

Carceral Time & Decarceral Time: An Account of Prison Temporality

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Abstract What is the meaning of “time” when one is “doing time”? Through a phenomenological analysis of first-person accounts, this article considers the imprint incarceration enacts upon a person’s primary experience of time. This is termed carceral time, and includes experiences such as the social death of incarceration, temporal stasis, natal alienation, carceral captivity, and the foreclosing of diachronic agency. Retributivists—including Kant and Hegel—assert that punishment is justified when it is proportional to the crime. Yet, the proportionality of a prison sentence hinges on the assumption that carceral time can be calculated in terms of its equivalency or economic exchangeability to free people’s experience of time. In evaluating whether incarceration is just, one must consider the impact it has on the incarcerated person. The testimonies on carceral time evince that incarceration indelibly inscribes the whole of an individual’s temporal horizon and is not quantifiably proportional to ordinary “free” experiences of time. This undermines the concept of proportional time at the heart of retributivist arguments, but also, potentially, the justness of the justice system. This article concludes by drawing on prominent carceral theorists, abolitionists, and critical phenomenologists to consider possible tactics of temporal repair termed “decarceral time.”

Keywords Incarceration, critical phenomenology, prison Time, justice

Time descends in your cell like the lid of a coffin in which you lie and watch it as it slowly closes over you. When you neither move nor think in your cell, you are awash in pure nothingness. Solitary confinement in prison can alter the ontological makeup of a stone.

— Jack Henry Abbott,
In the Belly of the Beast: Letters from Prison

Time is the very condition of Western civilization which oppresses so brutally.

— Ronald Walcott,
“Some Notes on the Blues, Style and Space”

"I didn't realize the social death that we were given at the sentence. This wasn't a five-to- fifteen or five-to-ten; this was a life sentence, a death sentence, in a sense." So attests Raymond Santana, freed member of the exonerated so-called Central Park Five.¹ Santana intuited that prison would enduringly mar the rest of his life irrespective of how long he was incarcerated. The existential, psychological, and physical burden of incarceration is neither figuratively nor literally contained to a prison sentence. Every prison sentence permanently and ontologically alters one's most intimate temporal projects, the whole of one's life, one's life expectancy, and the temporal experience of one's life. In this article, carceral time denotes this array of temporal experiences. Carceral time encompasses the temporal harms of incarceration: experiences of social death, inert time, exile from the everyday flow of conscious lived time, and deprivation of diachronic agency (the agential capacity to make decisions towards a chosen future and to form one's life projects).² In mainstream discourse for those without first- or second-hand experience, incarceration is often imagined as an innocuous period of waiting or suspension as opposed to a slow suffocation.³ This article draws on carceral theory, abolitionist theory, and critical phenomenology to elucidate the lived experience of incarceration and cultivate a robust understanding of the violence incarceration enacts on temporal experience.

The chief aim of this article is to give a testimony-based account of carceral time. I accomplish this by providing an array of lived accounts of carceral temporal undergoing. To know whether prison is just necessitates understanding not just the dehumanization, exposure to violence, and family separation that marks prison experience, but what carceral time does to a person, saliently what it enacts upon a person's experience of time. Even if prisons were made less violent, or included more occupational training, it would not mitigate the fundamental harm done to the incarcerated person's temporal unfolding. While rehabilitative opportunities and physical safety are also integral to questions of incarceration's "justness," this article's motivating question concerns the justness of the temporal experience of incarceration. This aligns with incarcerated people's articulated concerns. These accounts are then further elucidated through a critical phenomenological lens to provide a qualitative understanding of carceral experiences of time. Most carceral theory—such as recent works in abolitionist geography—focus on the spatial alienation or geographic isolation of prisons.⁴ Yet, as the phenomenologists included in this article attest, human beings are essentially temporal beings (in addition to being spatially enfolded matter). Thus, temporal alienation is equally worthy of consideration.⁵ Following this phenomenological reading is a critique of the linchpin of carceral logic: time as payment.

This is central to canonical retributivist arguments that argue that the justness of punishment rests on the proportionality of the punishment to the crime. Carceral time as punishment relies on an economic model of temporality with time being considered as property or currency. Akin to Penelope's unweaving, decarceral time is based on a critical phenomenology of temporality and connotes the durational reparative tactics intended to counteract carceral time.

I. First-Person accounts of carceral time: Weaponized time, social death, and slow death⁶

The painful enduring of inert states—as experienced through incarceration—displaces a person from the flow of “normal time.”⁷ Consider the testimony of an older incarcerated woman who described prison time as “quite different because you’re *watching* the clock inside prison whereas you don’t necessarily *look* at the clock on the outside. I mean the clock was there and you might glance at it, but here *clock time means everything*.”⁸ Instead of temporal agency she attests to a state of objective time captivity, where she is alienated from her own temporal experience and living in the dead impersonal time of the clock. In his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty distinguishes between objective time, claiming, “There is no time in things” and the experience of lived time, articulating “once I am born, time flows through me.”⁹ Carceral time exiles one from this temporal flow and confines her in the alienating time of things.

In prison, dehumanizing monotonous time is the project; one is *doing time*, coming undone by time. This is perspicuously articulated by formerly incarcerated author Jy'Aire Smith-Pennick, who writes, “None of us are living; we’re merely existing.”¹⁰ Doing time is not the monotony of waiting at the DMV; that is, a waiting towards quotidian accomplishments. Waiting in prison is waiting for time itself. To be submerged in this liminal state for prolonged periods, or even indefinitely, induces an ongoing psychic state of temporal claustrophobia. The ongoing horizon of stasis manifests in the essential disjoint of carceral time through a lack of agency in how one chooses to spend one's time—what Edward Hinchman terms diachronic agency.¹¹ Alienation from one's life, temporal horizon of meaning-making, and community are compounded by the social death induced through the exile from one's community, which harms one's fundamental agency, intersubjective identity, and position as a subject. This social death is not just the physical absence in the lives of others but being excised from intertwined temporal projects. Carceral time is a wound. This carceral marring of lived time is acute in instances of prolonged solitary confinement. However, a recent study found that suicide rates

are seven times higher for people incarcerated pre-conviction than for individuals serving sentences.¹² This demonstrates how even short sentences and pre-trial detention cause irreparable harm and hasten death.

Carceral time recasts the propriety of time into a form of impersonal punishment through the suffocating captivity of empty clock-time. Smith-Pennick reflects that the dehumanizing institutionalization of incarceration is a bare existence, as if he had become an object.¹³ He elucidates the accretive toll of this deadening monotony as follows:

This is the part of prison the media doesn't talk about — the boredom and stagnation. There is just no escaping this perpetual state of sameness because every aspect of it invades your space and overloads your senses. To people who are free, our collective boredom may seem minute. But life on the inside isn't so much a physical battle as it is a mental one. It's the little things that begin to chip away at your humanity and take a toll on your psyche.¹⁴

This is echoed in the epigraph by Jack Henry Abbott, which is from the 1981 collection of letters written during his long incarceration, where he asserts that that solitary confinement would “alter the ontological make up of a stone.”¹⁵ In 2020, Michael E. Gaston stated of his period of incarceration, “Sometimes I have looked up to realize that another day has passed, but it was so similar to the previous one—and the one before that, and all the ones before that. The only thing that sets it apart is its number designation on a calendar.”¹⁶ The likenesses between these various accounts attest to the impersonal temporality of prison. Carceral time erodes the body, the psyche, and steals the individual life-time of people who are incarcerated. It is the torment of having no alternative to the present, the living death of being disjointed from diachronic agency, the torturous temporal disorientation, and the severing of social temporal relations. Carceral time enacts a violence upon a person as a temporal being rather than a spatial/embodied being. Because this violence is invisible and enacted through slow accumulation, it is often overlooked.

Tracing the embodied temporal aspect of life behind bars, one formerly incarcerated woman stated, “Inside I don't feel old. But my body feels old...You seem to be dragging your body around all the time. You are conscious of your body. You know, it feels heavy all the time. Your heart is heavy all the time. Your feelings are all heavy — there is no lightheartedness.”¹⁷ Here aging, a temporal experience, is related to a feeling of heaviness and entropy. This person's mental experience does not match her body and her captivity is double, her mind captive in an aging and increasingly weighed down body, that body held captive in the carceral system. Likewise, a young man

discusses the phenomenon of being suspended in time, "I won't grow up, time stops dead in jail, don't it? You're doin' the same thing every day, livin' the same life every day, so there is no need to grow up."¹⁸ He too is speaking of the mental consequence of captivity. Both individuals articulate a temporal exile. The woman is weighed down by a body weathered by the passing of time that she does not internally feel. In the latter case, it seems this temporal stasis is the consequence of being deprived of novel experiences and experiencing normative life markers. In both instances time is out of joint; phenomenological and narrative experience does not match the passing of days and years.

Carceral time induces a painful dissonance between the pre-carceral past, the hermetic unbearable ongoing now, and an imagined post-incarceration future.¹⁹ This can be most accurately characterized as the violence of stagnant time, stripped of momentum and transformed into a dead object.²⁰ This is not a mere magnification of the ordinary pain of boredom or waiting. Carceral time includes the slow alienation from one's aims.²¹ One woman poignantly describes her incarceration as:

... each day your life slips away from you a little bit and then one day you wake up in the morning and it's all gone and that's the worst day of all, when everything before has gone. I was writing, it was like a diary effect, I was writing about present day and past and it was all mingled in together, it sort of made you cry and laugh at the same time, and that's what happened to me along the way. It all just slipped away. You can't keep it; you can't hold it.²²

The above passage elucidates the carceral experience of being deprived of one's own time, denied the capacity to hold onto the experience of the past in the service of a future in which it will be relevant again.

Carceral time permeates relational time. A recurrent motif voiced by those impacted by incarceration is that "families of prisoners are doing time too."²³ Those serving time are cut off from everyday social time.²⁴ It alienates one from the shared time of friendship, family, and community. One is living in the end, after the end, or outside the bounds of shared time, diachronic agency, and social time. This is not to minimize the importance of the shared undergoing between people who are incarcerated together, but to highlight the feeling of lived unreality. One no longer possesses time and cannot call it *my time*; behind bars, a person belongs to time, not vice versa. This living death sentence warrants being taken seriously as violence, not only in instances of exoneration, but as an inhumane practice full stop.²⁵ Phenomenology provides an account of lived temporality that illuminates the extent to which the violation of the propriety of one's time is a violation of one's very being. This corrects widespread assumptions that carceral time

is akin to everyday experiences of waiting, space, or voluntary social estrangement. For instance, during COVID lockdowns and quarantines, many individuals without carceral experiences expressed that they thought these experiences were akin to incarceration.

II. Phenomenology of carceral time

A central motif of phenomenology is the claim that time is not an empty medium one moves through; it is an inextricable ontological register of the person. Phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger claim human beings *are* time, in terms of memorial consciousness, embodied temporal habituation, historicity, and futurity.²⁶ In everyday experience, time is colored by affect, moves at fluctuating tempos, and is structured in terms of one's projects and aims.²⁷ If this, then, is the case, incarceration is not an unpleasant interim, but a fundamental wound to a person's essence.

While less visible than physical harm, violence done to one's temporal unfolding negatively alters one's primary experience of the world. For every year that someone spends behind bars in the US, their life expectancy is reduced by approximately two years.²⁸ Without mass incarceration, it is estimated that the average US life expectancy would be five years longer.²⁹ Research suggests even one day of incarceration produces irreparable legal, social, economic, and health harms.³⁰ Consider what happens within twenty-four hours when a person is publicly arrested, does not show up to work, does not pick up their children from daycare, cannot access necessary medications, and is placed in a dangerous and unhealthy environment. This is deeply stigmatizing and harmful to the person and their larger networks and communities. Even relatively short periods of incarceration can be deadly. Suicide is the leading cause of death in local jails, far exceeding that in prisons.³¹

Incarceration alienates one from the experiential flow of time. In an essay on the racialization of time, Ronald Walcott asserts, "Time for the invisible does not quite mean what it does for those swept up in its 'swift and imperceptible flowing.'"³² He goes on to cite Ellison, "Invisibility, let me explain, gives one a slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat. Sometimes you're ahead and sometimes behind."³³ This is not to collapse the distinction between racialized time and carceral time; however, they share a disjointed alienation, forced spectatorship, and exile from a perceived "mainstream" collective time which is in truth a racialized, economically stratified temporality of privilege.

Unlike the earlier invocation of carceral time as calendar time, classic phenomenology adumbrates everyday experience of time not

as subjective experience grafted onto objective time, but in the time of possibilities, in narrative construction of identity. Henri Bergson avers that it is false that time is the thread on which we string the beads of events and experiences.³⁴ Time is disclosed in the world amidst our quotidian concerns as “time for” or “time to.” A person is time insofar as one *is* what one chooses to spend one’s time doing.³⁵ Time is structured through one’s ordinary projects and possibilities. As temporally finite beings, it is also the limit of one’s possibilities.³⁶

While classic phenomenology delineates temporal consciousness, critical phenomenology is more revelatory of carceral time. In articulating the difference between “classical” and “critical” phenomenology, Lisa Guenter claims that the latter attends to power and history as they structure phenomenological experience. She defines critical phenomenology as follows:

A practice of suspending hegemonic “common sense” accounts of reality in order to reflect on the conditions of lived experience and the lifeworld in which it unfolds, and to describe, interrogate, and ultimately transform the contingent, historical, yet quasi-transcendental structures that shape the meaning and materiality of this experience... These structures... have emerged through historical struggles the outcome of which could have been —and could still become—otherwise. But they function in a quasi-transcendental way insofar as they generate and consolidate meaning by normalizing some habits of perception, cognition, and comportment and pathologizing others... They are not just phenomena in the world, but also (inter)subjective ways of seeing, hearing, moving, relating, and sense-making.³⁷

This is echoed by Gail Weiss who avers, “A critical phenomenology draws attention to the multiple ways in which power moves through our bodies and our lives. It is also an ameliorative phenomenology that seeks not only to describe but also to repair the world...”³⁸ It is critical to locate the “chronic” wound of carceral time not merely in the individual who is incarcerated, but in the historic, political, and structural intersubjective temporal exile from possibilities of meaning-making and intersubjectivity. Tactics of repair, harm reduction, and becoming otherwise are pivotal to the final section of this article, in which I delineate decarceral time.

Critical phenomenology illumines divergent temporal experiences and the structuring of said experiences by carceral exclusion. It is relevant scaffolding for articulating the burden of carceral time, the ethical response to the lived experience of incarceration, and the temporal relationship between incarcerated and free individuals. A robust understanding of carceral time’s structure and implications opens possible practices of chronic relational repair and systemic harm

reduction. Because the wound of carceral time is ultimately relational, the possibility of carceral healing or decarceral time likewise germinates in this temporal interstitial.³⁹

Contemporary scholarship has robustly articulated the social death of incarceration. Orlando Patterson, who originated the term “social death,” affirmed that the enslaved person “had no social existence outside of his matter... is violently uprooted from his milieu... is dissocialized and depersonalized...” and is situated in the world of his master as “a nonbeing.”⁴⁰ While this references slavery, there is growing scholarship attesting that prison enacts an irreparable social death.⁴¹ In a collected volume of critical phenomenology, Perry Zurn states, “There is a kind of living that feels like dying. There is a kind of life marked—relentlessly—by death. The term *social death* refers to this experience, this rhythm, this walled passage.”⁴² Zurn stipulates that social death is out of joint with physical death; it indicates a cessation of the person’s meaning-making and belonging to larger social networks. The experience of being “out of joint” with time bears a resemblance to anticipatory grief in that one’s possibilities are curtailed before one’s physical death.⁴³ In his book *Prison and Social Death*, Joshua M. Price affirms that the social death of incarceration is permanent as it continues to deaden temporal experience even after an individual is released.⁴⁴ Price asserts, “While people’s experiences vary significantly, the interviews I conducted revealed three basic qualities of incarceration: generalized humiliation, institutional violence, and natal alienation. The conjunction of the three yields the peculiar contours of social death.”⁴⁵ In mainstream discourse carceral time is imagined as resembling waiting or a monotonous interim. To sharply demarcate banal experiences of waiting from carceral experiences of indefinite suspension of temporal projects and social death, Friday, Price, et. al refer to the latter as “temporicide.”⁴⁶

The social death of incarceration is intrinsic to the general experience of carceral time, but is most acute in the experience of solitary confinement. In *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and its Afterlives*, carceral scholar Lisa Guenther terms solitary confinement “dead time.”⁴⁷ Incarceration is experienced as immutably deadening. This resonates with Lauren Berlant’s articulation of slow death:

Slow death prospers not in traumatic events, as discrete time-framed phenomena like military encounters and genocides can appear to do, but in temporal environments whose qualities and whose contours in time and space are often identified with the present-ness of ordinariness itself that domain of living on, in which everyday activity; memory, needs and desires; diverse temporalities and horizons of the taken-for-granted are brought into proximity.⁴⁸

One is sentenced to a hastened death—reduced life expectancy—but also to a life that is enervated, containing more death than life. Carceral time persistently inscribes experience even after release; the imagined re-enmeshment in the flow of social time is often illusory. The deadening and death-hastening register of carceral time is permanent.

Guenther argues that the irreversible violence of solitary confinement is partially explained by the inherent intersubjective constitution of the subject and their experiences of temporality. In her phenomenological analysis of prison time she states, “*There is no time without the other* for Levinas; the solitary existent remains stuck in the present instant to the extent that it fails to encounter something beyond itself, something that is not a “thing’...”⁴⁹ One’s time irrevocably depends on the proximal existence of the other, such that solitary confinement and incarceration in general cauterizes one’s temporal tethers to the social world.

The regularity of premature deaths in carceral facilities attests to the precarity of carceral life and the proximity of social death to physical death. This is likewise underlined by the horrific discovery of over two hundred bodies found in unmarked graves behind a prison in Mississippi.⁵⁰ On this Guenther states, “The irreversibility of biological death is deployed, at least discursively, against the logic of social death for the sake of a more meaningful life and death.”⁵¹ Individuals caught in the carceral administration and management of bodies resist with whatever forms of agency are accessible to reassert bodily temporal autonomy and wrestle life from the clutches of social and physical death.⁵²

If time is inextricably intersubjective, then exiling one from the experiences of shared time inflicts irreparable violence upon one’s very being. Justifications for incarceration often draw on a different notion of time: time as equivocal to the money or property of an individual autonomous subject. Time in this model is abstract; it can be calculated into an hourly rate or expense.

III. Time as exchangeable: How prison time became the default

It is claimed colloquially that if one does the crime, then one deserves to do the time. To arrive at this now-default assumption first required a notion of retributivism, meaning that justice violations need to be punished; and second, that time can be the form of punishment. This assumes a calculable equation of harm to time, or that the time of incarceration is the currency through which one “pays” for a crime. Time is property and currency. This is evoked in the initial passages of Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, in which societies transition from exacting retribution through torture or a pound of flesh, to procuring

payment through the individual's time.⁵³ The historical decrease in the popularity of torture and the death sentence is accompanied by a rise in the acceptability of confiscating a person's life-time. Exchange of time for criminal behavior is considered humanely non-violent. Incarceration is no longer the interim before punishment but is the punishment itself.

The rise of waged labor made it increasingly acceptable that one could calculate an exchange rate between time and capital. This is pointedly conveyed by Angela Davis, who attests:

The prison sentence is a temporal durational form of violence, computed in terms of time, is related to abstract quantification. This draws on the rise of Enlightenment and rational objectifications of temporality. This historical period inaugurated notions of the value of labor as calculated in terms of time and therefore compensated in another quantifiable way, by money for labor-time. The computability of state punishment in terms of time-days, months, years—resonates with the role of labor-time as the basis for computing the value of capitalist commodities. Marxist theorists of punishment have noted that precisely the historical period during which the commodity form arose is the era during which penitentiary sentences emerged as the primary form of punishment.⁵⁴

Retributive punishment draws on this presumed calculability that one's time can be monetized and therefore used as currency. This is euphemistically evident in the insistence that those who have served their time have "paid their debts to society." However, this need not be the only aim of incarceration: "in a slave economy, punitive mechanisms serve to provide an additional labor force... forced labour and prison factory appear with the development of a mercantile economy."⁵⁵ Likewise Angela Davis and Adam Jay Hirsch note the resemblance of incarceration to slavery. The Thirteenth Amendment loophole codified involuntary servitude as punishment for a crime.⁵⁶

The burden of the temporal interchangeability and the quantifiability of time is shouldered by those who are the most economically precarious, whose time is valued the least. While economic disadvantage does not wholly account for incarceration, the average pre-incarceration annual income of individuals who are incarcerated is US\$19,185.⁵⁷ More than 60 percent of individuals arrested remain incarcerated pre-trial because they cannot afford cash bail.⁵⁸ Those who pay with time are often those whose lives have already been curtailed by intersecting forms of systemic violence. Incarceration maintains an ongoing predation on the most economically vulnerable communities. It is fully enmeshed with systemic political economies of violence, debt, neoconservative fiscal policy, housing exclusion, and systemic

racism. Arguments that champion incarceration are often hung on an armature of time as a fungible property. This imagines that citizens move through a shared, uniform, universal time. One has the same number of hours in the day as anyone else, and how time is “spent” is a matter of uninhibited choice. Saliently, retributive justifications for incarceration are contingent upon false assumptions about the experience of carceral time and an assumed proportional exchangeability between prison and free time.

IV. Response to retributivism

If prisons are considered just retribution, it is in part because contemporary retributivist arguments rely on the above articulated capitalistic economic understanding of time. My primary critique of this retributivist argument is the underlying logic that affirms prison time as quantifiably equivalent to criminal harm (as articulated in the previous section). The deadening and death-hastening aspects of incarceration indicate a critical difference in the carceral experience of time. Because all prison time enacts permanent temporal harm, there cannot be a recalculation for a more “proportional” exchange rate between crime and carceral time.

Retributive arguments rely on a proportional exchange between punishment and the harms of criminality. In contemporary carceral systems the dominant metric of punishment is time — meaning carceral time is proportional to the harm of law-breaking. In his retributivist argument, Kant asserts that punishment is fairly applied when an agent is found punishable.⁵⁹ Yet, pre-trial incarceration is frequently inflicted on the poor who cannot afford bail. Kant states, “Criminal law is the right of the commander against the submissive to inflict pain on him for his crime.”⁶⁰ Kant critiques Beccaria’s arguments against torture and the death sentence. According to Kant’s particular retributivism, punishment ought to be equivalent, but also mirroring or similar to the harm caused by the crime. According to this logic, incarceration would only be just if the individual somehow stole time from the harmed individual. Hegel likewise claims, “Retribution alone is rational in [punishment]; for by retribution the crime is subjugated.”⁶¹ Hegel contends that Kantian strict equivalence or mirroring is unnecessary, but that the value of the punishment ought to match the crime.⁶² Moreover Hegel asserts that, “To injure [or penalize] the particular will of the ‘criminal’ is to annul the crime, which otherwise would have been held valid, and to restore the right.”⁶³ Both caution that punishment should be scaled to the crime, Hegel arguing that punishment should aim to negate the crime, while Kant argues that punishment ought to resemble the effect of the crime. While Kant and Hegel are

more expansive in the forms of proportional punishment that could be considered retribution for criminality, in the contemporary US judicial system, this is almost entirely enacted through prison sentencing.

Besides retribution, there are three other frequently invoked justifications for incarceration: deterrence for others, incapacitation of the perpetrator, and rehabilitation. While these are not the focus of this article's critical analysis, I will briefly address them. Incapacitation denotes the belief that during incarceration an individual is prevented from committing further crimes. Yet, several crimes can be carried out during incarceration, such as violence enacted against other incarcerated persons. While it is thought that incarceration may be a deterrent, Louisiana, where I currently reside, has both one of the highest incarceration rates, and the highest violent crime rate per capita.⁶⁴ It does not appear that deterrence has been effective. Likewise, high recidivism rates indicate the carceral systems' failure to "reform" behavior. Abolitionists and advocates of decarceration contend that rehabilitative models miss the lack of habilitation pre-incarceration. Often those who are incarcerated have already experienced many intersecting forms of acute, systemic, structural, and ongoing violences.⁶⁵ There are other justifications for prison beyond retribution. However, without underlying arguments of punishment, and the fungible proportionality of time, prisons would be profoundly different. Decarceral time draws on this critical phenomenology of temporal experience as opposed to an economic logic of time.

V. Decarceral time: Tactics against carceral time

Retributivism equates justice with individuals "doing time," the punitive aspect of the judicial system. What is the responsibility of participants and alleged beneficiaries of a carceral system that enacts cruel and unusual punishment, is torturous, and undermines individuals' basic humanity or intrinsic sense of self?⁶⁶ Participation without alternatives for justice can enact a moral injury upon those citizens who morally oppose the inherent violence of the carceral system. Moral injury, originally denoting the ethical injury incurred when soldiers were ordered to act against their values, here signifies the injury to values of participating in political systemic violence. Decarceral time responds to the specificities of carceral time and locates reparative shared temporal tactics to address the harm carceral time inflicted upon individual and relational temporal experience.

Incarceration is traumatic.⁶⁷ The focus on perpetrators and punishment compounds rather than resolves the trauma of law violation.⁶⁸ Trauma as PTSD is framed as a response to the violent force of a catastrophic event, rather than the unbearable accumulation of routine

brutal indifference.⁶⁹ In prison, traumatic harm is enacted through quotidian deprivation, cumulative repetition, durational monotony, and routine degrading inhumane experiences, such as being strip-searched after each family visit, transferred to a facility hundreds of miles away from one's community, or forced to sleep under the glare of fluorescent lights one cannot turn off.⁷⁰ This background violence is often obscured by the acute physical and sexual violence in prison. Yet, the everyday systemically undermining conditions and disciplinary architectonic of prison often prime situations for acute outbursts of violence. Carceral trauma is not solely bound to those who are incarcerated, but manifests in natal alienation, the absence of a person from their community, from a shared cultural world, and from the lives of their loved ones. This form of trauma is now being recognized under the diagnosis of post-incarceration syndrome and post-traumatic prison condition.⁷¹

There are polyvocal calls for collective, social, and political repair of the traumatic harm of incarceration. The concept of decarceral time is incisively focused on ameliorating the particular harm to a person's experience of time. Decarceral time is meant to complement and contribute to the community-driven practices of accountability and harm-reduction work already being done. In proposing decarceral time, this article does not propose immediate abolition, as it may keep carceral logics intact. Rather, decarceral time is an ongoing tactic that challenges the harm of carceral time on the individual, prevents social death, and seeks to restore relational time. This is a complex endeavor. Struggling for relational freedom involves tracing affective ethical, political and economic enmeshment in systemic harm. Dynamics of generosity in donated time can unintentionally reproduce the structural violence of the carceral institution,⁷² by framing the individual incarcerated person as a victim, a dehumanized other, waiting for the redemptive sympathy of the social worker or activist. This logic recenters the vantage of the (often) privileged outsider and violates the agency, privacy, and singular identity of the incarcerated person. In short, this reproduces forms of objectification, in that the incarcerated other becomes a tool for another's betterment. Systemic structural violence necessitates systemic structural response, just as temporal harm necessitates temporal amelioration. Nonprofit-initiated moral responses, in which social workers are lionized as correcting the harms of the state at the margins, are not a viable long-term strategy, as they decenter incarcerated individuals. Carceral time is a political and economic form of ongoing harm. Any scalable repair through decarceral time needs to attend to the ongoing temporal registers of political, economic, and systemic harms. Likewise, decarceral time cannot be over-determined by theorists, but is a relational strategy and

thus always needs to be unfolding in community with those who are or have been incarcerated. Thus, the first step is to strengthen that relationality.

Prison uprisings, protests, hunger strikes, and everyday practices of reclaiming time and temporal agency are embodied assertions of resistance. The existential, physical, and safety risks individuals undertake through these forms of protest evinces the immense pain of carceral experience. Incarcerated individuals have died from hunger strikes and during uprisings such as at Attica, and yet individuals deemed those risks warranted. Of the Pelican Bay Solitary Confinement Protests, Guenther argues, "The call to 'collectively seize this moment in time' re-animates the sense of dead or 'broken' time articulated by prisoners at Pelican Bay. This is not just a matter of seizing an already-existing moment in objective time, but of collectively creating the moment to be seized, by interrupting the monotonous repetition of living death in [solitary confinement]."⁷³ This push to enliven and reclaim time against the current flow towards social death is also decarceral time.⁷⁴ The social death of prison takes place *intersubjectively*, severing the threads to the social community, the lived horizon of social meaning, and webs of kinship. In these descriptions of carceral time, it is often overlooked that this experience can be shared, that individuals create shared meaning in the shared experience of social death.⁷⁵

Decarceral time is intended to invite a temporal response that mirrors the durational violence of incarceration. Society is habituated to accepting incarceration, using exchange of time as the dominant model of shared temporality. Decarceral time prompts us to collectively think temporality otherwise, to think of time in the framework of critical phenomenology instead of economic calculability. Here, decarceral time solicits shared temporalities that enliven instead of socially deaden. I am interested in tactics that undermine carceral time through the temporal relation between those who are incarcerated and those who are free. One such tactic is to find temporal horizontal relations of care and to create truly reciprocal care communities that include individuals that are currently incarcerated.⁷⁶ In response to the carceral wounding of time, reparative time or decarceral time bridges free and carceral time to enact shared diegetic undergoing. This shared undergoing happens in prison education, by doulas during prison births, in possibilities that maintain social tethers to the outside world: parenting, friendships, family and romantic relationships, even work relationships. Other examples are allowances that make carceral experiences meaningful such as care work, training service dogs, and even providing more choice in the way prisoners' time is spent. These examples do not exhaust the possibilities of decarceral time, but name several concrete reparative temporal tactics. The most straightforward

way to do this is diverting potential prison sentences and shortening existing prison time while still working to create more conditions for relationality for those incarcerated.

Without overdetermining its reparative aspects, decarceral time would necessarily respond to the collective demands of those who are incarcerated, supporting the possibility of collective diegetic agency. This would include diverse tactics such as abolishing solitary confinement, restricting the possibility of moving incarcerated individuals prohibitive distances from their pre- or non-carceral communities, and creating more opportunities for agency and communal temporal belonging. There is a responsibility for holding time, of refusing the carceral logic of retributivism that upholds logics of equivalencies between time, harm, and law-violation.⁷⁷ Decarceral time includes an array of everyday tactics undermining the distorted logic of carceral culture, seeing what this culture obscures, and practicing reparative relationality to others. The telos of decarceral time is to create alternate communal forms of temporality that shield against the indifferent harms of systemic violence and carceral time. This likewise entails undermining larger economic models of time-theft as punishment and assumptions of a quantifiable equivalence between the disparate temporalities of free citizens and carceral time. In short, this means interrogating the political, juridical, and economic temporal systems that depend on incarceration. The concept of decarceral time is intentionally left open in that it is intended to be shared, and continues to evolve. It is necessary to harness collective imagination to inaugurate an ethical relation between those whose time is allegedly free and the stolen life-time of imprisonment, to open the possibility of just societies structured otherwise, and decarceral futurities.

In *The Meaning of Freedom*, Angela Davis asserts, "The point that I'm trying to make right now is that prisons tell us that we are free."⁷⁸ Prisons allegedly free us from violence; instead they perpetuate violence. As a person that is free, as a citizen in a political society purportedly made safe by the prison-industrial complex, this imaginal innocence imparts a responsibility to illuminate the falsity of carceral logic. Incarceration uproots one's most intimate temporal projects, and one's own primacy of temporal unfolding. Decarceral time seeks modes of freedom that are not contingent on the carceral unfreedom of others. Carceral time is the tamping down of diachronic agency, the attenuation of community, and the impeding of freely chosen relation and participation in shared time, whereas decarceral time is relational. Decarceral time is not a fully delineated proprietary concept but a collectively or at least relationally enacted lived possibility left open for new imagined temporalities. It is the push for shared liberatory time.

NOTES

1. Raymond Santana, "Central Park 5: New Film on How Police Abuse, Media Frenzy Led to Jailing of Innocent Teens." Amy Goodman. *Democracy Now*, November 28, 2012.
2. Diachronic agency refers to the capacity to make decisions and have agency over one's own time, such that one can make decisions in the present that are also commitments to future decisions and ongoing temporal projects. It was developed by Edward S. Hinchman. See Hinchman, "Trust and diachronic agency. *Noûs* 37, no. 1(2003): 25–51.
3. I have had multiple associates fantasize about what they would accomplish during incarceration.
4. See Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Abolition Geography: Essays Towards Liberation* (Verso Books, 2022).
5. Here, I am taking seriously the becoming space of time and the becoming time of space evinced in the epigraph by Ronald Walcott. We have long failed to take seriously what a temporal exile means and its phenomenological effects on the subject's lived experience.
6. The inclusion of the voices of those who were or are incarcerated is not meant to bifurcate experience and theory. These are phenomenological accounts of temporal experience. The ameliorative move aims to recover a certain degree of relationality, to recognize the enmeshment of time between free and incarcerated subjects. This relationality has been covered over by the theoretical and social structuring that bifurcate the carceral and non-carceral structuring of phenomenological lived experience. While I have direct experience with individuals who are incarcerated, I cannot quote these sources as that could threaten their safety, prolong sentences, lead to harsher treatment, and threaten my ability to continue this work. There are unresolvable ethical implications involved in the privilege I have to speak about these issues while those incarcerated cannot.
7. Dominique Moran, "'Doing Time' In Carceral Space: Timespace and Carceral Geography," in *Geografiska Annaler, Series B, Human Geography* 94, no. 4 (December 2012): 307.
8. A. Wahidin, "Reconfiguring older bodies in the prison time machine," *Journal of Aging and Identity* 7 (3): 183. Naturally, there are times when all of us are clock-watchers, usually as a form of anticipation. This anticipatory state is uncomfortable, but typically short-lived.
9. M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, D.A. Landes, trans. (Routledge, 2014), 433 and 451 respectively.
10. Jy'Aire Smith-Pennick, "My Biggest Daily Challenge in Prison Isn't Violence. It's the Monotony," The Marshall Project, February 9, 2024. <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2024/02/09/prison-dehumanization-process-monotony-mental-health>.
11. Captivity is harmful to the health of living animals, especially those with higher cognitive functioning. Animals in captivity exhibit brain damage that manifests in irregular memory & emotional regulation as well as unpredictable and self-harmful activity. This is not to liken incarcerated

humans to animals, but to lay bare the common sense and fundamental wounding of one's humanity caused by carceral captivity.

12. T. Meagher & M. Chammah, "Why jails have more suicides than prisons," The Marshall Project. <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2015/08/04/why-jails-have-more-suicides-than-prisons>.
13. For a well-argued critique of the logic of dehumanization, see "On Making Dehumanization Possible," by Samera Esmeir.
14. Smith-Pennick, "My Biggest Daily Challenge in Prison."
15. Jack Henry Abbott, *In the Belly of the Beast: Letters from Prison* (Vintage Books, 1991).
16. Michael E. Gaston, "Fighting Time When You're Doing Time," *The Marshall Project*, January 9, 2020. <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2020/01/09/fighting-time-when-you-re-doing-time>.
17. Arzini Wahidin & Shirley Tate, "Prison (E)scapes and Body Tropes: Older Women in the Prison Time Machine," *Body & Society* 11(2) (2005): 59–79. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X05052462>, 70.
18. Cited in Nina Cope, "'It's No Time or High Time': Young Offenders' Experiences of Time and Drug Use in Prison," *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* 42 (2003): 158–175. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2311.t01-1-00273>.
19. This term borrowed from Lauren Berlant.
20. Many of the accounts of carceral time liken it to trauma, or traumatic time. For a more robust phenomenological account of the temporality of systemic political trauma see Hannah Rachel Bacon, "The Intersubjective Responsibility of Durational Trauma: Contributions of Bergson and Levinas to the Philosophy of Trauma," *Continental Philosophy Review* 55, no. 2 (June 1, 2022): 159–75, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11007-021-09556-7>.
21. This experience differs based on the age of the person incarcerated, the length of their sentence, the conditions of incarceration, and access to support, kinship, and community. Statistically speaking, Black individuals are sentenced to 20 percent longer sentences than white individuals for the same crimes. Considering existing racial disparities in life expectancy and the reduced life expectancy of those who have experienced incarceration, the social and literal death sentence of incarceration is significant.
22. Arzini Wahidin, "Reclaiming agency: Managing aging bodies in prison," *Old Age and Human Agency* (2004), 81. Emphasis in the original.
23. Dyane Holmes, 1988. "Families of Prisoners Are Doing Time, Too," *The Washington Post*, November 20, 1988, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1988/11/20/families-of-prisoners-are-doing-time-too/26e3c3d9-5269-41ae-80c2-bcd88f42a8bf/>.
24. While carceral time is shared time in that it is spent with other people who are incarcerated, each person has their own "end" of their time and it is thus individuating in a way that is similar to the way Heidegger describes death in *Being and Time*.
25. The relational aspect of carceral time is a promising inflection point for establishing decarceral time. This is true of anyone incarcerated but is acute in the case of incarcerated individuals separated from their child 24–48

hours after giving birth. The felt absence of someone incarcerated is an experience of a loss of shared time. Because of current logs in court hearings, a person who cannot afford bail can spend months in prison. When I was working with pregnant incarcerated people, this meant people can give birth in prison before their case is resolved. It is also the case that a statistical number of individuals die in prison pre-trial. The interim of carceral time takes the form of a holding time, waiting to hopefully rejoin another timeline of a different shared time, a return to a time that feels properly one's own. Freeing others also requires shortening parole and probation such that time is truly returned as opposed to the ongoing time tax of probation visits, court appearances, and carceral supervision that continues a temporal and spatial captivity through restricted movement.

26. See footnote ten and Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (State University of New York Press, 2016).
27. Here I am referencing classic phenomenological descriptions of time in which we experience time as mostly time for, as the underlying structure that provides for our lived possibilities. We orient ourselves towards the future, towards the time it takes to achieve our projects, towards the pursuit of particular possibilities. See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 307–321. Unlike a view say of Newton, who thinks time is an empty series of discrete moments, in which each second is equivalent to any other, time as we experience it “clumps together.” Such that we do not hear discrete notes, but hear the whole of the melody (See Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 118).
28. Emily Widra, “Incarceration shortens life expectancy,” *Prison Policy Initiative*, November 3, 2023. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2017/06/26/life_expectancy/.
29. Sam McCann, “Health Care Behind Bars: Missed Appointments, No Standards, and High Costs,” *Vera*, June 29, 2022. <https://www.vera.org/news/health-care-behind-bars-missed-appointments-no-standards-and-high-costs>.
30. Brian Nam-Sonenstein, “Research roundup: Evidence that a single day in jail causes immediate and long-lasting harms,” *Prison Policy Initiative*, August 6, 2024. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2024/08/06/short_jail_stays/.
31. Bernadetta Rabuy, “The Life-Threatening Reality of Short Jail Stays,” *Prison Policy Initiative*, December 22 2016. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2016/12/22/bjs_jail_suicide_2016/ For more on how deadly jails can be, even presentencing, see Andrew R. Klein and Jessica L. Klein, *Death before Sentencing: Ending Rampant Suicide, Overdoses, Brutality, and Malpractice in America's Jails* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2022). This includes deaths that occur “pre-sentencing.”
32. Ronald Walcott, “Some Notes on the Blues, Style and Space: Ellison, Gordon, and Tolson,” *Black World* XXII No. 2, (December 1972), 4.
33. Walcott, “Some Notes on the Blues,” 4.
34. In his description of the continuity of duration, he argues we imagine “a formless *ego*, indifferent and unchangeable, on which it threads the psychic states which it has set up as independent entities...set side by side like the

- beads of a necklace" before firmly asserting "this substratum [the egoistic thread] has no reality." Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (Dover, 1998), 3–4.
35. In phenomenology, this analogy is present in the thinkers such as Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty but overall, it is more often parsed in terms of space rather than time; i.e., I *both* have a body, *and* I am this body. In temporal terms one can say I am the living enactment of my past, present, and future. This further underlines the intimate primordial harm that is wrought when, if a person is time, they become an alienated, objective, deadened or empty calendrical form of time.
 36. This reference is to *Being and Time* and his distinction between authentic and inauthentic time/being.
 37. Lisa Guenther, "Six Senses of Critique for Critical Phenomenology." *Puncta: Journal of Critical Phenomenology* 4, no. 2 doi:10.5399/PJCP.V4I2.2. (2021), 6.
 38. Gail Weiss et al., *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology* (Northwestern University Press, 2019). This quote is preceded by the assertion that: "Contemporary phenomenologists increasingly recognize that these foreclosures [the foreclosures borne out of habituated perception that seeks to render the world familiar, comfortable, and manipulable] are a function of structural, political, and institutional inequities...internalized as personal biases and habits..."
 39. One *could* choose to instead focus on the wound an alleged perpetrator of crime inflicts on society. A reparative model of justice foregrounds repairing the harm inflicted as opposed to punishment. In this article I am not directly addressing this concern as it is addressed compellingly by others that I have already mentioned. Instead, I focus on what prison harm does and whether the harm of carceral time is a just way to treat anyone even someone who is "guilty." To wit, does state violence solve or adequately respond to individual violence?
 40. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Harvard University Press, 1982).
 41. Such scholarship includes the authors quoted in this piece such as Perry Zurn and Lisa Guenther, but also Caleb Smith's *The prison and the American Imagination* (Yale University Press, 2009), Brady Heiner, "Excavating the Sedimentations of Slavery: The Unfinished Project of American Abolition," in *Death and Other Penalties: Philosophy in a Time of Mass Incarceration*, ed. Geoffrey Adelsburg, Lisa Guenther, and Scott Zeman (Fordham University Press, 2015.; Paul Taylor, "Bare Ontology and Social Death," *Philosophical Papers* 42, no. 3; Loïc Wacquant, "Deadly Symbiosis: When Ghetto and Prison Meet and Mesh," *Punishment & Society* 3, no. 1 (2001): 95–134; and Lisa Cacho, *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected* (New York University Press, 2012).
 42. Perry Zurn, "Social Death," in *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology*, edited by Gail Weiss, Ann V. Murphy, and Gayle Salamon (Northwestern University Press, 2020), 309.
 43. Life sentences, or the deadening aspect of incarceration, is often referred to by individuals who are incarcerated as DBI (Death by Incarceration). See Smith-Pennick, "My Biggest Daily Challenge in Prison," 2024.

44. There are possible negative ethical connotations of this framing in that conceiving of social death as permanent could have the adverse effect of robbing an individual of agency in creating meaning and social connection as a form of resistance in a place that is designed to systematically dismantle these capacities. The social death of prison could also undermine the hope for agency after one's incarceration.
45. Joshua M. Price, *Prison and Social Death* (Rutgers University Press, 2015).
46. Gabrélla Friday, Joshua Price, and Nicola Satchel, "Temporicide: Waiting, Punishment, and (Social) Death," *Theoretical Criminology*, 30, no. 1, 126-144. (2026): <https://doi.org/10.1177/13624806251332917>.
47. Lisa Guenther, *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and Its Afterlives* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013).
48. Lauren Berlant, "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)," *Critical Inquiry* 33 (2007): 759-60. I would argue that this slow death dilutes the insidiousness of the systematic durational harm of social death. In a sense all of us are dying slowly, and what these forms of incremental or ongoing trauma do is hasten death and instill a form of living death, social death, and living in the wake of and proximity to death. For this reason, I prefer the term durational trauma.
49. Guenther, *Solitary Confinement* (2013). While I admire Guenther's analysis of the phenomenology of prison time my own analysis draws on different figures and differs in focus as Guenther is examining the carceral time of solitary confinement. Many of the incarcerated persons seek to articulate a general deadening of time in that one cannot have diegetic agency nor can one choose with whom one is constituting intersubjective time and identity.
50. Daryn O'Neal, "Hundreds of Bodies Found behind a Mississippi Prison Spark Community-Wide Outrage," *The Hilltop*, January 16, 2024. <https://thehilltoponline.com/2024/01/16/hundreds-of-bodies-found-behind-a-mississippi-prison-spark-community-wide-outrage/>. Notable is the fact that a study done from 2011 to 2022 in California found that the majority of these deaths occurred before the resolution of the person's case. These are deaths that occurred before a person was found guilty of a crime. The youngest death was of a thirteen-year-old. For more see <https://carefirstca.org/decadeofliveslost/>
51. Guenther, *Solitary Confinement*, 86.
52. This is evinced in the "dirty" protests and hunger strikes, notably by Irish political prisoners in the late seventies and the Attica Uprisings where the demands consisted of basic human embodied rights such as the right to sanitary conditions, the right to be free from physical abuse, better medical treatment, adequate visitation facilities, and the end of racial segregation as well as other racist treatment. In this description of the struggle for temporal agency I am implicitly drawing on Foucault's distinction between sovereign power and biopower. Sovereign power concerns the power to kill and let live. From this emerges the discourse on rights structured to curtail sovereign power. Biopower is the power to make live or allow to die and concerns the "administration of bodies and the calculated management of life." From these struggles emerges necropolitical power which concerns the political and social capacity to dictate *how* people live or *how* people

- die. Foucault draws this delineation in the final chapter of the *History of Sex*, as well as the last chapter of *Society Must be Defended*.
53. For a nuanced account of the interrelation between debt, social disinvestment, economic precarity, and mass incarceration see Jackie Wang, *Carceral Capitalism* (MIT Press, 2018).
 54. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* 44.
 55. Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Vintage Books, 1995). 24-25.
 56. Louisiana State Penitentiary is euphemistically called Angola, after the plantation on which grounds it now sits, and the origin of the slaves who worked on Louisiana Plantation. Incarcerated persons at Angola are required to work, often doing farm labor for little or no pay. Cara McGoogan, "'You're a Slave': Inside Louisiana's Forced Prison Labor and a Failed Overhaul Attempt," *The Washington Post*, January 1, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2023/01/01/louisiana-prison-labor-ballot-slavery/>.
 57. This is 41 percent less than people who were not incarcerated but of a similar age. Bernadetta Rabuy and Daniel Kopf, "Prisons of Poverty: Uncovering the Pre-Incarceration Incomes of the Imprisoned," *Prison Policy Initiative*, July 9, 2015, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/income.html>.
 58. "U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Releases Report: The Civil Rights Implications of Cash Bail | U.S. Commission on Civil Rights," January 20, 2022, <https://www.usccr.gov/news/2022/us-commission-civil-rights-releases-report-civil-rights-implications-cash-bail>. This disproportionately affects Black and Latino men.
 59. Immanuel Kant, "On the right to punish and to grant clemency," *Metaphysics of Morals*, Lara Denis, ed., Translated by Mary Gregor (Cambridge University Press, 2017).
 60. Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 106.
 61. G.W.F. Hegel, *Natural Law*, trans. T.M. Knox (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 92. Hegel goes on to argue that the criminal has the right to punishment and claims that the results of the crime (+A) are negated (-A) through legal retribution (91).
 62. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford University Press, 1967), 71-72.
 63. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 69.
 64. Jeff Asher, Ben Horwitz, and Toni Monkovic, "Why Does Louisiana Consistently Lead the Nation in Murders?" *The New York Times*, February 15, 2021, sec. The Upshot, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/15/upshot/why-does-louisiana-consistently-lead-the-nation-in-murders.html?unlocked_article_code=1.o1A.5opx.3ILOGYESxgh2&smid=url-share.html. "Incarceration Rates by State 2025," accessed March 18, 2025, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/incarceration-rates-by-state>.
 65. Prison theorists Lanphier, Matose, and Abdur'Rahman insist that, "developing programs focused on rehabilitation in the setting of mass incarceration is an incoherent goal given that rehabilitation presupposes prior

habilitation. Yet, histories of social and personal trauma render this initial habilitation illusive, at best, for much of the population that ends up incarcerated in a setting such as death row. Our claim is that traumatic histories can impede development and lead to antisocial consequences to such an extent that our pursuit of justice within and without carceral systems needs to be habilitative rather than rehabilitative." "(Re)Imagining (Re) Habilitation," *Public Philosophy Journal* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2019): 1.

66. In the past decade there have been several compelling and prescient critical examinations of the politics of "safety" and the racial undertones of the deployment of "safety" to protect an already protected class and reify the status quo of a centered innocence and a decentered perceived threat. See Wang's "Against Innocence: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Safety," in *Carceral Capitalism* (Semiotext(e) 2018), 260–295.
67. Often prison is thought necessary to ensure the safety of victims of violent crime. Prison abolitionists such as Ruth Angel Parker, Ruth Gilmore, and Angela Davis all provide well-argued and clear rebuttal to the often-invoked query, "But what about the rapists and murderers?" The majority of survivors of rape and sexual violence never file a police report. It is estimated that out of a thousand who commit acts of sexual violence, 975 will never be incarcerated. (<https://www.rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system>), whereas it is estimated that 86 percent of women incarcerated are survivors of sexual violence.
68. This is to say nothing of the large number of law violations in which nobody is harmed, or instances in which the harmed person is the one who is arrested.
69. See Hannah R. Bacon, "The intersubjective responsibility of durational trauma: Contributions of Bergson and Levinas to the philosophy of trauma," *Continental Philosophy Review* 55 (2022): 159–175. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11007-021-09556-7>
70. Elsewhere I write about the temporality of systemic trauma. Canonical descriptions of PTSD describe traumatic temporal symptomology in anomalies such as the inappropriate surfacing of the past in the present, a past that perseverates into the future, preventing the subject from moving beyond it. In public discourse this most recognizable in the trope of the war flashback of veterans. The examples of the strip-search and the lights were given during a discussion of the traumatic harm of incarceration, by two people who were formerly incarcerated.
71. See "The Definitive Guide on Post Incarceration Syndrome (PICS)," *National Incarceration Association* (blog). <https://joinnia.com/post-incarceration-syndrome/>
72. When I invoke shared time, I am thinking of the intimate shared time that is sometimes possible in relationships and communities of trust.
73. Lisa Guenther, "Unmaking and Remaking the World in Long-Term Solitary Confinement," *Puncta: Journal of Critical Phenomenology* 1, no. 1 (2018): 84.
74. One may argue that a person who is incarcerated is still allowed to be in relation to the external world. They have partial access to outside media. They can place phone calls and receive visits. These claims are often made

based on a shared public imaginary of carceral life, authored by individuals totally removed from incarceration. A fifteen-minute phone call could cost 15 dollars, a significant burden when prison wages are often less than a dollar an hour. Prisons are often remote, inaccessible by public transportation. Individuals are often transferred to facilities far away from their communities making visitation impossible. (Bertram, Wang, 2022.) For instance, individuals imprisoned in Halawa Correctional Facility in Hawaii are routinely transferred to a Saguaro, a private carceral facility in Arizona. They were often transferred abruptly with little to no advance notice. Additionally, visitation was suspended at many prisons during the pandemic. This meant the only contact or connection was virtual. Many facilities have resisted reinstating in person visits, as virtual visits are more “convenient” for prison staff.

75. Released individuals often speak of survivor’s guilt, or the guilt of leaving behind those who are still incarcerated who made the experience bearable.
76. I am purposely leaving these tactics open, as it is not for me to say what form these relations should take, nor what is essential in these relations. It is not my place to pre-determine what unique others need, however, anyone who does prison work longtime, or who reads the literature knows of individuals who enter prison work with a savior complex, and those who, as much as possible attend to the inherent hierarchical dynamics and seek to undermine or level these relational structures when possible.
77. In this I am drawing on Alia Al-Saji’s articulation of the political capacities of hesitation. There are political acts of hesitation such as a hesitation to call the police or a hesitation between seeing something and saying something that can disrupt logics of collective surveillance. Hesitation may seem unimportant but when I researched this topic and hesitation, I was immediately served an article critiquing hesitation in a policing magazine, which proves that it is a politically powerful possibility. Alia Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation: Interrupting Racializing Habits of Seeing,” in *Living Alterities: Phenomenology, Embodiment, and Race*, ed. Emily Lee (SUNY Press, 2014), 133–172.
78. Angela Y. Davis, *The Meaning of Freedom: And Other Difficult Dialogues* (City Lights Publishers, 2012).