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VISIBILITY AND OBSCURITY WITHIN THE SURVEILLANCE REGIME OF THE U.S. PRISON

U.S. penitentiaries are physical and imagined objects of fascination. Dramatic images of life in jail are highly available in the popular and public imaginary, yet the lives of typical prisoners remain obscured from public view. Through media portrayals—both fictional and 'real'—the public is led to visualize the prison primarily in terms of sensational physical violence. Although most large U.S. penitentiaries are located far from the main population centers, at the edge of rural towns, they are also familiar to many Americans as media images or as curiosities viewed from interstate highways. Certainly, in the immediate context of the communities in which the typical U.S. prison is located, the external physical features of its facilities project a constant message of violence. High-security measures, such as razor-wire fences and gun towers, serve as reminders of a highly salient, yet publicly-unseen, population. The built space of the jail, while physically secluding and obscuring those inside, serves a rhetorical purpose—producing a public image of a dangerous 'other,' a ghostly presence who necessitates such extreme security measures.
This essay examines issues of visibility and obscurity in regard to the present-day "control prison" (Rhodes 2004, 7)—a regime that functions primarily as a means of punitive social exclusion. Kleinman's (1997) anthropological concepts of social violence and social suffering will be used to discuss the diffuse, less-readily-visible, forms of violence which are the product of the social separation created by the prison regime. These anthropological concepts, I contend, are important for "the writer on prisons" (Rhodes 2004, 8) to take up as part of their theoretical vocabulary for scholarly work. They are as well as concepts worth introducing to a more general public, in order to engage more critically with the representations of the prison.
Such engagements with the U.S. prison system are, of course, well established. However, a more nuanced theorization of violence in terms of social coercion and suffering offers an additional, important, orientation which rhetorically depicts the mundane aspects of everyday violence within U.S. prisons as suffered by the prisoners who inhabit them. This may draw attention to the social suffering of prisoners, while at the same time working to sensitize the general public to forms and depictions of violence other than the sensational (where sensationalized depictions further separate prisoners from society).[1] Thinking in terms of social violence is useful in that it advances a holistic cultural perspective in which violence is not seen simply in the usual sense of discrete, interpersonal events. An awareness of social violence—violence as diffuse, including not only acts of commission, but also acts of omission and neglect—expands scholarly writing on prisons, further humanizes the depictions of those who are incarcerated, and helps academic and public readers of prison writing to creatively imagine counterpoints to the structures of violence in a wider range of forms. Thus, a counterpoint to social violence entails not simply the absence of overt physical violence (negative peace), but a substantive social-structural peace. As Kleinman explains, the conceptual lens of social violence works to

> unearth those entrenched processes of ordering the social world and making (or realizing) culture that themselves are forms of violence: violence that is multiple, mundane, and perhaps all the more fundamental because it is the hidden or secret violence out of which images of

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[1] Kleinman (1997) uses the category of social suffering to bring together a range of human problems

> that are usually divided among separate fields, conditions that simultaneously involve health, welfare, legal, moral and religious issues. [Conditions that] destabilize established categories. For example, the trauma, pain, and disorders to which atrocity gives rise are health conditions; yet they are also political and cultural matters. (1997, ix)

> people are shaped, experiences of groups are coerced, and agency itself is engendered. (2000, 239)

The concepts of social violence and social suffering can act as a framework to help us better 'see' or 'think' the U.S. prison system from multiple and interrelated levels: e.g. its physical structures (external and internal); everyday micro-political interactions; political-historical paradigms and so on. Putting an emphasis on the mundane and 'everyday' aspect of suffering can also help us to see forms of violence that are generally overlooked precisely because of their unexceptional nature. Part of my interest in this topic comes from my experience teaching a college course in a U.S. prison—an experience which I draw on at the end of this essay.[2]

The image of the prison which perhaps most readily comes to mind is that of the (in)famous Panopticon.[3] In its original design, the purpose of Bentham's project was to engineer an architecture not only for the efficient surveillance of prisoners by guards but also to create a built space that easily afforded access for the "curious at large" (Bentham 2017, 16). Not only would prisoners be exposed, but the entire prison, including the guards, would be open to public view by outside visitors. This is not to say that the overall effect of this ultra-utilitarian design (which was never realized in its original form) would have been emancipatory. The plan called for the individual isolation of prisoners (for what were then believed to be the therapeutic benefits of solitude); and this condition of social separation would have imposed its own form of psychological violence. Nonetheless, this layout allowed for a type of public visibility that was not simply voyeuristic, but rather a response to the democratic question of transparency: "who watches the watchmen?" The point is not to idealize Bentham's prison design, but to identify a historical moment in which the proposal of an everyday relationship between prison life and the general public was at least a possibility in the public imaginary.

In contrast, the contemporary U.S. prison follows a different logic. Here the design is decidedly one of social separation from the outside public, a measure deemed necessary for the functional protection of society through the incapacitation of inmates. This separation is also part of a moral economy of corrective justice which has taken various forms and approaches throughout U.S. history (Irwin 2009, 5).[4] Gilmore (2007) discusses the history of the U.S. prison as a regime designed to produce (albeit unsuccessfully) a certain type of social stability through control.[5] There are four theories of separation and exclusion that serve—according to their own overlapping and conflicting carceral logics—as "explanations for why societies decide they should lock people out by locking them in," these being: retribution, deterrence, rehabilitation, and incapacitation (2007, 13). As Gilmore notes, "These theories relate to each other as reforms—not as steps away from brutality or inconsistency, but as attempts to make prisons produce social stability through the applying of a mix of care, indifference, compulsory training, and cruelty to people in cages" (2007, 14). Of particular interest here—specifically as an example of social separation as social suffering—is incapacitation: "the least ambitious" of the reform theories.

> If the fourth concept [of reform], incapacitation, is not ambitious in a behavioral or psychological sense, it is, ironically, the theory that undergirds the most ambitious prison-building project in

[2] Due to the nature of my engagement in the prison in the capacity of a short-term instructor and not as an ethnographer or researcher, the general composite portrayals based on this experience are interpretive reconstructions from my own point of view and not verbatim accounts of events or conversations. No names of persons or places are given and some descriptive and temporal details have been altered or omitted to maintain anonymity.

[3] For the purpose of this essay, the shorthand term 'the prison' is used as an intentional and convenient figure of speech to stand for the U.S. prison system in general. There are, of course, a variety of prison types and structures in this system.

[4] Following what Clear et al. deem the 20th-century incarceration "fads" that have little to do with any empirically-based social theory (2018, 570).

[5] Gilmore notes the empirical evidence showing a lack of correlation between aggressive incarceration and the ostensibly desired outcomes of lowered crime rates and increased social stability. Moreover, Gilmore argues, "would the prevailing theories [of reform] shift and mingle over time, persistently reforming reformed reforms, if the outcome were stability? Probably not" (2007, 14-15).

> the history of the world. Incapacitation doesn't pretend to change anything about people except where they are. It is in a simple-minded way, then, a geographical solution that purports to solve social problems by extensively and repeatedly removing people from disordered, deindustrialized milieus and depositing them somewhere else. (Gilmore 2007, 14)

Furthermore, as Gilmore documents, 'reform'—however it may have been construed over several centuries of American penal theory (often in terms of producing social control as a stable racial and class hierarchy)—was, in the late 20th century, dropped, even as an ideological pretext. Looking at California as the paradigmatic example, the late 1970s mark an official break from any progressive lawmaking on incarceration. This was the beginning of an era of state legislation in which rehabilitation, although not forbidden outright, was, nonetheless, removed as being of little importance. Thereafter, the stated, explicit "purpose of imprisonment" was punishment (2007, 91-92). Moreover, the earlier progressive reform efforts of the first half of the 1970s, which had aimed to improve prisoners' conditions, not only elicited conservative reaction, but also took the form of liberal 'reform' legislation that ultimately led to the expansion of California's carceral system. Gilmore summarizes this conservative reaction and liberal reform thus: "Efforts to make the California Department of Corrections (CDC) take rehabilitation seriously wiped rehabilitation from the books. Efforts to free prisoners from crumbling prisons led to the construction program that has never ended" (2007, 88-89). How did conservative reactions and liberal approaches converge at this juncture?
During his second term (1978-82), Democratic Governor Jerry Brown began the work of replacing California's gothic-style prisons with newer prisons intended, presumably, for rehabilitation. Thus, instead of reducing overcrowding by progressive means such as parole and commutations for qualified prisoners, he "began to investigate the best way to improve plant and modestly expand capacity, intending […] to use state-of-the-art prisons for the benefit of prisoners and society" (Gilmore 2007, 92). When Republican George Deukmejian, a 'tough-on-crime' politician, took office in 1983, he expanded former Governor Brown's prison plan, while dropping any accompanying concept of rehabilitation. With Deukmejian, punishment in the form of incapacitation became the entrenched rationale for incarceration, putting the administration, the legislature, and the CDC on the same page in expanding the built capacity of the state prison system (Gilmore 2007, 95).
From a different strand of thought—originating, arguably, mostly from outside the carceral discourse of 'reform'—are other approaches to reform and rehabilitation which include restorative and transformative justice. These approaches recognize the importance of social connection, and thus acknowledge the ways in which social separation and exclusion from the larger society are not rehabilitative but are themselves a form of violence. Based on the need for connection, not separation, these approaches mostly run parallel or in opposition to the prison's received logic of retributive justice.
Unlike the Panopticon, the contemporary prison design has no pretense of transparency. As Rhodes notes, "[t]he 'box' of the prison presents a smooth surface to the outside world, which is of course how it works as a place of disappearance" (2004, 3). In contrast to the understated functionality of the Panopticon, the contemporary prison box is surrounded by the exaggerated trappings of extreme security (gun towers and high razor-wire fences)—measures that arguably amount to a kind of 'security theater.' Writing from the prison, Hartman describes the security overkill of California's prison system—physical structures that send a powerful message about the 'dangerous other' that must be housed inside:

> No prison system on earth goes to greater lengths to prevent escapes than those in this country; in California, the layers upon layers of razor wire and heavily armed gun towers ringing all of the prisons, even down to the lowest security levels, were not enough. To counter the remote possibility that a prisoner could theoretically escape, lethally electrified fences were installed. Powered up with enough amperage to kill a large man several times over, [and] costing enormous sums […]. (2013, 252)

This design serves to both produce and symbolize an absolute separation and isolation from outside society—the condition Rhodes calls "absolute social exclusion" as typified by the contemporary "control prison" (2004, 7). The design of the control prison signals the message that it is explicitly designed for the violence of social separation.

Let us now turn to the issue of the different levels of discourse in which the prison is represented and constructed (including the way in which the concrete materiality of the prison as a built space converges with the prison as an imagined space) and how we might take a more critical stance in relation to these representations and the ideological work they are made to perform. Rhodes, who did ethnography in a maximum-security psychiatric unit, sets the stage with this apt commentary:

> [T]he writer on prisons is faced with certain unavoidable points of complicity with her subject. One of these is that crime, criminals, and 'prison life' are—and have been at least since the nineteenth century—a source of public fascination and debate. Looming cellblocks, stone-faced guards, dangerous and deranged felons: these familiar tropes tell us in advance what to expect of prison […] One consequence is that prison becomes an 'abstract site' in the public imagination precisely through the fetishizing of its concrete details. An element in this dynamic, of course, is the captivating relationship between watching and being watched that pervades prisons. This relationship inevitably molds description […] and thus perpetuates itself even as one attempts to evade it. (2004, 8)

As the passage from Rhodes suggests, the 'writer on prisons' is challenged not only with presenting information in the usual positivist, 'representational' sense, but also with the more revelatory and rhetorical work of writing against the ready-made representations, images, and tropes that circulate in the collective imaginary and "tell us in advance what to expect." In thinking critically about the prison, we must consider not only the actually-existing prison system, but also the ideation of the prison as an enactment of larger social projects of social control—i.e. the prison regime as a sort of panacea for a range of social problems (while also contributing to those problems).[6]

"The writer on prisons" often describes the rite of passage involved in going into the facility—a ritualized set of procedures which eventually become routine—i.e. the narrative of "getting in" (Shelton 2007, 3). As Leder, who taught philosophy classes at a maximum-security prison in the middle of downtown Baltimore, describes his experience: "The first time I entered the prison was the only time I saw it. From then on I was used to it all or had trained myself to see through it and beyond. The bars and guards had become just passing annoyances on the way to the classroom. But the first time I arrived they seemed everywhere" (2000, 1).

Unlike the "massive 19th-century Gothic castle/dungeon" (2000, 1) where Leder taught, the typical U.S. prison is a complex of buildings—most-likely constructed in the 1980s or 1990s—projecting the simultaneously drab and imposing authority of a military facility. Not the fortress, but the facility; not the castle, but the camp is the contemporary aesthetic of power. An archaic, urban, fortress-like prison, as the one Leder describes, draws attention with its grand medieval appearance. In contrast to this aesthetic, the contemporary prison, laid out as a camp, is designed to project—at the scale of distance—a brutal bureaucratic indifference. Not thick stone, but razor-wire and metal-paneled towers (outlines that stick out against the rural terrain) are the primary emblems and instruments of the lethality of the facility. On the inside, tan-colored brick and the ubiquitous government-issue pale blue of the metallic door fixtures and window trim is the consistent style.[7]

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[6] Mass incarceration is a prime example of what Kleinman describes as "Policies and programs [that] participate in the very violence they seek to respond to and control" (2000, 239).

[7] Kerman, author of *Orange Is the New Black* (2011), gives a similar description of the physical space of the Danbury Women's Prison in Connecticut where she was incarcerated for a year:

> It's a heavily fortified building with a vicious-looking, razor-wire fence around it. And then there's the prison camp, which sits outside of that horrible, razor-wire fence. The building itself sort of looks like a 1970s elementary school […] [I]t's a cruddy, old building; and the ceiling leaks […] And the thing that is really striking […] is just the incredible drabness of the physical landscape.

(https://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=211339427. Last visited July 28, 2019.)

The idea and the institution of the prison enact and embody a number of foundational—and particularly American—structures of control.[8] The idea and institution of the prison are, of course, intertwined with the narratives of crime, law, and punishment—narratives that are over-inscribed in public political culture. We see these narratives in the discourse of electoral politics, beginning in the early 1970s, where politicians on both sides of the aisle reliably traded in the currency of being 'tough on crime' having 'zero tolerance,' and waging a 'war on drugs.'[9] These narratives animate journalistic reports and the local news, where decontextualized depictions of crime events play out as highly reportable commodities.[10] The crime/law narrative is even more pervasive in popular media and entertainment culture, in the innumerable films and television shows where the drama of law and crime are told and re-told to the point of becoming the implicit backdrop and unconscious schema organizing our view of the world.[11] There is, as Rhodes notes, an interplay and feedback in which "the growth of imprisonment as an almost reflexive response to social problems affects our priorities for public life and is reflected in a pervasive media imagery of violence in the service of the law" (2004, xiii).

Popular representations of prisons have generally depicted inmates and staff as particularly manipulative and dangerous people, foregrounding images of the prison that highlight spectacular scenes of overt violence. Certainly, such forms of bald violence have been, and continue to be, aspects of the actually-existing prison; yet today's prisons are quite orderly. As Skarbek notes: "[t]he rate of inmate homicides declined 94 percent between 1973 and 2003, at which time the homicide rate was actually lower than that in the general population" (2014,18).[12] The point is not that prisons are inordinately 'safe' places, but rather how what we think we 'know' about prison, and the narrow way in which we think about violence, may act to inhibit us from seeing or thinking about the violence of incarceration in terms of the more pervasive and diffuse aspects of social violence. The following inmate's account of late 20th-century prison life at Stateville prison illustrates this point:

> [I]f you expect the usual tale of constant violence, brutal guards, gang rapes, daily escape efforts, turmoil, and fearsome adventures, you will be deeply disappointed. Prison life is really nothing like what the press, television, and movies suggest. It is not a daily round of threats, fights, plots, and 'shanks' (prison-made knives)—though you have to be constantly careful to avoid situations or behavior that might lead to violence. A sense of impending danger is always with you; you must be careful to move around people rather than against or through them, but with care and reasonable sense you can move safely enough. For me, and many like me in prison, violence is not the major problem; the major problem is monotony. It is the dull sameness of prison life, its idleness and boredom, that grinds me down […] [B]oredom, time-slowing boredom, interrupted by occasional bursts of fear and anger, is the governing reality of life in prison. (Morris and Rothman 1995, 203)

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[8] At the level of historical social structure, the prison system can be seen as a continuation of America's historical structures of extreme labor extraction, racial stigmatization and exclusion. Wacquant argues that this continuity originates out of the U.S. institution of chattel slavery. Following slavery, Jim Crow laws, and the black urban ghetto, Wacquant situates the contemporary prison system as 'the fourth peculiar (American) institution'—all of these being institutions that have functioned to contain a black proletariat caste (2004).

[9] One of the most dramatic examples of this is the Willie Horton campaign advertisement, which arguably resulted in the election of George H. W. Bush over Michael Dukakis in the 1988 presidential election. Moreover, the resulting "Dukakis syndrome" ensured that any policy perceived as "soft on crime" was too great a risk for a politician to take (Irwin 2009, 13-14; 116).

[10] Although crime and violence in the U.S. persist at unacceptable levels, when compared to the past crime is at an historic low, having been on the decrease since a peak in the early 1990s. For example, the number of murders in New York City peaked at 2,245 in 1990. In 2017 there were fewer than 300 murders in the city, the lowest in recorded history and despite the city's increase in population. (https://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=574800001. Last visited July 28, 2019.)

[11] Such recent serialized, entertainment-driven prison documentaries, fictional dramas, and dramatizations based loosely on autobiographical accounts that deal explicitly with prisons include: the MSNBC's *Lock Up* (2005-2017); *Oz* (1997-2003); and the (more nuanced) Netflix series *Orange Is the New Black* (2013-2019).

[12] Skarbek (2014) documents this phenomenon as being largely due to the informal security and social structure provided by self-governing gangs within the prisons.

The usefulness of the concept of social violence or social suffering—something all the more pervasive, and even acutely felt in the everyday because of its often indirect and diffuse nature—is that it helps us get at the kinds of issues with which most incarcerated individuals are concerned. These concerns are the violence done to a person's sense of individuality and sense of self, and the everyday violence of deprivation, humiliations, and stigma.[13] Through an extended concept of social violence (which includes structural, cultural, and symbolic aspects) or social suffering (Farmer 2004; Das et al. 2000),[14] we can become more attentive to forms of suffering beyond a narrow focus on directly-physical, immediate, and inter-personal acts of commission, and thus, be better able to critically represent the conditions of the contemporary prison regime.[15] Moreover, the larger point of an extended notion of violence—which includes structures of absence and omission—is to help us better think the counter conditions of these forms of suffering. The goal is to conceptualize peace not only as negative peace (the absence of immediate conflict), but positive peace in the broader sense of social justice, or restorative justice: justice that supports substantive democracy. These forms of justice are counters or at least supplements to retributive forms of procedural legal justice and can be preventative in relation to violence in the usual sense of acts of commission.
At a different scale from the everyday social suffering of life inside the prison, is the social violence of mass incarceration, a type of structural violence that has emerged from structural-historical conditions—violent acts that have, in turn, exacerbated the very conditions of their genesis.[16] Angela Davis asks us to consider the "thoroughly prisonized landscape" of California as she chronicles its history of prison construction (2003, 12). San Quentin (California's first state prison) was built in 1852; Folsom followed in 1880. No new prison was constructed until a penitentiary for women was built in Tehachapi in 1933. From the construction of San Quentin in 1852 up until 1955, a total of nine prisons were constructed in the state of California. Two camps

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[13] Many in the American public, however, see concern with anything other than a victims' rights approach as itself a form of violence. As Rhodes notes, "We have evolved a public discourse in which paying attention to these situations [i.e. social suffering in prison] is taken as a sign of indifference to the suffering of those who have been harmed by others and of lack of common sense in the face of obvious social dangers" (2004, 6).
[14] Kleinman uses, more or less interchangeably, the terms social suffering and social violence (which includes structural violence) to denote violence that is partly differentiated from political violence, generally understood in the sense of state-sanctioned warfare and large-scale events such as the forced expulsion or extermination of entire populations (2000, 238). Kleinman notes that ethnographers also use the phrase "the violence of everyday life" to indicate the deprivation and extreme stresses of structural violence to the poor, but this can be opened up to include the "violent consequences of social power [that] also affect other social groups in ways that are often not so visible, perhaps because they are also not so direct and also, not surprisingly, less likely to be labeled 'violence'" (2000, 228).
[15] Coady defines violence in three types: "wide" (or "extended"), "restricted," and "legitimate."

> Restricted definitions are typically those which concentrate upon positive interpersonal acts of force usually involving the infliction of physical injury […] [This is generally seen as] being the normal or ordinary understanding of 'violence' […] [and] the proponents of the wide definition usually take it that they are offering an extension of just such a normal or usual idea. (1999, 24)

To take this point further, violence can be categorized in terms of: 'structural violence' (see Farmer 2004, 281); 'symbolic violence,' "...the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004, 272), and which involves "the magic of symbolic power […] through which the dominated, often unwittingly, sometimes unwillingly, contribute to their own domination by tacitly accepting the limits imposed" and where the practical effects of this power "often take the form of *bodily emotions*—shame, humiliation, timidity, anxiety, guilt—or *passions* and *sentiments*—love, admirations, respect" (341); and 'cultural violence:' "those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence—exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science […]—that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence…. Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right—or at least not wrong" (Galtung 1999, 39).
[16] Wacquant (2001, 95) takes issue with the common terms 'mass incarceration' and 'Prison Industrial Complex,' as being less accurate than his concept of 'hyper-incarceration.' The issue is not simply one of scale alone, or that prisons have meshed with private investment interests, but, most importantly, the particular population that is being incarcerated at highly disproportional rates: i.e. socioeconomically disadvantaged people of color.

for the California Rehabilitation Center were opened in the early and mid-60s; but in the second half of that decade (at this point there being about 200,000 people in prison in the U.S.) and throughout the entire 1970s, no new prisons were built in the Golden State (2003, 12).

Davis' historical narrative shows us that the story of the American prison and American mass incarceration is a story of the late 20th century, beginning in the mid-1980s (at a time, incidentally, in which the crime rate was already on the decline) (Mauer 2013, 74). In California between 1984 and 1989, nine new prisons were constructed (recall that this is roughly the same as the number of prisons that had been constructed since San Quentin opened in 1852). And during the 1990s twelve new prisons were opened in the state. As of Davis' writing, there were "33 prisons, 38 camps, 16 community correctional facilities, and five tiny prisoner mother facilities in California" (2003, 13). Out of a total prison population of 157, 979 (about 20,000 prisoners are being held for immigration violations), the racial make-up of the people incarcerated in California was 35.2% Latino, 30% African American, and 29.2% white. California has the largest women's prison in the world (Valley State Prison for Women) and, across the street, stands the second-largest women's prison in the world (Central California Women's Facility). Together these prisons house about 7,000 inmates (Davis 2003, 12-13).

Finally, on a global scale, we see that the U.S., a formally-democratic nation, locks up more people than any other nation. With five percent of the world's population, the U.S. locks up 25 percent of the world's incarcerated people (Larson 2013, 1).[17] These sociological facts give an overview of America's dysfunctional incarceration habit, a problem that has long been hard to justify from a civil and human rights perspective (all the more so as incarceration has never had a strong relation to crime rate).

Returning to the issue of the mundane, everyday social suffering inside the prison, the following are some reflections from my experience interacting with incarcerated students. These serve to show the prison not simply as a 'total institution' with a controlled and seemingly monolithic structure that defies physical escape, but, moreover, the struggle to find relief from an all-present condition of distractions and deprivations. As the students in my class described prison life: "It's always there." The "it" being the lack of privacy, the surrounding noises, the over-proximity of one's cellmate. For incarcerated students—those vying to read, write and think about challenging academic topics—this ever-present "it" can be felt even more intensely.[18]

The students in my course were consistently well-prepared and eager to engage with the assigned texts. But even beyond their interest in the content of the course there was the additional enjoyment in being part of an intellectual group experience. As several students agreed, part of the value of the classes was the feeling that "this is our time." This sentiment of claiming something as 'one's own'—something especially important within the regulated existence of the prison—made class time an opportunity for the students to do something particularly meaningful to them in an environment where they could exercise some control. Overall, the students had a general desire to seriously engage in the life of the mind within the context of a classroom setting; and they did so with an enthusiasm not always found in campus undergraduate classes.

During a class discussion on the topic of communication and language, I commented about responding to questions from people in the general public regarding 'what it's like to teach in a prison' and 'what the students are like.' In such situations, I realized how I needed to work against the assumptions of what others believe they already 'know in advance' in regard to what they imagine the prison to be. Also, I noted, to the extent that I have anything to say about the physical space of 'the prison,' I am only speaking, of course, from the very limited experience of the classroom. In response to this, the students described some everyday aspects of their immediate living conditions—such as the constant negotiation of space involved in sharing an area the size of a bathroom with another person (and where cellmates can be changed at any time). But rather than talking about their living space, students were more interested in expressing the existential

[17] Put in terms of people who are incarcerated, Doran Larson, in the introduction to *Fourth City: Essays from the Prison in America*, gives a powerful illustration: "If gathered together in one place, incarcerated Americans would constitute the nation's fourth largest city—a city larger than Houston, Philadelphia, or Phoenix" (2013, 1).

[18] Kierman gives a similar account of her prison experience: "prisons are generally built out of cinderblock. They're painted gray or beige, and it's just all hard surfaces, linoleum floors. And so one of the things that's so striking is that it is cacophonously loud in prisons everywhere. Sound is just always bouncing off of metal, off of concrete, off of linoleum." (https://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=211339427. Last visited July 28, 2019).

condition of living in prison: a daily struggle for one's individuality, a condition where, as reduced to a number, one must fight for the recognition of one's full humanity. The students then changed the frame of the discussion from the initial question-of-the-present ('what it's like') to their greater concern—the desire for a place of voice and visibility outside the prison. This, ultimately, led to the students' future-oriented question: 'what do we want?' What the students wanted, they all agreed, was a chance for redemption and acceptance; the chance to find a future place in society as productive, enfranchised citizens.
In the afterward to *Undoing Time: American Prisoners in Their Own Words*, Haney summarizes the essays in that volume as showing that many prisoners "take responsibility for what they have done and who they have become [yet] worry that they are forever doomed by the labels society has attached to them and the permanence of the prison system's view" (2001, 255). By imagining and critically representing the prison regime and the typical control prison as something beyond the drama of media depictions and imposing structures wrapped in razor-wire, we can begin to understand the prison as a place of social violence and social suffering, a violence produced by a dehumanizing separation from the outside public. This is not, of course, to deny that violence in the usual sense can also take place in prison; but we must be critical of how a particularly lurid over-attention to the images and imaginations of such violence does an injustice to incarcerated people by further viewing them as 'the other.' New representations and images of 'the prison' can serve to depict the humanity of those behind bars and help prepare the way for those who are returning to society so that they can be seen and accepted as full citizens.

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