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James Anderson
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1227-4618>
jameskepanderson@gmail.com

A Few Theses on Art, Alienation, and Abolition

Abstract:

Marcuse suggested the alienation of art from society intrinsic to the aesthetic form represents and recollects an unreal world capable of indicting existing social arrangements while simultaneously providing a sensuous experience of another possible, liberated reality denied by established institutions. Drawing on and recasting part of Marcuse's theory of art and the aesthetic dimension, the author puts forward several theses regarding art, alienation and abolition of the prison-industrial complex (PIC). First, art implies alienation; yet, because of that condition, art offers an antidote to estrangement conducive to PIC abolition. Second, Marx explained why key components of capitalism engender alienation, but expounding upon his analysis reveals how incarceration and the concomitant punitive paradigm also reinforce and reproduce estrangement; art, understood as recollection, can aid in abolition of those institutions. Third, authentic justice implies unimpeded use of creative capacities denied and distorted by the PIC, but art can act as recuperation of those capacities in ways that transform our understanding and practice of justice. Fourth, art can offer a foretaste of liberation while anticipating, expressing and heightening our understanding of the possibilities for fuller freedom and PIC abolition, going against and beyond reformist reforms that have historically functioned to strengthen and expand the PIC. Finally, art augments the spirit of abolition and intimates a mode of being antithetical to imprisonment, the PIC and the alienated way of life associated with criminalization and State coercion.

Keywords:

art, alienation, abolition, prison-industrial complex, human nature, species-being, justice, recollection

I. Introduction

Writing in prison prior to his death in January 2021, Elizam Escobar, a participant in the Puerto Rican clandestine movement before his April 1980 arrest in northern Illinois, noted that Socrates wrote his first and only poems while incarcerated.¹ As described in Plato's *Phaedo*, an interlocutor, Cebes, asks Socrates on behalf of the poet Evenus why someone "who never before wrote a lie of poetry," is now in prison "putting Aesop into verse, and also composing that hymn in honor of Apollo."² Per Plato, Socrates replied that he wanted to try to "purge away a scruple"³ related to dreams he often had telling him to create art. He thus put together a hymn in honor of the deity and, realizing true poets "should not only put words together but make stories," he turned some of Aesop's fables into poetry.⁴ Although Socrates ostensibly felt compelled to address the calling that came to him in dreams because he knew his life would end soon, Escobar, who previously studied philosophy and taught art at New York City College in the 1970s, argued incarcerated persons gravitate toward art even when they have no prior history of artistic engagement.

Possible reasons abound. Herbert Marcuse claimed "art creates the realm in which the subversion of experience proper to art becomes possible: the world formed by art is recognized as a reality which is suppressed and distorted in the given reality."⁵ Following Marcuse (AD),⁶ art, as a relatively self-contained work expressing human imagination and capable of exciting our senses and eliciting affect as well as understanding, remains alienated – or, estranged and fundamentally-if-qualitatively separate or autonomous – from everyday existence. For that reason, art can enliven and alter our understanding of quotidian life and taken-for-granted assumptions, institutions and arrangements structuring our reality. While prior to incarceration, Socrates assumed the message in his recurring dreams was intended only to propel him in the study of philosophy, which he referred to as "the noblest and best of music," impending death and imprisonment provided impetus to reexamine that assumption. Tellingly, Marcuse claimed a "work of art cannot be comprehended in terms of social theory," and "neither can it be comprehended in terms of philosophy" (AD, 12). We can describe, interpret and theorize artwork; art, however, cannot be contained conceptually. If Adorno was right to assert a concept never totally contains its content,⁷ we might entertain the possibility that art can offer a window into the ecstatic and ethereal ineluctably escaping the conceptual schema of human beings.

The above helps explain the indispensability of art to the theory and practice of abolition. Mariame Kaba, writing with Kelly Hayes, suggests that "when we speak about abolition of the prison-industrial complex, many react as though the idea is alien and unthinkable – as if, to them, prisons, policing and surveillance are part of a natural order that simply cannot be undone," even though massive expansion of the carceral system did not occur until the 1980s.⁸ The explosion in incarceration rates in the United States that started several decades back⁹ reflects a crisis of alienation afflicting the social body, a crisis of human estrangement exacerbated by

1) Escobar, "Art of Liberation," 300.

2) Plato, "Phaedo: The Death of Socrates," 492.

3) Ibid.

4) Ibid.

5) Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, 6, (hereafter referenced parenthetically in text as AD with page number).

6) Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, 79–128 (hereafter referenced parenthetically in text as CR with page number).

7) Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*; Holloway, "Why Adorno?," 12–17.

8) Kaba and Hayes, "A Jailbreak of the Imagination," 19.

9) Incarceration numbers in the US increased from a little more than 500,000 in 1980 to about 2.5 million by 2009, giving the nation-state the distinction of locking up a quarter of the world's prison population despite being home to only five percent of the global population. See Kilgore, *Understanding Mass Incarceration*, 11. In California, where I currently reside, problems of capital

the assemblage of penal and carceral institutions known as the prison-industrial complex (PIC). Controlling for crime, the US became six times more punitive from the mid-1970s to the early 2000s, and the number of persons held in state prisons for controlled substances increased 478 percent during the so-called “war on drugs” between 1985 and 1995.¹⁰ Revealing the apparent intent and function of the augmented repressive apparatus, Grubačić and O’Hearn suggested, using a world systems lens,

Imprisonment was a strategy used by core states like the US and Britain to stem the domestic rise of insurgencies that accompanied that Cold War. It was extended into the post-Cold War era and used against Islamic insurgents, gangs, and other groups that often came to prominence as a byproduct of the anti-leftist strategies of Western states in the Cold War.¹¹

In effect, incarceration in their reading became the politically expedient method for subverting challenges levelled by social movements and outright rebellion. The response to that militancy came, in part, in the form of “neoliberal” austerity politics giving way to a recession in the social provisions and public services of the state, and in part through the ascendancy of a “philosophy of retributive justice” predicated on punishment.¹² Of course, the punishment is primarily reserved for populations without the wherewithal, wealth and/or racial privilege that exempts those so endowed.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the role of prisons and other components of the PIC as “death-making institutions,” per the abolitionist critique.¹³ Analysis of recent data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics corroborates that criticism,¹⁴ and that BJS data does not even include information on the horrors that have taken place on the inside since the start of the pandemic.¹⁵ Incarceration does more than function as a liminal space between life and execution, as in the case of Socrates more than two millennia ago. It also does more than advance premature biological death. Dylan Rodriguez has referred to prison as a place of “mass-based civic death,” given the systematic punishment that establishes “a semi-permanent state of elimination from civil society altogether.”¹⁶ Furthermore, prison produces “social death, as prisoners are isolated from loved ones in the free world and, upon release, often experience substantive emotional rupture and alienation from family and friends.”¹⁷ In this way, the prison regime is not only repressive, but also productive “of a new social formation, premised on the structural and ritualized domination of particular target communi-

over-accumulation and punitive turns in policymaking saw the state prisoner population expand almost 500 percent between 1982 and 2000, even though the crime rate peaked in 1980. See Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 7.

10) Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor*, 127, 132.

11) Grubačić and O’Hearn, *Living at the Edges of Capitalism*, 239.

12) Kilgore, *Understanding Mass Incarceration*, 22. See also Davis, “Masked Racism”; Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor*.

13) Quoted in Taylor, “The Emerging Movement for Police and Prison Abolition.”

14) Wang and Sawyer, “New data: State prisons are increasingly deadly places.”

15) One illustration of how the pandemic contributed to already unconscionable conditions of confinement also illustrates the enduring problem of super-exploited prison labor that, while not necessarily the defining feature of incarceration or the carceral state, still exists as a site of struggle. Robbie Hall, who worked early on in the pandemic for 60 cents an hour making face masks in the California Institution for Women prison factory in Chino/Corona, contracted COVID on the job, struggled to breathe, and spent weeks in and out of consciousness battling pneumonia in the hospital before authorities moved her back inside the CIW. See Kiera Feldman, “California kept prison factories open.” More than a year after almost dying from COVID-related illness, and after 36 behind bars, Robbie finally left prison.

16) Rodriguez, “‘Social Truth’ and Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals,” 75.

17) *Ibid.*

ties”¹⁸ – one that imposes and naturalizes extreme relations of alienation or feelings of estrangement, distance, separation and even incomprehension vis-à-vis other human beings.

As I will argue below, art can serve as a powerful antidote to alienation. In so doing, I argue, it can augment abolition as a philosophy, praxis, and (perhaps) as a way of life. We can tentatively take philosophy as a way of life (PWL) to refer to “the ongoing practice or way of life of a philosopher, involving spiritual exercises to shape a manner of living in light of the tenets of different philosophical teachings.”¹⁹ Using that working definition, we might reasonably view engagement with works of art in the spirit of abolition as a productive and potentially transformative intervention in the PWL tradition.

The remainder of this essay will be devoted to explicating and supporting five theses germane to the subject of art in relation to abolition and alienation. Throughout I will be drawing heavily from Marcuse’s philosophy of art and liberation – and from other relevant thinkers, artists and organizers. I will argue that alienation intrinsic to the aesthetic form so indispensable to art enables artwork to participate in the process of abolition of both the PIC and the extreme alienation it perpetuates. Similarly, I will borrow from Marx’s conception of “species-being” and from the 1971 debate about human nature between Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault to better explain the foundations of human alienation and how art expresses and recollects our innate creative capacities in relation to transformative justice. I also expound upon how art can envision and anticipate fuller freedom, unearthing the fatuity of reformist reforms of the criminal punishment system, as well as how it can augment the spirit of abolition: suggestive of a mode of being and way of life free from alienation and divested of the PIC.

II. Thesis 1: Art implies alienation; yet, because of that condition, art offers an antidote to estrangement conducive to PIC abolition.

Marcuse locates the liberatory function of art within “the aesthetic form,” referring to “the total of qualities (harmony, rhythm, contrast) which make an oeuvre a self-contained whole, with a structure and order of its own (the style)” (CR, 81). The form emerges as the artist extricates the artwork from “the constant process of reality and assumes a significance and truth of its own.” (AD, 8). Through aesthetic transformation, art promotes a “perception of the world which alienates individuals from their functional existence and performance in society,” and that alienation allows for “an emancipation of sensibility, imagination, and reason in all spheres of subjectivity and objectivity” (AD, 8).

In contrast to Leftist publications that limit possibilities through prohibition of “dissent within dissent,” art, “as the power of the imagination” and as an authentic simulation, as Escobar (who spent 19 years in prison before his release in 1990) maintained while incarcerated, can assist in emancipating and announcing the “political collective unconscious”²⁰ by disclosing repressed human aspirations. John Dewey before him argued human imagination could free ideals “from their encumbrances and project them as a guide to our interest in what now exists.”²¹ As concretization and conveyance of imagination understood as “a way of seeing and feeling things as they compose an integral whole,”²² and by virtue of its estranged relationship with existing reality, art can disclose or represent in aesthetic form a transformation of justice alien to the alienating social relations and

18) Ibid.

19) Sharpe and Ure, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 8.

20) Escobar, “Art of Liberation,” 298.

21) Dewey, “Individuality in Our Day,” 184.

22) Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 267.

conditions constitutive of the PIC. As Marcuse had it, insofar as human beings “are constituted by an unfree society, their repressed and distorted potentialities can be represented only in an *estranging* form” (AD, 10). Indeed, “only as estrangement does art fulfill a *cognitive* function: it communicates truths not communicable in any other language; *it contradicts*” (AD, 10). As Marcuse explained in another text (CR), artists must alienate their work from the established reality in order for an aesthetic transformation to take place, and that alienation from the social order enables artwork, and arguably only works of art, to communicate an otherwise ineffable truth. Yet, art’s alienated character relates art to the existing, shared, social world by rendering transparent society’s structural flaws. Art indicts. It can do so thanks to the alienation intrinsic to the aesthetic form.

An artist can deliver the indictment somewhat directly through aesthetic representation of the horrors associated with the epitome of human estrangement. Lyrics to the song “Parole,” written and recorded by the formerly incarcerated hip-hop artist, Immortal Technique, illustrate this. “Prison ain’t the place that you find your right of passage in / It’s slavery, with nasty food in your abdomen,” he rhymed, adding: “My movements like a jiu-jitsu kata / I graduated out of prison so fuck my alma mater.”²³ Not for nothing did my sister rap the song aloud with other women in a jail cell while incarcerated in Southern Illinois for several months. She had asked me to send song lyrics to her, and the Immortal Technique lyrics I mailed seemed to resonate. Lyrical indictment of incarceration spoke to her and others locked up in ways that straightforward criticism might not. Maybe the alienated aesthetic form made it possible to imagine oneself out on parole, per the subject of the song. Performing the song a capella in a jail seemingly served as expression and sublimation of anger and frustration at the injustice of the supposed “justice system” responsible for severe estrangement of human beings. The sublimation, however, rather than functioning to accommodate the status quo, also enabled the incarcerated persons who recited it together to recover some semblance of solidarity in a setting where collective action, even of the artistic variety, is often actively discouraged and frequently met with force.

While Marcuse claimed the tension inherent in the aesthetic form “precludes any identification with revolutionary praxis” and argued an artwork “cannot represent the revolution,” only invoke it any different medium (CR, 103–4), he accurately summarized the distinguishing features of artistic creation but perhaps downplayed the artistic qualities ineluctably present in certain forms of praxis. The *Incarcerated Worker*, the prisoner newsletter published from 2015 through 2018 by the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee of the Industrial Workers of the World – the only labor union to facilitating prisoner self-organization – offers one case of praxis in a racy dance with the aesthetic dimension. The first issue of the *Incarcerated Worker* featured artwork by Kevin “Rashid” Johnson,²⁴ a Wobbly,²⁵ a founder of one of the first New Black Panther Party Prison Chapters and “a New Afrikan Communist revolutionary artist & writer,” as his bio on the issue’s contributors page states.²⁶ Johnson’s art appears throughout the issue, inserted in several instances in the lower right hand corner of a page, as if to punctuate and perhaps encapsulate in meta-political or transcendent political form the overtly political prose surrounding it. One of his contributions includes a small image of political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal wrapped up in and restrained by the dark lines on the American flag, which would be colored red if not for the publication’s use of black and white throughout the pages. Johnson also created black and white images of the famous nineteenth-century abolitionists, Nat Turner and John Brown, as well as two

23) Immortal Technique, “Parole.”

24) That inaugural issue shows his surname spelled “Johnston,” but subsequent issues and other texts show his name spelled with the “t” omitted. The last issue of the *Incarcerated Worker* features some of his artwork as well, and in that, “Rashid Johnson” (without the “t” before the “o”) receives credit for the art.

25) Members of the IWW are called Wobblies.

26) IWOC, “Contributors,” 2.

juxtaposed images, one of a woman in anguish behind bars and the other showing a child, presumably intended to represent her son within this artistic rendering, in another setting with a solemn look on his face. Johnson also contributed what appears to be a sketch of a pregnant woman in handcuffs lying prone and in pain. In that issue, edited by Sean Swain²⁷ and filled with articles authored by other prisoners, the penultimate page calls on readers to submit “contributions of writings, art, and any other material for the building of this new project of prisoner self-determination” to Kent Books to Prisoners in Ohio. In certain respects, the publication is as much an artistic as it is a political project. Adding a necessary addendum to Marcuse’s theory, the contents of the newsletter exhibit art and politically significant prose embedded in what might genuinely coalesce into an aesthetic of mutually affording theory and practice.

To provide another example, Fred Hampton, chairman of the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party when the Chicago Police working in cooperating with the FBI assassinated him in December 1969, achieved rapid success as an organizer thanks in part to his powerful rhetoric. The BBP challenge to policing during Hampton’s time fits within the tradition of abolition, but Hampton also made clear he learned from men locked up in Menard Correctional Center, a state prison in Chester, Il. As documented by Jeffrey Haas, a co-founder of the People’s Law Office in Chicago and former attorney for the Illinois chapter of the BPP, Hampton articulated that learning experience in an August 1969 speech he gave “at the ‘People’s Church’ on Ashland Avenue in the heart of Chicago’s black West Side.”²⁸ Per Haas’s account,

His voice got softer. “I went down to the prison in Menard, thinking we were the vanguard, but down there I got down on my knees and listened and learned from the people. I went down to the valley and picked up the beat of the people.” A drumbeat started, and everyone clapped to the rhythm. Fred chanted, a cross between a Baptist preacher and Sly and the Family Stone. “I’m high,” making each high into a two-syllable word, he sang, “I’m high – ee, I’m high – ee off the people,” and then chanted the words again.²⁹

Yet, Hampton not only learned from fellow prisoners, translating that educative experience into the art of rhythmic elocution in the service of exciting, inspiring and mobilizing; in the spirit of critical pedagogy and transformative dialogue, he also organized on the inside. Louis Truelock, one of the survivors of the CPD/FBI raid on the Panther apartment in Chicago, became involved in the Illinois chapter of the BPP after encountering Hampton inside Menard; he joined the Panthers after they both emerged from prison.³⁰ Intimating the role art might play in pedagogies of struggle, Urooba Jamal wrote that Hampton is increasingly “remembered for his breathtaking oratory,” public speaking, “punctuated by a legato, lyrical delivery” that raises the question, “Is Hampton really the Godfather of Rap?”³¹ We can observe a parallel between Hampton’s oratory, as part of both his personal and the broader (Panther-style) praxis, and the transformative oral instruction found in ancient philosophy germane to the PWL tradition,

Intended, in the first instance, to form people and to transform souls. That is why, in Antiquity,

27) A former newspaper columnist and union organizer with strong anti-authoritarian sensibilities, Swain has been incarcerated since 1991. See IWOC, “Contributors.”

28) Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton*, 3.

29) Ibid.

30) Haas, email to author.

31) Jamal, “4 Speeches That Prove Black Panther Fred Hampton Was the Godfather of Rap.”

philosophical teaching is given above all in oral form, because only the living word, in dialogues, in conversations pursued for a long time, can accomplish such an action. The written work, considerable as it is, is therefore most of the time only an echo or a complement of this oral teaching.³²

The power of oratory to “transform souls” is probably owed in part to the aesthetic quale of rhetoric. Likewise, the potential to communicate a deep, profound or even meta-political truth also inheres in the art of public speaking, with “art” here referring to the refined creativity of speechmaking and to the technique involved in delivery. Form in this case becomes content and content becomes form. Andrew Feenberg, who studied under Marcuse decades ago, wrote that his mentor turned to Hegel to reinterpret Heidegger’s conception and application of the ancient Athenian philosophy of *technē*, which we can understand as a model for and mode of revealing.³³ The term connotes the belief that the knowledge and action of human beings can expose or bring forth, and to fruition, what the world conceals. Acknowledging the Platonic critique of rhetoric as substitution of appearance for reality, we can also treat spoken word as a craft capable of constructing a revelatory aesthetic sphere and realm of experience through which the speech act can change the speaker and the listeners. As *technē*, Hampton’s talk became ostensible illustration of the dimension discussed throughout this essay.

Conversely, art can indict indirectly when it provides a sensuous, aesthetic experience of a beautiful world that does not (yet) exist (except perhaps as potentiality). Through the aesthetic form, “art transforms the order prevailing in reality,” creating an “illusion,” one “which gives the contents represented a meaning and a function different from those they have in the prevailing universe of discourse” (CR, 81). The poet John Keats famously opined in verse that, “Beauty is truth, truth beauty,”³⁴ and in so doing he articulated the power of art, including the force of his own poetry, to express a primordial truth beyond the mere propositional through the beautiful lifeworld brought to life by the aesthetic form. As Marcuse argued, “artistic alienation makes the work of art, the universe of art, essentially unreal – it creates a world which does not exist, a world of *Schein*, appearance, illusion. But in this transformation of reality into illusion, and only in it, appears the subversive truth of art” (CR, 98). To be sure, such beauty can reside even in artwork focused on the abhorrent. “Thus even the prison scene in *Faust* is beautiful,” in Marcuse’s view (AD, 66).

Of course, art can offer a sensuous experience of beauty minus overt criticism. Marcuse wrote about “beauty as negation” vis-à-vis commodification (CR, 121), but art can also express beauty that negates alienation reified within prison walls and throughout the PIC. Although this point will be developed in the fourth thesis of this essay, artistic invocation of the beautiful, the wondrous, the awesome and the sublime – even in the seeming absence of political content – can excite the human senses in ways that give rise not only to appreciation of the work of art. The beauty afforded in the aesthetic form can enhance appreciation of and desire for freedom from forced confinement, from alienated existence and from an ugly reality characterized by those affronts to humanity. Marcuse wrote of “erotic energy” finding “sublimated poetic expression” in love poems via “poetic language becoming the outcry against that which is done to men and women who love in this society” (CR, 118). Not surprisingly, Marcuse suggests, “Beauty returns, the ‘soul’ returns” (CR, 117),³⁵ in the music and lyrics of singer-songwriters like Bob Dylan, who (maybe not so) coincidentally wrote songs infused with an abolitionist spirit. In the mid-70s, Dylan recorded a song about the unjust imprisonment of one-time

32) Hadot, quoted in Davidson, “Introduction: Pierre Hadot and the Spiritual Phenomenon of Ancient Philosophy,” 20.

33) Feenberg, *Heidegger and Marcuse*, 7–8.

34) Quoted in Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 34.

35) For a similar point, see Anderson, “Bob Dylan, Even at 80.”

heavyweight boxing champion Rubin “Hurricane” Carter,³⁶ and about a decade or so prior to that he recorded a synesthesia-reflecting track, “Chimes of Freedom,” containing pertinent verse. “Tolling for the searching ones, on their speechless, seeking trail / For the lonesome-hearted lovers with too personal a tale / An’ for each unharmed, gentle soul misplaced inside a jail / An’ we gazed upon the chimes of freedom flashing,” he sang.³⁷ Also apropos beauty in art with implications for abolition, my sister, while confined in Decatur Correctional Center, poured over pages written by Maya Angelou available in the prison’s library; she read “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” and one or two other autobiographical works, as well as one or two books of poetry authored by Angelou while incarcerated there.

III. Thesis 2: Marx explained why key components of capitalism engender alienation, but expounding upon his analysis reveals how incarceration and the concomitant punitive paradigm also reinforce and reproduce estrangement; art, understood as recollection, can aid in abolition of those institutions.

To think through why and how abolition might afford new possibilities for philosophy and PWL, it helps here to recover and to attempt to rework Marx’s concept of “species-being” as put forward in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*. As Marx would have it, the human is a “species-being” because we humans objectify our own lives, because we each adopt the species as our object, because we treat ourselves as a universal (“as the actual, living species”) and because we treat the species as “our own essential being.”³⁸ Per Marx, “the productive life is the life of the species. It is life-engendering life. The whole character of a species, its species-character, is contained in the character of its life activity; and free, conscious activity is man’s species-character.”³⁹ For Marx, human productive activity is our “active species-life.”⁴⁰

Given that Marx’s manuscripts on this subject represent an unfinished and partial (if also intricate and elaborate) draft, and given Marx’s emphasis on using theory to inform and transform the present circa the nineteenth-century, I find it useful to think about the productive activity invoked by Marx as encompassing more than what he theorized. Beyond formal, industrious – or, under the sway of capital, exploited and degrading – labor, we can also consider the work of cultivating people as essential to our “species-being,” following the work of the late anthropologist David Graeber. He tried to show how applying Marxian analysis of value “to the production of people and social relations” might reveal “the real stakes of human existence,”⁴¹ otherwise obscured by ideology. In a posthumously published text, Graeber and his co-author David Wengrow claimed we are fundamentally “beings with the capacity for self-creation, even freedom,” and that “what ultimately matters is whether we can rediscover the freedoms that make us human in the first place.”⁴² Shifting emphasis toward the fashioning of people might “make it possible to stop focusing so obsessively on the production of material objects – discrete, self-identical things that one can own – and start the more difficult work of trying to understand the (equally material) processes by which people create and shape one another.”⁴³ Looking with that lens of “genuine materialism” can throw new light on the Marxian exposition of our “species-being” and on how we might recover (or recollect and liberate) it.

36) Dylan and Levy, “Hurricane.”

37) Dylan, “Chimes of Freedom.”

38) Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.

39) Ibid., 31.

40) Ibid., 32.

41) Graeber, “Turning Modes of Production Inside Out,” 71.

42) Graeber and Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything*, 8.

43) Graeber, “Turning Modes of Production Inside Out,” 71.

At first blush, de-emphasizing the production of objects, likes works of art, seems at odds with the overarching arguments in this essay; yet, Graeber's suggestion attunes us to the social relations that inform artistic creation and the arrangements works of art prompt us to reflect upon with a discerning eye. Art directly or indirectly repudiates relations of alienation by virtue of alienation from a world fraught with estrangement. Furthermore, insofar as prison precludes any form of labor free from coercion and alienation, it also mutilates what Marx understood as our "species-being," as the Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution that abolished slavery and involuntary servitude *except as punishment for a crime* cruelly attests. Policing, predicated upon (as an abolitionist critique would have it) the kidnapping of people from predominantly targeted communities, undermining already disadvantaged neighborhoods in the process, along with jailing and imprisonment, further militate against the care and nurturing needed to furnish people and communities capable of truly flourishing. Beyond the high-stakes competition endemic to labor under capitalism, beyond the absence of participatory decision making and democratic control denied people in a capitalist workplace, beyond the absence of ownership over goods and services produced, beyond the appropriation of surplus value and profit by shareholders and owners, the repressive function of the nation-state also alienates. The PIC undergirds and protects those aforementioned institutions characteristic of capitalism. In so doing, and through its monopoly on purportedly legitimate violence, coupled with its monopoly on ideas and practices of justice, which the state's criminal punishment system conflates with retribution, the PIC both buttresses and perpetuates (as it intensifies and entrenches) human conditions of alienation. Art, by way of alienation, has the ability to reveal those insights of abolition conducive to recovery of our "species-being," of our repressed and distorted humanity.

While Plato's account depicts Socrates as explaining and defending the ancient Athenian doctrine or notion of knowledge as "recollection" to his friends Simmias and Cebes while in prison awaiting death,⁴⁴ Marcuse invoked "the subterranean survival of the ancient theory of recollection in Marxian theory" (CR, 99). The "perpetual *materialistic core of idealism*," referring to "idea" as a term for the "true Forms" disfigured and denied by established institutions, and as "an image illuminating what is false, distorted in the way in which things are 'given'" revealing what is absent "in the mutilated experience which is the work of society" (CR, 69–70). Recollection in this sense can be considered an "epistemological faculty" and the process of "reassembling the bits and fragments which can be found in the distorted humanity and distorted nature" that faculty makes possible (CR, 70). "This recollected material has become the domain of the imagination," Marcuse clarified, adding that "it has been sanctioned by the repressive societies in art, and as 'poetic truth'" – yet the imagination of human beings, "as knowledge, retains the insoluble tension between idea and reality, the potential and the actual" (CR, 70). As a vehicle and sensuous expression of the imagination "art is recollection: it appeals to a preconceptual experience and understanding which reemerge in and against" institutional taboo and, it seems to me, beyond what Noam Chomsky has called "The Bounds of the Expressible,"⁴⁵ in reference to established parameters for comprehensible discourse. Escobar, the aforementioned incarcerated artist, claimed prisoners find themselves in paradoxically privileged positions of adversity from which they can receive the gift of art and "liberate that 'obscure' region of the imagination"⁴⁶ responsible for or perhaps tantamount to the recollection described above.

Following Feenberg, we can assume that recollection incited by art, and by extension the desire for PIC abolition in accord with knowledge of fuller freedom implying a non-retributive notion of justice closer to

44) Plato, "Phaedo," 505.

45) Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions*, 5.

46) Escobar, "Art of Liberation," 301.

its authentic form, also aids in recuperating our “species-being” and sensibilities of sociability and solidarity anathema to alienation. On the subject of “species-being,” Feenberg noted that a “human being is not simply a lone creature; he can’t exist without other humans. But he’s not a herd animal either. He doesn’t just go along with the herd. The human being’s capacities are developed through the relation to the species.”⁴⁷ Individually fulfilling our capacities, Feenberg avers, “requires a conscious relation to species-being,”⁴⁸ an awareness of where we are in relation to other people, and, if we intend to successfully actualize our potentials, a consciousness of the personal and communal capacities we are cultivating via that relation.

A concrete example might help evince how abolitionist art can assist with that kind of recollection. A 2021 virtual exhibit, “Art Against Imprisonment – From Palestine to the U.S.,” acclaimed as “a testament to the creativity, imagination and brilliance of the many” incarcerated and formerly incarcerated “people who resist the invisibility, isolation and repression of prisons and claim a liberated space through their art,”⁴⁹ communicates the power of shared struggle. The artwork therein stands as testament to the largely latent potential of human “species-being” and to the recovery and re-articulation of knowledge of ways of living and loving that affirm rather than negate humanity.

IV. Thesis 3: Authentic justice implies unimpeded use of creative capacities denied and distorted by the PIC, but art can act as recuperation of those capacities in ways that transform our understanding and practice of justice.

Noam Chomsky, known as the “father of modern linguistics,”⁵⁰ put forward a theory of language rooted in human nature germane to the above discussion of “species-being” and to the overarching themes of art in relation to justice and abolition.⁵¹ For our purposes, we can locate the most pertinent articulation of Chomsky’s ideas regarding human nature in his 1971 debate with Michel Foucault. While Foucault is a thinker credited with reinventing PWL,⁵² the usefulness of his ideas in terms of transforming justice and thinking about abolition deserves scrutiny. We would be remiss not to mention that he authored a book about the genesis of prison.⁵³ Yet, as Joy James pointed out, much of the book focuses on the body with little-to-no consideration of racialized (or sexualized) punishment.⁵⁴ Foucault’s argument about “the disappearance of torture as a public spectacle,”⁵⁵ James observed, featured “no reference to its continuity in European and American colonies where it was inflicted on indigenous peoples in Africa and the Americas,” and through that erasure “Foucault weaves a historical perspective that eventually presents the contemporary (‘Western’) state as a nonpractitioner of torture.”⁵⁶ Foucault also argued that “physical pain, the pain of the body itself, is no longer the constituent element of the penalty,”⁵⁷ which runs counter to the realities of repression routinized in Western policing, jails and prisons. He went on

47) Feenberg, “Remembering Marcuse.”

48) Ibid.

49) Block and Tannous, “Art Against Imprisonment – From Palestine to the U.S.”

50) Bartlett, “The Chomsky Puzzle.”

51) For an overview of Chomsky’s linguistic theory, see Chomsky, *The Science of Language*.

52) Ure, “Foucault’s Reinvention of Philosophy as a Way of Life”; Sharpe and Ure, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 293–312.

53) Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

54) James, *Resisting State Violence*, 25.

55) Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 7.

56) James, *Resisting State Violence*, 24–25.

57) Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 11.

to claim that should it become “necessary for the law to reach and manipulate the body of the convict, it will be at a distance, in the proper way, according to strict rules, and with a much ‘higher’ aim,”⁵⁸ all of which flies in the face of the criminal punishment system and its grotesque countenance.⁵⁹ Foucault’s claim that the contemporary carceral web “saves everything, including what it punishes”⁶⁰ likewise omits the realities of premature death produced by incarceration, discussed previously, not to mention the police violence dating back to slave patrols⁶¹ and law enforcement’s history of complicity in the beating, torture and burning of Black men documented by anti-lynching crusaders like Ida B. Wells-Barnett.⁶²

The unhelpful tendencies in Foucault’s approach can also be seen in an abridged case study of the Attica uprising. In reaction to the Attica Prison Rebellion of 1971, which occurred prior to the publication of Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, the state of New York ordering gunfire that autopsies showed to be responsible for every death during the uprising and backlash.⁶³ That included the deaths of guards evidently deemed disposable in the overarching paradigm of anti-Blackness, state control and retribution.⁶⁴ Joy James elsewhere recounts how, during a 1972 interview conducted as part of a tour of Attica, “Foucault does not once mention the men who rebelled in Attica and who were killed there. He stands in a graveyard and derisively likens the architecture to ‘Disneyland’ but mentions no agency of the insurrectionists, some thirty-nine men, who died there. There erasure of the specificity of the black/brown bodies and the risky abolitionist gestures and revolutionary moves for which they were slaughtered is disturbing.”⁶⁵

A closer look at the debate between Chomsky and Foucault circa 1971 also reveals problems with Foucault’s social theory as it pertains to ideas of justice. In contrast, Chomsky’s theory of human nature presented in part during the debate throws light on ideas about justice with implications for understanding our creative (and aesthetic and abolitionist) capacities. A snippet of the ensuing exchange between the two captures their fundamental disagreement.

FOUCAULT: I would like to reply to you in terms of Spinoza and say that the proletariat doesn’t wage war against the ruling class because it considers such a war to be just. The proletariat makes

58) Ibid.

59) There is no shortage of examples and evidence undermining Foucault’s claim. In October 2021, a prisoner at the Women’s Huron Valley Correctional Facility in Michigan publicized the beatings suffered by women incarcerated there. The Southern California ACLU sent a letter to the state’s attorney general in September 2021 documenting abuse and medical neglect of incarcerated persons perpetrated inside Riverside County jails. To cite one infamous example from recent history, Chicago police commander Jon Burge infamously used electroshock and “dry submarino” torture techniques for years against people of color in his custody. (Those are just the extreme cases. Correctional officers “manipulate,” and deploy violence against, prisoners on an everyday basis, as anyone familiar with conditions on the inside can attest.) See Hill, “Physical Abuse at Women’s Huron Valley.” See also Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton*, 355.

60) Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 301.

61) For more on the history of slave patrols see Hadden, *Slave Patrols*.

62) Burroughs, *Warrior Princess*, 43–78. Of course, officer complicity often enough turned into police participation in mob violence against men of color.

63) “In the end, ten guards and twenty-nine prisoners died on the morning of September 13, 1971. (Another four people died under uncertain circumstances over the course of the previous days.) Early reports blamed the hostage deaths on the prisoners, saying they slashed the guards’ throats. But every autopsy would determine that to a man, all the victims were killed by gunfire ordered by the state of New York.” See Bandede, “After the Attica Uprising.”

64) Ibid. Jared Ball, the founder of the iMiXWHATiLiKE multimedia hub and co-founder of Black Power Media, has made a similar observation and leveled a similar critique as part of his public pedagogy.

65) James, “Introduction,” xl.

war with the ruling class because, for the first time in history, it wants to take power. And because it will overthrow the power of the ruling class, it considers such a war to be just.

CHOMSKY: Yeah, I don't agree.

FOUCAULT: One makes war to win, not because it is just.

CHOMSKY: I don't, personally, agree with that.⁶⁶

We should be wary of understanding human motivation for social transformation as best explicable by a drive toward power.⁶⁷ Insofar as that power perpetuates alienating existence, it remains at odds with something seemingly fundamental to our species constitution.

We can take a closer look at the Chomsky-Foucault debate with our “species-being” in mind to unpack how ideology elides human nature and renders opaque its inextricable link to justice. Just as some initially dismiss the notion of “society” or even the reality and possibility of the “social” by chalking it up to abstraction, à la Margaret Thatcher, omitting consideration of how we all embody and demonstrate the social in practice, Foucault took Chomsky's notion of justice to primarily be “ideal,” and thus a “problem,” as noted above. Chomsky did little to address that interpretation directly during their debate. Closer examination of his ideas about human nature, however, reveal that our ideal(s) of justice ought to be and to some extent inevitably are tethered to acknowledgement, and some fledgling grasp of, our largely (if not exclusively) inbuilt limits, abilities, needs and desires.⁶⁸ Exercising our human capacities to project beyond the present and to cognitively conjure features of a better, more just society, reflect theory that can be tested (so to speak), experimented with, and refined through creative practice; the engagement with art being one outlet for that. In this way art establishes new values similar to how science, in the philosophy of John Dewey, represented a praxis for the “creation of new values and ends.”⁶⁹

Now, in the excerpted exchange quoted before, Foucault's argument appropriately alludes to dangerous, ideologically serviceable justifications. Ideology fosters justification for war, revolutionary or otherwise, and for the PIC and the existing “justice” system that reproduces excess estrangement, surplus repression and “racial capitalism,”⁷⁰ among other abuses inflicted upon human beings. At the same time, though, that argument appears to fall victim to ideology. For his part, Foucault clearly expressed a critique of the ideological function claims to “justice” can perform and have performed throughout human history. Here I have to quote an exchange from the debate at length again in order to clarify the disagreement, so that I can then explain where I depart (in part) from both debate participants, and so I can sketch what I see is at stake.

66) Chomsky and Foucault, *The Chomsky-Foucault Debate on Human Nature*, 51.

67) Contra Foucault, MLK Jr. described power “as not only desirable but necessary in order to implement the demands of love and justice,” but he also stressed “that power without love is reckless and abusive and that love without power is sentimental and anemic.” See Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here*, 38.

68) Foucault expressed a reluctance to accept the existence of human nature during the debate. Chomsky made clear his position is that human nature must exist if anything distinctly human exists. This position has implications for thinking about what is and is not “just” when it comes to human beings. If social relations and arrangements (and treatment of people) can indeed be dehumanizing, as I believe to be possible, that implies something fundamental about our humanity. It also implies recognition of the interpenetrating, innate limits and abilities of human beings. Chomsky's argument, developed elsewhere, against the reductive strands of behaviorism that posited or assumed something akin to a near-infinitely malleable blank slate of human being reaffirms what is at stake if careful individual and collective consideration of human nature and life informed by that circumspect (and equally ambitious) activity is abandoned. Paraphrasing a consequent conclusion from which an underdevelopment of that component of praxis can stem, Chomsky wryly supposed that if we humans “have no intrinsic nature, then there is no moral barrier to control or manipulation of them – in their own interest, of course.” Quoted in Wennerberg, “On Humanism and Morality.”

69) Dewey, *Individualism Old and New*, 147.

70) For an explanation of the term, see Kelley, “What Did Cedric Robinson Mean by Racial Capitalism?”

FOUCAULT: If you like, I will be a little bit Nietzschean about this; in other words, it seems to me that the idea of justice in itself is an idea which in effect has been invented and put to work in different types of societies as an instrument of a certain political and economic power or as a weapon against that power. But it seems to me that, in any case, the notion of justice itself functions within a society of classes as a claim made by the oppressed class and as justification for it.

CHOMSKY: I don't agree with that.

FOUCAULT: And in a classless society, I am not sure that we would still use this notion of justice.

CHOMSKY: Well, here I really disagree. I think there is some sort of an absolute basis – if you press me too hard I'll be in trouble, because I can't sketch it out – ultimately residing in fundamental human qualities, in terms of which a "real" notion of justice is grounded.

I think it's too hasty to characterize our existing systems of justice as merely systems of class oppression; I don't think they are that. They embody systems of class oppression and elements of other kinds of oppression, but they also embody a kind of groping towards the true humanly valuable concepts of justice and decency and love and kindness and sympathy, which I think are real.⁷¹

Foucault effectively argued against understandings of human nature – and against what we might call our "species-being" in the Marxian sense – and he likewise questioned the effectiveness or utility of ideas of justice.

While Chomsky's rejoinder seems overly sanguine with respect to (misplaced) faith in our institutions, his understanding of justice and freedom as rooted in fundamental, innate (and we might assume, repressed) facets of our humanity uncovers grounds for contesting and transcending social alienation. Humans have treaded that territory throughout history, and long-standing traditions of transforming and humanizing justice attest to Chomsky's optimism, even as it best applies to work autonomous from criminalizing institutions.

Elsewhere Chomsky has distilled his naturalist position down into accessible logic. As Chomsky put it, if we take humans to be "biological organisms, not angels, then our cognitive faculties are similar to those called 'physical capacities'."⁷² In the 1971 debate, Chomsky referred to an inherent cognitive "schematism that makes it possible to derive complex and intricate knowledge on the basis of very partial data," calling it "one fundamental constituent of human nature."⁷³ An element of Chomsky's theory of human nature, which I find readily apparent and seemingly impossible to refute, pertains to his self-described, somewhat "idiosyncratic" yet pragmatic "use of the term *creativity*,"⁷⁴ which initially caused some misunderstanding between him and Foucault. For Chomsky, at least in the context of that conversation, creativity amounts to "a normal human act," as he was:

Speaking of the kind of creativity that any child demonstrates when he's able to come to grips with a new situation: to describe it properly, react to it properly, tell one something about it, think about it in a new fashion for him, and so on. I think it's appropriate to call those acts creative, but of course without thinking of those acts as being the acts of a Newton.⁷⁵

71) Chomsky and Foucault, *The Chomsky-Foucault Debate on Human Nature*, 54–55.

72) Chomsky, "What Kind of Creatures Are We?" 664.

73) Chomsky and Foucault, *The Chomsky-Foucault Debate on Human Nature*, 4.

74) *Ibid.*, 19.

75) *Ibid.*

He added that it is possible creativity in the arts could involve properties of human nature, which might at times be more fully developed in and more frequently exercised by some individuals than others.⁷⁶ The degree to which institutions (unevenly) repress our productive, creative potentials thus emerges as an ethical concern, inasmuch as we take activation and realization of those potentials as necessary for humanization against alienating dehumanization. Existing paradigms and practices of supposed “justice” thwart expressions of creativity, but use of our endowed capacities in the construction of artwork represents manifest potential to emancipate the senses and encourage an aesthetic sensibility concordant with the transformation of what inexplicably passes for justice.

Indeed “creative and dynamic experiments happening across the world”⁷⁷ comprise the practice of what is termed *transformative justice* (TJ) in the context of PIC abolition. This mode of abolitionist praxis involves “revival of the tools taken from us by a society that did not trust our ability to resolve harm without brutality,” and elicits a “process of construction and creativity, for all peoples whose systems of justice were upended or eradicated by the American political project.”⁷⁸ Art that indicts institutionalized alienation emerges as one such tool – one that also has the power to maximize human creativity and apperception in ways that further recollect and revive presently estranged humanity.

In cases of interpersonal harm in the present, for example, organizer Mariame Kaba, writing with Hayes, suggest TJ praxis “could immediately focus on addressing the harms perpetrated, centering on the concerns and experiences of the person who was harmed,” and would then “focus on the person responsible for the harm – but without disregarding their humanity. This means we have to acknowledge the reality that often it is hurt people who hurt people.”⁷⁹ It also entails discerning “how the broader context was set up for this harm to happen, and how that context can be changed so that this harm is less likely to happen again,” entreating us to check “our punitive impulses, while prioritizing healing, repair and accountability.”⁸⁰ That work of creatively reproducing ourselves and reconfiguring social contexts and relations arguably amounts to artwork.

V. Thesis 4: Art can offer a foretaste of liberation while anticipating, expressing and heightening our understanding of the possibilities for fuller freedom and PIC abolition, going against and beyond reformist reforms that have historically functioned to strengthen and expand the PIC.

Art in the vein of abolition disrupts the cultures of consent that legitimate and reproduce hegemonic notions of justice. The aesthetic dimension has a unique ability to undermine popular “commonsense,” to borrow the Gramscian phrase, as part of a process of transforming consciousness, sensibility and sense of possibility. Indeed, Marcuse maintained that art “implies dissociation from, and negation of, common sense and common values: ingression of a qualitatively different reality in the established one.”⁸¹ An abolitionist aesthetic opens up the closed, one-dimensional universe of discourse, and seems adept at supporting a refusal to surrender “to the immediate facts,” instead impelling “recognition of the factors behind the facts” and recognition of the “historical content”⁸² of what exists in ways that de-naturalize established arrangements. In so doing, art

76) Ibid., 20.

77) Kaba and Hayes, “The Sentencing of Larry Nassar Was Not ‘Transformative Justice,’” 61.

78) Ibid., 61–62.

79) Ibid., 59.

80) Ibid.

81) Feenberg, *Heidegger and Marcuse*, x.

82) Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 97.

provokes understanding that society could be otherwise. The partial autonomy and alienation inherent in the art form allow for enriched critical abstraction and contemplation capable of transcending given paradigms for addressing harm and presuppositions regarding the normality of the PIC. As dialectical imagination made sensuous and experiential, art in an abolitionist mode throws light on and thereby heightens “the tension between the ‘is’ and the ‘ought,’ between essence and appearance, potentiality and actuality,”⁸³ to once again frame this in Marcuse’s terms.

Case in point: Motion pictures. Director Martin Scorsese contends that we ought to view cinema as an art form,⁸⁴ and the academic discipline of film studies widely regards cinema as art. To be sure, there are movies that serve de-radicalizing functions, too often omitting close or accurate consideration of political praxis critical of the status quo. Film is also a fount of contradiction. As commercial mass media, motion pictures comes packaged in commodity form to be sold and bought, but as an industry of commercial culture, they also help sell a social order defined by commodification.⁸⁵ Any cursory glance at movies and television shows also offers abundant evidence of how media take police and prisons for granted – or, worse, glorify and exalt them as bulwarks of what is right and just. From the deprecation of predominantly poor individuals and communities on a series like *Cops*, to uncritical veneration of law and order on the long-running show by the same name, media reproduce tacit consent for the constitutive elements of the PIC. Corporate media do not as a rule prioritize pedagogical presentation or earnest attention to praxis even when the agents of that praxis become the protagonists in the narrative. On the other hand, by virtue of their aesthetic mode and even sometimes owing to their entertaining appeal to prevalent attitudes and beliefs, movies can accommodate popular consciousness while at the same time expanding and reconditioning it, stimulating subterranean sensibilities.

To the point, and apropos Fred Hampton referenced above, the recently released biographical drama *Judas and the Black Messiah*, which focused just as much on the FBI informant William O’Neal (Lakeith Stanfield) as it did on Hampton (Daniel Kaluuya) and BPP politics, nevertheless recounted history of the COINTELPRO efforts to destroy oppositional movements. As viewers, we confront historical realities ironically unvarnished in and through the aesthetic form. Implicitly, it entreats the audience to steel (and steal) themselves against (and away from) those same “necrophilic”⁸⁶ forces alive and dealing death and dehumanization in the present. Through fictionalized portrayals, the film communicated key truths about counter-institutions and practices, like mutual aid in the form of the Free Breakfast Program organized by the Panthers, giving younger persons and those who have never been involved in social struggles a different understanding of the world they inhabit.

The director, Shaka King, explained how his friends the Lucas brothers presented the idea for the film to him, saying:

They reached out to me and basically said, “We have this idea to make *The Departed* inside the world of COINTELPRO.” And I just thought that that was a very clever vessel and kind of intelligent way to sort of Trojan-horse a Fred Hampton biopic and introduce the world, you know, a great segment of the world who is unaware of who he was, and is highly unaware of the Panthers’ politics

83) Ibid.

84) Scorsese, “I Said Marvel Movies Aren’t Cinema.”

85) You can locate a variation of this idea in the following seminal work of Marcuse’s Frankfurt School colleagues: Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 120–67.

86) Those forces are “necrophilic” and thus oppressive because they are “nourished by love of death, not life,” to borrow a Freirean line. See Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 77.

and ideology. And, you know, obviously, as people know about, there's just been so much negative propaganda put forth about them, the Panthers as an organization, that I just thought it was an opportunity to kind of correct the record and put it – couch it in sort of this genre movie that would go wide to the masses, as opposed to just focusing on people who already were aware of it.⁸⁷

King's comments speak to artistic agency in and against propaganda, and to the inextinguishable power of art to informally re-educate and transform. "Aesthetic education," as Feenberg explained Marcuse's theory, ought to "prepare the people for freedom by refining their experience of the world."⁸⁸

Admittedly, the aesthetic form cannot guarantee an artist's exercise of power in that register, especially in the context of the twenty-first-century culture industry. Popularizing resistance figures and organizations can whitewash their resistance, posthumously alienating them from the spirit they embodied – or, estranging their memory from the spirit it ought to invoke and nurture. Quoting Marcuse, "the strong affirmative tendencies toward reconciliation with the established reality coexist with the rebellious ones" (AD, 10), and Hollywood has internalized a strong, arguably unyielding predilection for the former. Worse, marketing a film like *Judas and the Black Messiah* no doubt enriches a select few while plenty of former Panthers and organizers remain imprisoned and invisible in real life⁸⁹ – another reason why PIC abolition and art that helps sustain it or that offers it succor remains crucial.

Some major motion pictures and independent films still cut against the grain, even using the art of cinema to represent abolition, or at least the spirit of it. Setsu Shigematsu's *Visions of Abolition*⁹⁰ – and the updated version of the documentary, *Re-Visions of Abolition* – appear(s) to do that. A segment in the original film featuring clips from an interview with Angela Davis, another one of Marcuse's students and a vocal advocate for prison abolition, illustrates this. In one shot from the interview, Davis explains, "there have been those who say that prisons don't work, and then they say, 'Well, what do we need? Let's reform the prison, so it works. So let's create a better prison – a bigger and better prison.' And then that prison doesn't work. So, what do we do? We reform it by making the institution stronger, and so what happens is that you're caught in this circle," in which "the solution to the problem always becomes the problem itself, and it reproduces the problem." As Davis speaks, the film cuts to an image of Stateville Prison in Chicago, courtesy of National Geographic, followed by images of a prison interior shaped as a panopticon, effectively showing viewers what reformist reforms have wrought.

The director also intercuts Davis providing analysis she and others tried to share with the world through Critical Resistance, an abolitionist social movement organization, with images of demonstrations replete with performative street theatrics and graphic artwork critical of the PIC. Davis explains CR's work back in 1997 to popularize an abolitionist critique of the PIC and to introduce new vocabularies capable of challenging carceral commonsense. "People tended to assume," she told the camera, "that whoever was in prison was in prison because they had committed a crime. And it may be true that people who are in prisons have committed 'crimes,' but that may not be the reason why they're there, because many other people commit 'crimes,' and don't go to prison."

After showing footage of Davis speaking at a seminal CR conference, along with music performed live, Shigematsu cuts to other interviews, including one with another CR co-founder, Dylan Rodriguez, who stressed that abolition concerns more than just the PIC. That is, it also entails understanding of fundamental social transformation needed as part of a process of abolishing institutions while building anew. As has been argued

87) King, "Judas and the Black Messiah' Director Shaka King on Fred Hampton."

88) Feenberg, *Heidegger and Marcuse*, 93.

89) Others have voiced similar concerns and criticisms. For example, see Ball, "Judas and the Black Messiah: First Thoughts Review."

90) For this and the next two paragraphs, I draw from the following: Shigematsu, *Visions of Abolition*.

here, it implies enduring efforts to eradicate human estrangement. Rodriguez pointed to prison reform advocacy removed from the praxis of abolition as a problem because what it really calls for “is a reform of violence.” Rodriguez speaks and the director cuts to a close-up still shot of the barbed wire atop a fence surrounding a prison and a graphic with bullet points about electrified fences. The audio from the interview continues, and as the voiceover ends, the camera tilts upward, revealing more of the facility inside just as the shot fades into a prison official touting the electricity coursing constantly through the fence. Then the director cuts back to a medium close-up of Rodriguez, who says, “What you’re asking for is a reform of a racist slave relation,” as the film proceeds to intercut a black and white sketch of men in bondage on what looks like a slave ship. Modern day pictures of tables used to strap down and restrain prisoners appear soon after, and then interview audio from Rodriguez argues that reform merely proposes altering the institutional arrangements in which violence occurs without directly addressing those relations of violence (relations of extreme alienation from our “species-being” and our humanity). Disputing the premise that prison is actually about “criminality,” he leads those watching and listening to the conclusion “that the reform impulse is actually wrongheaded from the start.” Verbalized criticism coupled with revelatory imagery to adduce arguments for abolition does more than merely persuade. It offers aesthetic material that might aid in recollection of estranged, fragmented “species-being” by encouraging *conscientização*:⁹¹ critical consciousness of the PIC and the accompanying insight that its institutions displace and perpetuate harm rather than reduce it.

Moreover, drawing on Marcuse’s Frankfurt School colleague, Walter Benjamin, “that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction” – and Benjamin goes on to explicitly analyze film in this text – “is the aura of the work of art.”⁹² Intact, the “aura” vitiates abolition and apperception thereof. The technological reproduction of motion pictures, not to mention new digital and interactive multimedia, “detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition,” from the paralyzing aura, leading “to a tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind.”⁹³ By substituting “a plurality of copies for a unique existence,” and in allowing the beholder to meet the reproduced art form on her own terms, “it reactivates the object reproduced,” liquidating the traditional value of taken-for-granted cultural norms.⁹⁴ In Benjamin’s view, “by exploring commonplace milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action.”⁹⁵ Together, technology and art illumine. To repurpose an apropos line from Benjamin’s text, along “came film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second,”⁹⁶ using close-ups, jump cuts, dissolves and other devices to show us what we have hitherto taken for granted in a new light. As Escobar, the Puerto Rican artist and political prisoner referenced above, similarly explained, the “intense involvement that art requires helps us to understand the real necessities and the true meanings of freedom, for the individual as well as the collective.”⁹⁷ The technologically enhanced, alienated nature of this sort of art eviscerates the “aura” that otherwise occludes the socially and historically constructed character of the represented content, opening it up for closer inspection as the aesthetic dimension discloses a horizon of new possibility.

91) For a seminal overview of this pedagogical process of problematizing the world and one’s relation to it and producing critical consciousness, see Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

92) Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” 221.

93) Ibid.

94) Ibid.

95) Ibid. 236.

96) Ibid.

97) Escobar, “Art of Liberation,” 301.

Benjamin ends the aforementioned essay with a pertinent provocation. He wrote that humankind's "self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art."⁹⁸ His concluding remarks could also apply to the role of art in abolition today. Writing several decades ago from inside a prison, within what might be considered a testament to fascist repression or to emergent proto-fascism in the US, George Jackson argued against seeing fascism as a future concern or impending threat, instead claiming it "has temporarily succeeded under the guise of reform."⁹⁹ Jackson echoed and presaged the criticism of compromising reformist reforms. Whether we opt to use the label of "fascism" as Jackson did, replacing "Communism" in Benjamin's last sentence with "Abolition" appropriately recasts his proposition, provided the politicization retains the dialectical tension intrinsic to the aesthetic form. If our "self-alienation," or alienation of our "species-being," expands sans abolition of the PIC, then politicizing art is and ought to be part of abolition's apposite answer to the state's fascistic apparatus.

Nevertheless, referencing the playwright Bertolt Brecht, Marcuse claimed "deliberately formless expression 'banalizes' inasmuch as it obliterates the opposition to the established universe of discourse – an opposition which is crystalized in the aesthetic form."¹⁰⁰ If politicizing art entails fusing it with political struggle and thus compromises art's ability to "speak the language of a radically different experience" and to "invoke images and needs of liberation which reach into the depth dimension of human existence,"¹⁰¹ then the absorption of the aesthetic into what is risks denying art the power to express what ought to be. Artistic "mediation between 'ought' and 'is' represents an alternative to the Marxist unification of theory and practice through class struggle" – a mediation Feenberg understood Marcuse to favor.¹⁰²

Yet, Marcuse also mentioned the "limitation of aesthetic autonomy" essential to art, which affects consciousness and can make art "a social factor" (AD, 41). The "elements (word, color, tone)," along with purposive rhythm, rhyme, beat, inflection, pacing, lighting, angle, and the like that art depends upon in order to meaningfully communicate come from existing cultural material – otherwise expression would be impossible (AD, 41). The bounded autonomy of art, and its embedded alienation, make both its politicization and its propensity to promote perception of the ineffable and penchant for instilling and driving desire for social arrangements that transcend established limits possible. With artistic engagement, Escobar theorized, one can better sense "the intrinsic relationship between the visions coming through the praxis of art and those unveiled aspects of the too-much-rationalized and arbitrary aspects of our ideologies, as well as our daily mechanical rituals and common nonsense" (AD, 41). The dual pedagogies of artistic creation and appreciation can provide a sensuous experience of an otherwise incommunicable knowledge of another way of being.¹⁰³ Escobar shared how his "own experience of repression expressed through art," when properly received, bears resonance with generalized "human experiences of repression and exclusion" in ways that dogmatic, didactic politics could not.¹⁰⁴ Such art exudes a communal ethic. It bespeaks reform consonant with abolition, a re-formation of our

98) Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 242.

99) Jackson, *Blood in My Eye*, 120.

100) Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, 43.

101) *Ibid.*, 40.

102) Feenberg, *Heidegger and Marcuse*, 93.

103) Escobar expounded upon the ways art escapes the limitations of dominant discourse, enhancing human receptivity to heterodox knowledge. See Escobar, "Art of Liberation," 298–300. I also draw from Marcuse's theory of art in relation to revolution here. See CR, 79–128.

104) Escobar, "Art of Liberation," 301.

“species-being” ready for actualization. To bring back Benjamin once more, this art arrests thought “in a configuration pregnant with tensions,” and “it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad.”¹⁰⁵ Consciousness then beholds “the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past.”¹⁰⁶ Through art, Escobar insisted, “one can create meaning for one’s own existence or inspire others to continue the struggle.”¹⁰⁷ Marcuse captured all this thusly:

In this sense art is inevitably part of that which is and only as part of that which is does it speak against that which is. This contradiction is preserved and resolved (*aufgehoben*) in the aesthetic form which gives the familiar content and the familiar experience the power of estrangement – and which leads to the emergence of a new consciousness and a new perception. (CR, 41)

Art as abolition might not directly abolish the PIC, but it arguably can augment abolition via *conscientização* as it engenders, recollects or emancipates sensibility. Whether the sort of stylized non-fiction described above always emits artistic resonance remains an open question, but even artwork closely wedded to reality, so long as there exists iconoclastic, convention-repudiating fidelity to the transformative aesthetic mode, should retain indirect, emancipatory potential. If art inserts facts from existing reality into the vehicle of the qualitatively disparate aesthetic form, the transported cultural content arrives in a partially “fictitious world” that “restructures consciousness and gives sensual representation to a counter-societal experience” (AD, 44).

Adopting the cultural studies lens shared by Stuart Hall,¹⁰⁸ and thereby extending this theory of art to aesthetic forms of representation through media, we assume that representation of the given sensuous world and empirically experienced facts within it amount to more than mere re-presentation of already existing events. As Hall argued, the representation through which so many people experience worldly events, and those media representations framing, depicting and reconstituting reality in effect constitute the event. The process of representation produces content we comprehend as reality. Put differently, because we understand much of the world through that representational process, the media text, together with how we encode the messages conveyed, comes to constitute the world or the events in it for us. Since mediation of content also entails selective and thus stylistic recombination of aspects of reality, representation implies and constitutes something akin to an alienated aesthetic universe replete with possibility.

Marcuse suggested that even realistic works of art “must transform the reality which is their material in order to re-present its essence as envisioned by art,” adding that whatever the historical reality, it can become part of “mimesis,” so long as it is “stylized, subjected to aesthetic ‘formation.’ And precisely this stylization allows the transvaluation of the norms of the established reality principle – de-sublimation on the basis of the original sublimation, dissolution of the social taboos, of the social management of Eros and Thanatos” (AD, 44–45). This amounts to “representation through estrangement, subversion of consciousness” (AD, 45). Marcuse intimated that this mode of representation intensifies experience and perception – not unlike what Benjamin claimed before him – claiming the form goes so “far as to distort things so that the unspeakable is spoken, the otherwise invisible becomes visible, and the unbearable explodes” (AD, 45). In this way, “aesthetic transformation turns into indictment – but also into a celebration of that which resists injustice and terror, and of that which can still be saved” (AD, 45).

105) Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 263.

106) Ibid.

107) Ibid.

108) For this paragraph, the author has drawn from the following: Jhally, *Stuart Hall*.

Now, as Hall would have it,¹⁰⁹ the notion that nothing exists outside of discourse is false, but it remains true that nothing meaningful exists outside discourse, assuming discourse encompasses the alienated – if also communicable and expressive – aesthetic dimension. Ideology attempts to fix meaning, and technology, including the guns and cellblocks used in policing and prisons, further reifies frameworks for thinking about and realizing justice. Those reifications do violence to the justice involved in recuperating our estranged “species-being,” the ongoing processes of representation and the unrelenting human compulsion to create art to represent irrepressible futurity. If reification denotes forgetting, then the authentic aesthetic form “fights reification by making the petrified world speak, sing, perhaps dance” (AD, 73). Artists might intervene in the world of discourse with works of art that undercut the constructed popular consent buttressing the PIC – with artwork that disrupts the tenuous broad-based support for a punitive paradigm manufactured in part by dominant discourse and the simulated representation of consensus the hegemonic process hitherto reproduces and presumes. The intervention can come in the aesthetic form offering a foretaste of liberation (synonymous with successes on the road to abolition) and can thus indirectly impel individual and social transformation.

This seems especially true if the interventions become part of a movement for what Angela Davis termed, “abolition democracy,”¹¹⁰ drawing on the work of W.E.B. DuBois.¹¹¹ Prior to Davis’s reformulation, DuBois argued that while slavery was formally abolished with the Emancipation Proclamation, abolition occurred only in the negative sense and remained stillborn.¹¹² Repression thwarted efforts during Reconstruction to develop counter-institutions and relations needed so that formerly enslaved persons would have the physical, social and cultural resources necessary to exercise meaningful say over their own lives. Widespread realization of the “abolition-democracy”¹¹³ envisioned by DuBois and attempted in part during the short-lived era of Reconstruction in the immediate post-Civil War United States never took hold. Davis in turn argues that PIC abolition demands a reinvigorated “abolition democracy” and suggests that formal elimination of alienating penal institutions is not enough. While “abolition democracy” surely involves creating autonomy from the criminal punishment system while trying to meet everyone’s material needs in a participatory manner, it also probably must promote the human creativity and spiritual uplift associated with the arts and culture. Without that, the alienation endemic to the PIC likely remains under attack, but intact.

VI. Thesis 5: Art augments the spirit of abolition and intimates a mode of being antithetical to imprisonment, the PIC and the alienated way of life associated with criminalization and state coercion.

How does art preserve the alienation needed to indict “the totality of a society which draws everything, even the estranging works, into its purview” (AD, 31) while also embodying and advancing “abolition democracy,” simultaneously nurturing critical consciousness and the spirit of abolition? How might art aid in recollection of our innate “species-being” and in the cultivation of a human sensibility incompatible with far-reaching feelings and relations of alienation ensconced within, demanded and ideologically served by the PIC? How do artists committed to abolition popularize disavowal of the PIC while also anticipating a world without policing and prisons? How do they do that without succumbing to the cooptation, and incorporation into the wrong world when; both commodification and mutually reinforcing efforts to create abolitionist art intelligible to

109) Again, see Jhally, *Stuart Hall*.

110) Davis, *Abolition Democracy*.

111) DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America*.

112) Davis, *Abolition Democracy*, 95.

113) DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, 292.

prevailing commonsense risk rendering the multitude of possible messages and meanings in artwork reformist and conformist, flattening out the contradiction and potential found in the aesthetic form?

Marcuse's reexamination of Marxist theories of aesthetics require additional reevaluation in relation to the above. Marcuse questioned the "definite connection between art and social class" (AD, 2) and the subsuming of subjectivity (including individual consciousness, the unconscious and experience) into assumed class consciousness (AD, 3–5). Likewise, he interrogated the tendency to assess works of art in terms of their class-based ideologies (AD, 6). He posed as a problem the presupposition that class position must condition art, and he challenged the impulse to settle or interpret all of which art can convey through the lens of class struggle (AD, 14).

We would be remiss, however, were our reformulation to discard his thesis. That is, "the radical qualities of art, that is to say, its indictment of the established reality and its invocation of the beautiful image (*schöner Schein*) of liberation, are grounded precisely in the dimensions where art *transcends* its social determination and emancipates itself from the given universe of discourse and behavior while preserving its overwhelming presence" (AD, 6). If art is to inform and express abolition, though, if it is to indict the estrangement violently reproduced by the PIC, and if it is to invoke images of a world without people in cages or hunted by armed kidnapers sanctioned by the state – to target specific communities – concern for social or "class" position reemerges as relevant. This is not to suggest a revival of any reductionism or a bastardization of the autonomous aesthetic form. Representation and introjection of the spirit of abolition, or recollection of "species-being," against and beyond dehumanizing distortion by the estranging nature of the PIC, and the exploitative institutions for capital accumulation it protects, ought not to become the property of a particular class at the expense of others.

Situating art not just within the theory and practice of liberation, but specifically within the tradition and movement for PIC abolition, invites a partial reformulation of Marcuse's critique. Without attending to incarceration, or established retributive structures actively expropriating social justice and the dominant methods for addressing harm in society, Marcuse's corrective to outmoded Marxist aesthetics neglected the major sources of alienation and repression in society. Sans any adjustment, the theory thus fails to envisage liberation. Marcuse claimed that, even if the forces of advanced capitalism had not sufficiently integrated the working class into the system – though he believed that integration occurred in the US and similar societies – the proletariat's "class consciousness would not be the privileged or the sole force which could preserve and reshape the truth of art" (AD, 31). The greater the administration of the people into the system, he suggests, the greater the estrangement of authentic art from the people. To rework his theory in light of abolition, we must acknowledge that prisoners are in a suspended state of alienation from the rest of society. As an institution, prison administers and deprives them of self-determination, to be sure, but the administration and deprivation takes place apart from the ways of life common on the outside. As noted above, incarcerated persons often see their situations as akin to "social death," an extreme form of estrangement foreign to those subject to less totalizing and corporeal alienation.

Imprisoned human beings develop a deep and abiding knowledge of the inner workings of what the movement for abolition seeks to abolish, at tremendous cost of course. That knowledge and the concomitant cost (the "social death" and the ceaseless denial of humanity and of the creative experimentation so fundamental to it) produce a consciousness of the carceral not shared by persons spared immediate subjugation by the PIC. "If art 'is' for any collective consciousness at all," Marcuse claimed, "it is that of individuals united in their awareness of the universal need for liberation – regardless of their class position" (AD, 31). The statement withstands, but the creation of a collective consciousness attuned to the re-humanizing aims of abolition no doubt demands input from the "prisoner class" whose way of life epitomizes the horrors of the PIC as well as the indefatigable spirit of resistance to it.

Jailhouse Lawyers Speak, a collective that takes “seriously prisoners being protagonists in their own struggles,” also speaks of “organizing prisoners as a class,” as a “prisoner class,”¹¹⁴ journalist Jared Ware has explained on Black Power Media.¹¹⁵ JLS is part of the iamWe Prison Advocacy Network, which intentionally educates against racism and classism, aims to address “the impact of prisons on Brown people, Indigenous peoples, and poor Whites,” and “encourages all prisoners to find their life purpose, through life skill curriculums and personal spiritual development.”¹¹⁶ In other words, they are engaged in a creative, collective recovery of “species-being” through multifaceted struggle with the structures of estrangement maintained by the PIC, the racist underpinnings of capitalism and related hierarchies of punishment. That engagement, reminiscent of Fred Hampton’s Rainbow Coalition, exhibits an aesthetic as well as practical appeal.

In contrast to the sadism pervading the PIC, JLS interweaves the aesthetic form with straightforward analysis in ways that juxtapose our alienation with sensuous, if circumscribed, experience of recollected humanity. The JLS membership zine,¹¹⁷ for example, features graphic sketches alongside photographic images of movement icons, complemented by brief text in august font propounding, “End Prison Slavery Now!” and “From Gangsta to Guerilla” as well as with seemingly clear and superimposed text affirming “freedom will blossom in the ashes of the prisons,” and (written in all-caps) “Abolition is a Realistic Vision.” The zine includes a poem by the late Hugo Pinell, an organizer active in the first wave of the prison movement popularized by George Jackson.

NO
MATTER
HOW LONG IT TAKES
REAL CHANGES WILL COME.
AND THE GREATEST PERSONAL REWARD
LIES IN OUR INVOLVEMENT AND CONTRIBUTIONS,
EVEN IF IT MAY APPEAR THAT NOTHING SIGNIFICANT
OR OF IMPACT REALLY HAPPENED
DURING OUR TIMES.
BUT IT DID.
BECAUSE
EVERY SINCERE EFFORT
IS AS SPECIAL AS EVERY HUMAN LIFE.

According to the New African Black Panther Party-Prison Chapter,¹¹⁸ California prison officials set up Pinell; he was murdered inside a California prison in 2015, giving his poetry added weight and an insinuation of the prophetic that animates the spirit of abolition. The poem asserts the inherent dignity of each human being regularly disrespected by what our intrinsic worth implores us to overhaul.

JLS shares the sentiment with persons on the outside as well, as evident with the “National Shut ‘Em Down Demonstrations” the collective called upon organizers outside prison walls to make happen. JLS called for folks to “protest in the spirit of abolition,” as one of their fliers announced, by sharing JLS material on social

114) Mack and Ware, “Jailhouse Lawyers Speak!” 13:38.

115) Ibid., 8:00.

116) iamWeUBUNTU, “About iamWe.”

117) Subsequent references in this paragraph refer to the contents of the following: Jailhouse Lawyers Speak, *Information Guide*.

118) Johnson, “Love and Lessons in Memory of Comrade Hugo ‘Yogi Bear’ Pinell.”

media, ordering and posting JLS-promoted stickers (which also read “IN THE SPIRIT OF ABOLITION”) and otherwise organizing and publicly educating against the PIC between August 21 and September 9 in 2021.¹¹⁹

JLS “Rebel Wear,”¹²⁰ including graphic t-shirts, tank tops, leggings, hooded sweatshirts and accessories, use the aesthetic form to communicate solidarity with prisoners and the demand for abolition. Although sold as commodities, the images and ideas on display transcend exchange value. They refute any fidelity to the penal institutions upholding the estranged relationships endemic to capitalism. One t-shirt reads “ab-o-li-tion-ist” – with dictionary-style world division dots separating letters – atop a working definition that references “a comrade in the struggle on the pursuit to do away with an institution or institutional policy” above the JLS logo, a circle showing two shackled arms forming an X. Another shows flames in the shape of a dragon neck and head, with the words “BURN THE PRISONS” ablaze in the fire below. The “Rebel Wear” store also sells assortment of shirts, hoodies, face masks and coffee mugs featuring “DWELLS WITHIN PRISONS” text below your choice of the words “LOVE” or “HUMANS,” all surrounded by an intricate border with the shape of a heart on the top and the JLS logo at the bottom. You can also order one with “MIRACLES” on it. The products offer another vision of what is fashionable – that is, fashionable in the dual sense of what is in fashion and widely esteemed as well as another person and world, fashionable through creative co-creation and free from entrenched alienation and the PIC. They remind us of our humanity in and through reproducible testaments to a resistance articulated and apprehensible thanks in part to the artistic qualities affording abolition of the PIC some purchase (double entendre again intended).

Yet, Marcuse rightfully observed, “art cannot translate its vision into reality” (AD, 57). The aesthetic dimension in which art operates “remains a ‘fictitious’ world, though as such it sees through and anticipates reality,” reminding us “the hope which it represents ought not to remain mere ideal” (AD, 57). Conjuring Kant, Marcuse called this “the hidden categorical imperative of art” (AD, 57), what we might take as tantamount to the spirit of abolition, recognizable in but fully alive only outside artwork. For Marx, our “spiritual nourishment,” which must first be prepared “to make palatable and digestible,” stems from the “continuous interchange” between human nature and the non-human nature sustaining us all in significant part through the exercise of our natural endowments.¹²¹ We find abolition as art at that intersection Marx mapped out.

Theorizing his own work as well as that of others while incarcerated, Escobar referred to “a responsibility” to emancipate the “extreme collective madness”¹²² found in prisons through art. The aesthetic alienation of the perverse alienation administered by the PIC offers what Escobar considered “the best argument for talking about freedom and ‘bout necessity when one does not separate the body from the spirit.”¹²³ The dual pedagogies of artistic creation and appreciation can provide a bodily experience of an otherwise unspeakable spiritual knowledge of another way of being, one bereft of the self-alienation structured by the PIC.

Escobar understood the liberation of our estranged, socially constructed experience through art as an obligation to the species made possible via “true dedication” to the craft “and to those who have been reduced to invisibility.”¹²⁴ We can surmise that artistic practices emblematic of that commitment to transformative social justice make art as well as the incarcerated person’s creation, enjoyment and theorization of artwork an indispensable part of abolition. Following Marcuse’s interpretation of Marx’s manuscripts, the artistic act of

119) For more on the “National Shut ‘Em Down Demonstrations,” see Fassler, “Incarcerated Organizers Call for Mass Actions.”

120) Jailhouse Lawyers Speak, “Real Rebel Wear.”

121) Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 31.

122) Escobar, “Art of Liberation,” 301.

123) *Ibid.*, 302.

124) *Ibid.*, 300–301.

“distinguishing” ourselves “from the immediate determination”¹²⁵ of our existence constitutes a “real expression of human freedom,”¹²⁶ and one that might today instantiate abolition as an instinctual need and way of life. To “achieve the abolition of estrangement,”¹²⁷ as Marcuse desired, demands abolition of the prison-industrial complex, a perpetually creative process of transforming the self, and our sense of self, severed from our human “species-being” with which art, in the spirit of abolition, reacquaints us.

125) Marcuse, “The Foundation of Historical Materialism,” III, para. 9.

126) *Ibid.*, III, para. 10.

127) *Ibid.*, II, para. 1.

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