizinga, 1979: 10) seem acceptable in medieval times, they are no so easily digestible today. Discussing violence in terms of excitement and spectacle is problematic for various reasons: unlike torture in the Middle Ages, the horrors of the holocaust in War World II have been immortalized in videos and pictures; images of mass graves in various parts of the globe bounce from one continent to another. Violence in medieval times is nowadays romanticized and fantasized (the popularity of TV shows like Game of Thrones prove this point), whereas the images we witness daily remind us of its veracity and brutality. In our visual society, maintaining a desensitized approach to violence is a hard challenge. Not only this: also discussing it (even within the intellectual, 'scientific' ring of academia) can represent a problem. In this respect analyzing the links between violence, excitement and spectacle from a historical perspective can provide a valuable tool: we no longer look at the processes by which contemporary motiveless violence occurs, but we explore the same dynamics in a distant past.

### **A CRIMINOLOGIST'S ATTRACTION TO MEDIEVAL STUDIES.**

Torture as a form of control is not confined to medieval history and, in fact, at the time, torture was less widespread than we may think (Mills, 2005): my choice of establishing a parallelism between the Middle Ages and contemporary society is, however, not a random one: Roman times also witnessed a high level of violence, but, as Larissa Tracy (2012) suggests, accounts of torture and brutality in the Middle Ages bring to the surface not just a lust for blood (as popular culture induces us to believe), but also satire, cultural anxieties and dissent. That analysis of the 'emotions'/experiences attached to medieval torture can encourage and feed a broader criminological discourse on crime and violence as cultural criminology is also pushing for an analysis that explores the satire, the cultural anxiety and the ideological dissent present in crime.

Describing the modes of vision in medieval gothic art and in particular of the way the martyrdom of saints is depicted, Michael Camille suggests how in the Middle Ages people were receptive to the idea of the body "as a theater of torment, a site of incredible horror" (Camille, 1996: 159). He affirms "images of death were produced in a culture ravaged by constant war and quite used to the public spectacle of corporal punishment meted out to miscreants in the public squares of towns. While the naked sexual body was consigned to the margins, the naked, sadistically tormented body, whether of Christ or the saints, was given center stage" (Ibid, p.60). Analogies could be made between medieval visual arts and some of the images we are exposed to in the media:

1. At the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Scene of the Martyrdom of Saint George (c.1400) by Andrés Marçal de Sax explored what we

would today define as the objectification and the commodification of violence. Presdee (2000) gives numerous examples of evidence of the consumer's need for privately consumed violence, humiliation and cruelty. The notion of the grotesque comes to play an important role in the way violence, crime, and pain are consumed. The grotesque refers to the use of the bizarre, the absurd, irony, laughter and excess, dealing with the dichotomy of life and death. Looking at the Martyrdom of Saint George and the grinning of one of the executioners, we are reminded of the fascination we have today (as perhaps in Medieval times) for the grotesque and for the *modus operandi* of violent suffering. In the grotesque executioners of Saint George, we can see, for instance, the spectacle of death produced by the contemporary exhibition *Body Worlds* by pathologist Gunter von Hagens. This exhibition displays real human bodies and body parts preserved using a plastination method. Attended by millions of visitors around the world, the exhibition triggered various controversies regarding the use of cadavers and their display as art artifacts.

2. The 'transi' tomb of Cardinal de la Grange at the Petit Palais, Avignon visualizes the decomposition of the dead body of the Bishop. We know from some drawings held at the Vatican library that four heads in different stages of putrefactions were located above the main body of the piece. The inscription starts with the word 'spectaculum', indicating, according to Camille (1996), that this decomposition of the body was certainly a spectacle to be seen. Analogously, contemporary news images tell us stories of death and decay in parts of Africa and the Middle East afflicted by war. The death of 26-year-old Lt. Muath Al-Kaseasbeth is an unfortunate example of this: burnt to death by Islamic State militants, his torture was recorded on video (Hendawi, 2015).

Medieval art had various functions: it was a celebration of Christ and the Bible, a way for the artist to be closer to God through his/her art; it was also a way to study the body and its functions. Medieval artists insisted on painting the dying Christ or the dying saints and made sure the decomposing body was exaggeratedly represented; it had a pedagogical valence, both in terms of helping illiterate people visualize the passages of the Bible or in terms of visually describing what would happen to a potential criminal. Merback (1999: 104) emphasizes how in medieval times, perceptions and feelings aroused by devotional art were channeled and expressed through the various elements of *iustitia*: the spectacle of pain, penance, expiation and redemption.

The combination of disgust, horror and attraction is a constant throughout our social history. The martyred body, sacred or profane, sickens us, yet makes us curious. Merback (1999: 113), again suggests "with a macabre curiosity unmatched in history of art, numerous late medieval painters applied their illusionistic skills to the problem of creating wounds whose severity and gruesomeness could expose the perviousness of the body and [...] attract the spectator's gaze like powerful magnets". Carroll (1992: 85) believes that our fundamental pleasure with respect to horror fiction is a matter of fascination with the transgressive: we are attracted to what is horrific in virtue of this specific horrific value. Horror for horror's sake.

The Journal d'un Bourgeois de Paris, 1405-1449, is a valuable source for, I believe, historians and criminologists alike. The text, in fact, contains descriptions of events happening in Paris in the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The manuscript is full of descriptions of spectacular punishments and execution rituals:

1. On the 7<sup>th</sup> October 1409, Jehan de Montagu, *grant maistre d'oste du roy de France*, was executed for treachery. Two trumpeters escorted him to Les Halles, the market area, before he was beheaded and his torso exposed. Huizinga (1979) highlights how executions were astutely staged so that people were not left without the effect of assisting at a theatrical spectacle.

2. On the 12<sup>th</sup> June 1418, Bernard D'Armagnac, *le connestable de France*, in the course of a popular insurrection, ended up in a despicable death: his body was exposed to the violence of the population for three days, dragged around the streets of Paris, and left to rest in the middle of manure. Whereas this behavior would be dismissed as something belonging to a distant past where people did not have the same level of empathy as we do, contemporary accounts of prolonged violence are explained in terms of mental impairment (the perpetrator must be mad to engage in those actions). This could be true in some incidents, but could this always be the case? Almost 600 years after the execution of Bernard D'Armagnac, another example of prolonged spectacular violence (again performed by 'authority') raise similar points: the acts of systematic, sadistic torture and abuse performed by American soldiers on the Iraqi inmates of Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq in 2003 (Hersh, 2004) could be interpreted as either the actions of an unstable mind or the product of thrill/excitement.

The graphic description or *mise en scene* of the martyrdom of Saints or the punishment of offenders represents a further useful tile in the historical discussion of the relationship between pain and spectacle in contemporary crime. According to Enders (1999: 172), medieval religious drama renegotiates the spectacle of brutality as something joyful, cathartic and even musical. In a way, it is possible to argue that we witness an 'inversion' of values, where what is deemed 'sadistic', 'cruel' or 'abominable' becomes metabolized or even celebrated. For example, the story of St Alban and St Amphibal in the *Legenda Aurea*, a collection of hagiographies written by Jacobus de Voragine in 1483, describes the cruel calvary endured by St Amphibal: his brutal torture serves as a means to reach something holy (martyrdom). This inversion of values (where perpetrators of a crime regard their actions as 'positive'/purposive) can also be noticed in contemporary cases, like ritualistic killings (see the murders of a mother and two sons in Florida in July 2015<sup>1</sup>).

According to Nerbano (1997), we can talk of a gothic naturalism in relation to the morbid insistence in which macabre details of the death of Christ are displayed in drama. Nudity and torture contribute to sketch an exhibitionist sanguinary realism. It seems that medieval theatre, painting and contemporary crime have in common a curiosity for violent, gory details. Enders (1999), again, goes back to the idea that medieval drama gives violence a positive value. From a criminological perspective, this is an important aspect, a point of reference for contemporary crime. For the medieval man and woman, violence was positive because through violence Christ died for humanity or through violence justice was preserved: it had a pedagogical, yet amusing, valence. However, violence was still consumed and enjoyed, even though fear was not completely excluded from this process: criminology does not digest well this notion of 'positive value', which can be interpreted as willing engagement in a contemporary carnival of brutality. The London riots in 2011, for instance, moved beyond their sense of protest to become a frenzy of violence: some participants relished in looting, destroying and 'doing' violence. If we accept to consider this aspect, we may look at cases of seemingly 'motiveless' crime from a new angle. The medieval man and woman allowed themselves to engage with brutality as a form of entertainment. If we apply the notion of entertainment to crime, we no longer need to fit crime into a specific rational and opportunistic box: the burning of the Jordan pilot by the Islamic State in early 2015 is no longer just a brutal political message, but it also brings to surface a crafted spectacle of pain.

Old French Fabliaux (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century) are another good example that can be employed when drawing a parallel between medieval times and contemporary times. The

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<sup>1</sup> A 77-year-old Florida woman and her two sons were killed in their house. The crime has been defined as 'ritualistic' and linked to the blue moon in July 2015 (Associated Press, Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> August 2016).

use of a sexual and obscene violence makes the audience laugh: they laugh at the sight of castration, at the nudity, at the torture and the punishments. All this is constructed in the form of spectacle. Pain adopts a humoristic valence, in spite of its legal side. Today TV shows like Game of Thrones, 'real TV' programs showing people laughing at others' injuries and accidents and video games have replaced the fabliaux. Violence still displays a level of humor and entertainment, but its educative side is no longer there. When the element of humor is displayed in crime, criminological discourses do not take it into consideration: frequently explanations are sought in more traditional sociological approaches.

Medieval literature demonstrates a voyeuristic attitude towards violence. The value of this violence has, however, an entertainment nature. The links among pain, spectacle and laughter are well established in historical and philosophical literature. Plato argued that comedy amalgamates pleasure and pain. The 'comical' is malicious: it induces a mental pain where the man who feels it is pleased by his neighbor's misfortune (Plato, td Frede, D. 1993). Bakhtin (1984) suggests that laughter was extremely important in the medieval carnivals, as it would pull together various elements of the festive imagery: the banquet, the market, the grotesque and the body. Georges Bataille (1985) in his sociological essays described the fundamental role of laughter in transforming repulsive forces into attractive ones. Tracy (2012: 191) emphasizes how "medieval comedy is often the refuge for gratuitous violence where pain is [inflicted] without any consequences, where an audience can laugh at the discomfort". Comedy is the channel through which violent voyeurism can be articulated: the 'spectacle' allows us to watch and consume pain and repulsion. The medieval theater has today become the virtual theater of YouTube, where we can consume the grotesque spectacle of the body being subject to distress in an anonymous manner (e.g. videos of beheading of civilians by the Islamic State have been widely watched). This attractive repulsion can be a fundamental element in our understanding of seemingly 'motiveless' violence as well. Witnessing the infliction of physical pain was accepted and understood in medieval times, but our contemporary uneasiness with the practice prevents us from publicly understanding this in relation to crime. It is not just out of respect for the victims of these crimes, but also because assessing this approach in a neutral methodical manner is very challenging. In this respect, looking at humanity's past can help cast light on our present. After all, our ancestors probably shared our fears and our fascinations.

## **VIOLENCE FOR VIOLENCE'S SAKE: A SELECTED OVERVIEW FROM 5<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY TO PRESENT TIME.**

Based on the principle that we probably share similar sentiments to our medieval ancestors, I will now outline a series of seemingly 'motiveless' criminal cases in both medieval and contemporary times. The common denominators are the sense of excitement, pain and spectacle– they are all examples of 'thrill killing'.

The idea of spectacle of pain not only brings to the surface the infringement of rules, but it also highlights those inner factors that lead to illegal activities. According to Bataille (2002), as previously pointed out, it is exciting to infringe the limit, we feel pleasure and we are fulfilled. Humankind has a natural tendency not to conform to rules and rebel against the social order and in doing so experiences enjoyment. This is what Bataille (2002) defined as *la fête*, the release of tension, a liberation from order, and what Kristeva (1982) defines as the discharge of the pollution of identity. This "liberation" is exciting. The following stories all seem to fit into this theoretical background.

### *Zu Shenatir*

Frequently considered the first serial killer in the history of humanity (Newton, 2006), Zu Shenatir lived in 5<sup>th</sup> century Yemen, where, according to accounts, he

attracted young boys to his home with the promise of money and food. He sodomized them and then killed them by throwing them out of the window.

*Peeter Stubbe, the Werewolf of Bedburg*

A 15<sup>th</sup> century German farmer, Peeter Stubbe was accused of incest, cannibalism and the murder of children and pregnant women. He claimed he drank blood and ate foetuses and scattered limbs of children and women around the fields of nearby villages (Orenstein, 2002).

*Peter Niers*

In 1581 a notorious Bavarian criminal, Peter Niers was subjected to a particularly gruesome three day execution, following his cannibalistic and murderous acts. He killed and/or helped to kill approximately 75 people, including pregnant women, whose foetuses would be ripped from their bodies (Wiltenburg, 2012).

*Richard Ramirez aka The Night Stalker*

A self professed Satan worshipper, Richard Ramirez was sentenced to death for murder, sexual assault and child molestation in 1989. AC/DC's song 'Night Prowler' became his personal anthem (Newton, 2006: 219), which allowed media to reinforce the connection between his actions and metal music.

*The Eliza Jane Murder*

In 2006, two teenage girls were accused of murdering their friend Eliza Jane in Western Australia; in the course of the trial, it emerged that the two girls were interested in emo music and forensic science. They did not display any sense of remorse for their action, but stated they simply wanted to experience what killing would feel like (Fleming, 2007).

*Dexter-mördaren (The Dexter Killer)*

In 2010 a 21-year-old Swedish girl stabbed her father to death. After her arrest, she stated that she had a passion for the American TV series Dexter. From her diary it emerged she felt a desire to experience killing somebody (The Local, 2011).

*James Holmes*

Obsessed with Batman, James Holmes admitted he identified himself with the Joker following his theatrical spree killing during the screening of the last Batman film in Colorado in 2012. Prior to the events, he told a classmate he would like to kill people (The Associated Press, 2013). He also had questions about how Batman would select and kill his victims (was it random or did it follow a 'logic'?).

By looking at cases of murder and how they are portrayed in the media, one notices how problematic it is to find a way that is neutral and non moralistic to report and discuss killings that do not fit into traditional sociological and criminological parameters: there is no apparent motive for each crime, and the crime seems emotionless. Perpetrators lack remorse. Emphasis is drawn to the subcultural or theatrical element. While this can be identified as 'thrill killing' by psychology, other social sciences do not necessarily find this discourse easy to implement.

In order to discuss this typology of crime, we should employ a narrative that emphasizes the philosophical and historical element of excitement, rather than a sociological narrative of deviance. Historical accounts of violence inform us of its diverting nature. Attiring our cases with traditional sociological elements does not increase our comprehension of these acts. Perpetrators do not hold an opportunistic motivation to commit crime, but they seem to indicate they are fascinated by the implementation of violence and death.

Autopsies on bodies of victims of extreme violence, for instance, reveal that the way the bodies are tortured to death indicates an escalation of aggression: the attacker clearly does not plan the attack and progressively “gets into it”, almost as if s/he gets excited by doing it. There is something in here that indicates a tendency to perform atavistic violence and to enjoy it. Where is this coming from? Is there something imprinted in our “historical genes”<sup>2</sup> that can help theorize and understand violence for violence’s sake? In 14<sup>th</sup> century Paris, the students of the Norman nation<sup>3</sup> of the University asked their members if they should launch an attack against members of another university nation: one clerk ended up being wounded and another one died (Muchembled, 2012): a youth rivalry served as excuse to engage with a violent conflict. In the course of the medieval Festival of the Boy Bishop, young clerics would celebrate eclectic parodist rites in church and, then, would go out beating up any women they met in order to ensure the fertility of both women and fields. Rites of violence seemed to be infrequent, but, at the same time, not outside the norm. A discussion on the elements that underpin medieval violence, such as its rituality, its grotesqueness, its recreational function, especially in the forms of carnival, festivals, comic songs and stories, can help to decode some elements of contemporary crimes: the transgressive cultural necessity of carnival in everyday life (Presdee, 2000). Through the exploration of medieval violence we can metabolize the ceremonial interplay between order and disorder, transgression and excess. In other words, we can understand some individuals’ lust for blood and violence.

## CONCLUSIVE REFLECTIONS

Rational choice theories of crime taught us that transgressive behavior is the product of rationality. Nonetheless, when we are faced with particularly cruel crimes, examples of which have been listed further above, a rational approach does not necessarily explain crime motivations. Consequently, I proposed in this essay to look at our medieval past in order to employ medieval violence as an interpretative tool to encourage a discussion around the issues of ‘motivelessness’ and crime spectacularization. In so doing, I attempted to identify the sentiments behind the consumption of brutality and what we would define as irrationality. In particular, I explored the elements of excitement, pain and spectacle, which can be associated to seemingly ‘motiveless’ crimes.

In the course of this work, I referred to some examples, but many more could have been chosen: a shooting by a man in Brazil in April 2011 killed 12 children aged between 10 and 13; in April 2011 a gunman murdered 6 people before killing himself in the Netherlands; July 2011 saw a man bombing the government buildings in Oslo and then killing 69 young people in Utøya Island, Norway. Anders Breivik, the perpetrator, was part of a neo-medieval paramilitary group called Knights Templar; in December 2012, 26 people, adults and children, were killed in an elementary school in Connecticut by Adam Lanza; We witnessed protests ending up in riots in London in 2010 and 2011 and, recently, riots in Syria, Turkey, Greece and Brazil; violence employed by Islamic State militants (e.g. use of decapitation) seems to be chosen more to satisfy television standards, rather than solely military strategies.

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<sup>2</sup> The use of the word ‘genes’ should not be understood in biological terms, but in a figurative manner.

<sup>3</sup> During the Middle Ages, university nations were corporations of students, similar to university societies (UK) or fraternities (US). Usually, students coming from similar backgrounds chose the same nation (e.g. the Norman nation for Norman-born students). All main medieval universities, like Bologna, Oxford or Padua had some. The university of Paris had initially four nations: Norman, English, French and Picards. Violent confrontations or rivalries among nations were quite common.



Examination of medieval violence and crime today can be connected to what Bakhtin (1984) called the 'second life of people'. In this second life, transgressions are articulated and come out. This second life is where our irrationality resides. Criminology should acknowledge that the world of irrationality is also the world of crime. We seem to accept violence as a form of entertainment when it comes to cinema, music or literature, but we do not see this element when it comes to real cases. Tracy (2012: 192) suggests, "Satire and parody are common motifs of medieval comic literature, as common people get one over on their 'betters' and social structures are subverted and inverted as means of either comic relief or social commentary". As in seemingly motiveless crimes (where the transgressive experience is turned upside down) evil, crime and violence are regarded by the perpetrators as positive experiences and justifications for their actions, whereas order, limits and regulations are perceived as intoxicating forces<sup>4</sup>. Enders (1999: 171) talks about an "enactment of the cathartic pleasures of pain". As medieval society recognized a potential entertainment value in the pedagogy of physical punishment and pain, so we need to acknowledge that some individuals may see a potential recreational nature in crime. This ludic side of criminal behavior also constitutes a criminal motivation.

In the course of this work I also referred to the experience of festivals, carnivals and theater in connection to criminal rationales. Bakhtin (1984) saw the carnival as something that went beyond a simple festivity. The carnival would suspend any social dynamics: no status, no power, no prestige, everybody is equal. The carnival reverses the make-up of society norms. It was an important part of existence where the scattered fragments of rationality could be subverted in the name of the celebration of the incomprehensible. In different époques and locations, visual arts seem to have embraced this approach: Bruegel's painting *The Fight between Carnival and Lent* (1559), John Bock's performance *Lütte mit Rucola* (2006) or the film *The Purge* (2013) are just some examples of this inversion. Understanding the central role these festivities played in the past can help us appreciate some individuals' thirst for the grotesque, for the transgressive and the irrational.

Like us, medieval people experienced both revulsion and disgust over violence, which contain(ed) an element of excitement; these could be represented or actual. However, the association between physical punishment and entertainment was neither unfamiliar nor shocking to them. In line with the expression of historical genes I mentioned earlier, it seems that proximity to violence re-enacts this 'inherited' trait: for medieval people this proximity was physical, 'pedagogical' (legal) and holy (the passion of Christ). For us, this violence is more virtual: when some individuals engage with it, on one side we 'consume' it, on the other side, we seek to understand it without resorting to thrill/excitement.

This allows me to advance the idea of carnival of crime<sup>5</sup> elaborated by Presdee (2000) by integrating it with a discussion on medieval spectacles of pain in order to create a criminological discourse that considers how historically violence has been represented and experienced and how we can apply this knowledge to analyze contemporary cases. In more simple words, I advocate the use of the ideas of thrill/excitement for criminological purposes.

Talking about a transhistorical Middle Ages, Mills (2005) believes that the middle ages possess elements of continuity with the present. A medieval criminological approach would make our analyses less static because a look into history would offer us the ability to explore crime without the scaffolding imposed by traditional criminology and sociology.

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<sup>4</sup> De Sade was of the same opinion. In *Justine*, he puts forward the argument that the real good is doing crime and order is violence against the self.

<sup>5</sup> The process by which contemporary society engages with violence, both consumed or performed

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