

Carceral Logic: on 'Sitting Still'
by: Matthew "Matt" Saffrit¹

Typical prisoners are un-accustomed to seeing people doing 'nothing' other than 'thinking' to their selves. For example: attempting to assess the contradictions in gang culture and capitalism, I was interrupted by a question: "you okay, Matt?" "Yeah, I was just trying to figure something out." "I know, I see where you're [mentally] at." This person assumed I was dealing with some sort of negative thought pattern because, presumably, this person cannot sit down and face the ghosts of their own past — that is, they cannot face the events in their mind which subconsciously manifest when they turn off all distractions even though these very thoughts are the most important obstacles for them to wrestle with on the path to their own self-realization. I can say this statement concerning their inability to meditate because they have to constantly stay busy — a human-doing, rather than a human-being.

The individual I speak of here is not alone. Prison is a place where so many people who have made terrible mistakes are utterly deprived of sensory input; as such, an unfathomable amount of pass-times are undertaken, ranging from the mundane to the suicidal, to keep the mind's onslaught of its most important recordings from assailing one's 'self!'

¹ "Matt" is an abolitionist who is using his time to fight for staff accountability and prisoner's rights. He wants to start a progressive, juvenile education program in the North Carolina prison system upon his release (History of Ideas + Transformative Justice).

It is well documented that under-education is a leading cause of prison and recidivism. Can a prison be humanely constructed which forces inmates to be either educated or face their demons without ^{allowing} non-productive distractions to interfere?

For example: North Carolina currently has tablets. Can we humanely confine people to cells, load up their tablets with educational programs and games (Sudoku, etc.) and only let them out for classes, bathing, and exercise? Surely this would not be long-term (more than two years); likewise, windows to see outside to a landscaped area should be in every cell to keep the average mind from too much sensory deprivation. In this way, prisoners could be forced to learn life skills (vocational, yes, but primarily a study of the Humanities and psychology would be more beneficial) for an intense duration that crams their minds with information before sending them to 'normal' population.

I stress the Humanities because a study of Western Civ. and the History of Ideas equips people to understand their 'now', while psychology can help them assess their 'self' and others. I, personally, would then introduce Transformative Justice to give them an existential goal that will make them other-focused, and, having sufficiently underscored the delicacy of civil society in the History classes, hopefully make them more responsible citizens.