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The Carceral Resistance Manifesto

In 2017, there was approximately 2.3 million people incarcerated in America. The United States prison system has the largest prison population in the world. French philosopher Michel Foucault states that the modern prison came about after the creation of the human sciences, which are bodies of knowledge that have man as their subject. Psychiatry, criminology, sociology, psychology and medicine are the main human sciences. Together, the human sciences create a regime of power that controls and describes human behavior in terms of "norms". By setting out what is "normal", the human sciences also create the idea of abnormality. Through this, the human sciences created a power over those deemed to be abnormal, different, deviant, and criminal from "normal" society. This was the birth of the beast, the modern day penitentiary that has evolved and continues to grow in today's western society.

In a world of electronic monitors, predictive policing, interagency data sharing, hidden cameras and registries, the tentacles of the beast extend beyond the walls of the jail or penitentiary. In this brave new world of mass incarceration, no space is safe anymore, and in time, your own house will be your prison. Your block will be your prison. Your school will be your prison. Your neighborhood... your city... your state... your country will be your prison. The promise of walls being built do not just function to keep people out, walls also function to keep people in. The oppressors of the world want to control more than just our bodies. The oppressors aim to own our privacy, and in so doing, eventually own our very souls, the essence that gives a human the power to recognize themselves as a unique being in the universe. In a society in which **surveillance** and **monitoring** are becoming the accepted norms of everyday life, the oppressor perpetuates the fantasy that new forms of confinement, isolation, and surveillance will somehow set us all free, it is getting harder and harder to see that we have given up our privacy for an illusion of safety.

Since the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the oppressors have used strategies to stoke fear of black and brown people into the minds of the American public, and have mercilessly implemented laws designed to specifically incarcerate men of color. Mercilessly because although the target was designed for the incarceration of black and brown bodies, the beast known as the prison industrial complex, has no problem swallowing up low income white people as well as large amounts of white drug users. The only color that matters these days is green. In 1975, Michel Foucault predicted that the prison would evolve into a system of mass control of bodies and their movements, a control that would extend beyond the prison walls and penetrate into society. Indeed the eyes and ears of the carceral system exist on nearly every street of every city in America in the form of cameras, satellites, and social media. The modern carceral system controls not just the bodies of its prisoners, but aims to control the bodies and minds of the upstanding citizen as well. It achieves this by constant observation, characterized by the "unequal

gaze,” specifically designed so that the prisoner could never be sure whether they are being observed at any moment. The unequal gaze causes the internalization of disciplined individuality in a person, meaning one is less likely to break rules or laws if they believe they are being watched, even if they are not.

Mass incarceration created mass surveillance, which in time evolved into the prison industrial complex. The prison industrial complex has an economic stronghold in its inclusion and participation of private prisons that benefit from the exploitation of prison labor. For private businesses, prison labor is like a pot of gold. No strikes. No union organizing. No health benefits, no unemployment insurance, no workers' compensation to pay. No language barriers. As the prison population grows, a rising rate of incarceration feeds small and large businesses such as providers of furniture, transportation, food, clothes, medical services, construction and communication firms. All making money off of the misery prisoners.

The prison industrial complex has also been linked to rising numbers of detained immigrants along the U.S. southern border. The separation of immigrant children from their parents is another example of the merciless tactics used by the system to create profits. Also linked to the PIC is the school to prison pipeline, one of the explanations for the disproportionate arrest and incarceration of people of color and people with lower socioeconomic status, which generally proposes that practices in public schools, such as [zero-tolerance](#) policies, police in schools, and [high-stakes testing](#), are direct causes of students [dropping out](#) of school and, subsequently, committing crimes which lead to their arrest.

One might ask how can artists, and the arts in general, make any difference in slowing the carceral systems hunger for control of all human movement in this country. But the fact that the arts stand apart from the bodies of knowledge that may have had a part in creating what we consider social “norms,” is proof that the arts have a stronger influence than we think. Here are 5 ways in which artists and activists can use the arts to reduce recidivism, which can be described as the revolving door strategy the system uses to keep prisoners from being completely free from its grasp.

1. We must attempt to reduce recidivism on three fronts. Combat the school to prison pipeline by implementing more art programs in inner city schools. Zero-tolerance' policies criminalize minor infractions of school rules, while cops in school lead to students being criminalized for behavior that should be handled inside the school. Students of color are especially vulnerable to push-out trends and the discriminatory application of discipline. Also, studies have shown that Arts programs enable young students to exercise creative thinking as well as thinking critically in regards to emotional expression. A statistic that is overlooked in inner city children is the fact that they have been directly impacted by the prison system. Many children grow up watching their parents get arrested and the trauma of a prison visitation room has been reported to stay in the mind of young people for years after the fact. A strong artistic curriculum within

large school districts, such as LA Unified, could offset the school to prison pipeline and install creative, critical, and emotional thinking strategies within young children.

2. Take the arts directly to the prisoner. Drumming, dance lessons, painting and theater classes—thanks to the Arts-in-Corrections program, a joint effort of the California Arts Council and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, are just some of the artistic offerings available to inmates at 19 of California’s 34 state prisons. The project, which launched in the summer of 2018 after a two-year pilot, aims to **reduce recidivism rates, decrease violence in prisons, and improve inmates’ self-confidence** before they are released. The California Arts Council is responsible for managing the process of putting out requests to the arts community, taking in proposals, reviewing them, and then choosing providers to teach classes. So far it has partnered with 10 organizations, including The Actors’ Gang, a Los Angeles nonprofit theater group led by actor Tim Robbins.

3. Promote and enlighten community engagement with the help of higher education, coupled with the arts in 4 year universities. An example of this can be found at Ucla's prison education program-Launched in 2016, the UCLA Prison Education Program creates innovative courses that enable faculty and students to learn from, and alongside, participants incarcerated at the California Institution for Women (CIW), Barry J. Nidorf (BJN) Juvenile Hall Camp Joseph Scott (CJS) correctional facility for girls, and the Custody to Community Transitional Reentry Program (CCTRP), correctional facility for women. Making post-secondary education accessible to women and young people who are currently incarcerated, and to bring UCLA faculty and students to learn alongside them, thereby challenging bias, discrimination, and injustice in a shared and collaborative learning experience. Out of this program a theater group known as the theater of the oppressed was created to educate the public about the power of the arts in correctional institutions. The programs website reads: “This is an extraordinary opportunity for us to more fully realize UCLA’s mission as a public research institution: to create, disseminate and apply knowledge for the betterment of our global society. Offering an education to incarcerated persons not only reduces suicide rates and sentence lengths, but also brings more voices into our society’s conversations. Debates over the ethics of private prisons, the validity of deterrence as a justification for punishment, and how to reduce the highest rate of imprisonment in human history must be discussed not just hypothetically, by free people, but also by people with experience in the criminal justice system.”

4. Promote Education as an option for parolees, both at the community college level as well as 4 year institutions of higher learning. As mass incarceration has become a legitimate issue that affects all communities, a growing awareness has begun, which has opened small pockets of resistance in the form of education. Opportunity programs aimed specifically towards parolees wanting to return to school, have statistically shown growing success in reducing the percentage of parolees reoffending and returning to prison. Furthermore, inmates who receive aftercare (treatment after imprisonment) have an even greater chance of not recidivating. When combined with treatment that was given during incarceration aftercare can be a very useful tool in recidivism reduction. Some offenders have had a reduced risk of recidivism of up to eighty percent after undergoing aftercare treatment.

5. Allow for parolees and formerly incarcerated students and scholars to control the narrative of their experiences, which can become the instruments for change within correctional institutions. I have personally been rejected in entering county jails, juvenile detention centers, and state prisons due to my past criminal record, even as proof has been shown that incarcerated are more likely to listen and engage with formerly incarcerated individuals about the opportunities that have become available such as financial aid for college, and support groups such as Underground Scholars of UCLA, a student organization comprised of formerly incarcerated students and students who have been directly impacted by the prison system. A strategy of “each one teach one,” can be one of the most useful tools artists and activists can use to show proof to those incarcerated that positive options exists. For many years the system has created a hopeless vision of a future to prisoners with three options: Returning to prison, death, or living in torment and ridicule in a society that has made a habit of throwing people away. What groups like the prison education program and underground scholars offer is a new and positive option of using education to start a new life, and in time, earn something that, unlike time, money, family, or you’re very own body cannot be taken away.

