

Art Evading Confinement: Abolition as Universal Design

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ABSTRACT

Universal Design, initially an approach to designing barrier-free architectural spaces for disabled people, has primarily been adapted to schooling through the Universal Design for Learning framework. Contemporary abolitionism is a visionary grassroots movement to make prisons and jails obsolete, which has been brought into education discourse primarily through considering urban public schools as institutions of policing and punishment. By considering these strategies for reforming and ending confinement, respectively, this essay argues for a more expansive understanding of access in education. The argument for their compatibility in arts education is articulated first through reviewing shared aspects of these two approaches, then surveying examples drawn from artists' practices, and lastly through a pedagogical approach framing the school as a complex and contradictory setting for making art.

KEYWORDS: Abolitionism; Universal Design; Universal Design for Learning; Anti-Racist Art Education; Enclosure; Ableism; School-to-Prison Pipeline

Space is the place

Minoritized groups have historically been spatially confined through projecting hierarchal distinctions, naturalized through embodied phenotypes, into forms of physical separation and constraint (Ben-Moshe et al., 2014; Ben-Moshe, 2020; Cunningham, 2009; Gilmore, 2002; Mbembe, 2003; Pitzer, 2017; Price, 2010; Rothstein, 2018; Schweik, 2009; Weizman, 2002). Just as Indigenous groups survived and persisted in the gaps created by European settler colonists' territorial expropriation (Byrd, 2011; Kimmerer 2013; Marin, 2020; Nelson & Wilson, 2021; Pewewardy et al., 2022), Black survival in the New World has been defined by resisting and refusing the constriction of physical space and the restriction of access to land (Anderson & Wilson, 2021). Black, Indigenous, disabled and queer scholars have identified long-standing legacies of creatively claiming space and offering mutual support in their respective and overlapping communities (Barclay, 2021; Harney & Moten, 2013; hooks, 1994, 1995; Kaba, 2021; Kimmerer, 2013; Marty, 2016; May, 1999; Moten, 2016; Nelson & Wilson, 2021; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Rickford, 2016; Rose et al., 2021; Watson, 2019; Wolcott, 2020). Such counter-dominant strategies of solidaristic refusal, subterfuge, and evasion have been discussed, following Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2013), under the heading of "fugitivity." Defying hierarchies

of race and ability, communal practices of survival, care, celebration, sustainability, and resistance infiltrate and circumvent ever-evolving modern institutions, which continually erase old boundaries and barriers while simultaneously generating new ones.

Insofar as schools are places where stratification and enclosure are perpetually updated and reinforced (Sojoyner, 2016), legacies of subaltern creativity offer promising models of subversion (Givens, 2021), even as these creative strategies, by necessity, remain incompletely assimilable by institutional authorities (Stabler, 2020a). Schools serving low-income areas in the U.S. are often detached from local community oversight and face encroaching privatization, centralized austerity, and metrics of quantified achievement that deny opportunities to a majority of students while granting autonomy to the children of wealthy families (Mayes, 2022; Meyerhoff, 2019; Price et al., 2013; Ravitch, 2013; Saltman, 2014). Particularly in majority-BIPOC U.S. cities, school privatization has become a key means by which students and communities with the greatest needs are shut off from education and other essential resources (Mommandi & Welner, 2021). Meanwhile, all historically marginalized communities other than White cis women, meaning BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, and disabled people, remain dramatically overrepresented in American prisons, jails, and youth and immigrant detention facilities (Crowe & Drew, 2021; Duxbury, 2021; Nanda, 2019; Rovner, 2023; Ryo et al., 2018; Maruschak et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022), trends that have been vociferously opposed by those involved in contemporary campaigns for police and prison abolition. In response to these movements, art educators might emulate "minor" approaches to flourishing (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986): counterintuitive and circuitous "creative lines of escape" (p. 26) from conventional institutional hierarchies through fugitive forms of communal self-preservation. And importantly, "(f)ugitivity is not only escape," as Jack Halberstam (2013) notes in his preface to Moten and Harney's *The Undercommons*, "...fugitivity is being separate from settling" (p. 11). Such peripatetic, drifting, nomadic approaches might expand autonomy within classrooms, as well as within a wider curriculum and policy horizon, through invoking existing efforts that refuse both closure and enclosure, and connect to expanded models of creativity.

I myself am a cis, white, middle-class, invisibly disabled man. I worked in Chicago with Black and Latinx students as an art teacher in a range of settings, including a decade at a public high school in a low-income neighborhood, and I worked for four years with a group of incarcerated adult Black and Latinx college students who established a program for social and emotional learning in order to support fellow incarcerated men. One thing that makes my lived experience so different from many of the BIPOC people whom I've met and worked with, or even those whom I encountered through their creative work, has been a matter of both access and mobility. As a child my disability was respected even

when not accommodated, and as an adult I have navigated the world on my own terms, even or especially in majority-BIPOC spaces.

Many students I've worked with, both youth and adults, had not traveled far within the city beyond their home neighborhoods often, if at all (though many had made trips down South), and some had spent decades inside a prison. Such differences in voluntary mobility have become a major topic of conversation in the field of geography (Cook, 2018; Kwan & Schwanen, 2016; Shabazz, 2015), and they are at the heart of understanding how abolition relates to accessibility, and how both can be applied meaningfully to art education. Below, and throughout the essay, I will be sharing a variety of images that I believe uniquely convey an unfettered sense of and response to living and thriving in conditions of immobility. The first two images (see Figures 1 and 2) were made by high school students I worked with in Chicago.



Figure 1. *Individual student work, Stop Police Brutality, 2010. Stencil and block print on paper. 18 x 12 in.*



Figure 2. *Collaborative student work. School Surveillance Robot. 2008. Cardboard and mixed media. Approx. 36 x 24 x 120 in.*

In this essay I advocate for a consideration of abolition in arts education as an anti-carceral, anti-racist, anti-ableist struggle that seeks the democratization of access to space, extending work begun by the founders of Universal Design. Universal Design denotes a paradigm for the full inclusion of disabled people in relation to buildings, and all designed objects. In doing so, I maintain a focus on space and aesthetics, since the origins of Universal Design are in accessible architecture, and movements for abolition have long resisted physical and legal structures of power, particularly the plantation and later the prison (McKittrick, 2011). Speaking of his mentor Masao Miyoshi, Fred Moten (2016) describes how, “(o)perating at the intersection of performance and architecture, ... Professor Miyoshi is concerned with the rupture of restricted economies, those privatized sites of public exclusions,” in order to “pierce naturalized economic exclusion, envelopment, and exploitation, thereby initiating the work of abolition and reconstruction” (p. 164). For Miyoshi and thus Moten, these zones of exclusion beg a question about beauty, which “assumes the necessity of the aesthetic dimension of anticoloniality” (p. 165).

It can be upsetting to imagine the expressive space of an art classroom as part of an infrastructure that sustains and manages difference (hooks, 1995). But any effort toward changing art teaching should take seriously the institutional settings we function within as teachers, as

well as wider historical and social contexts. I want to suggest that we consider the horizon of carceral abolition as an extension of Universal Design, advocates of which have sought to make all spaces navigable by all bodies and minds (Hamraie, 2017). Emerging from the work of anti-racist activists in the 1970s and 1980s, who in turn took inspiration from campaigns to abolish slavery, today's abolition movement maintains that human captivity is morally and ethically intolerable, and it pursues projects opposing institutions of confinement. For contemporary abolitionists, these can include not only prisons and jails, but police forces, nation-states, surveillance apparatuses, and the global capitalist economic order (Davis, 2003; Gilmore, 2007, 2022; James, 2005; Kaba, 2021; Kilgore, 2022; Schenwar & Law, 2020).

As sites of pacification and punishment, as well as redistribution and collaboration, schools have become sites for dialogue around abolitionism (Meiners & Winn, 2012; Meyerhoff, 2019; Nocella et al., 2018; Reddy, 2018). Meanwhile, even modest efforts at accessibility have presented a challenge to the standardization that produces academic hierarchies, and the so-called "achievement gap." Also known as "normal distribution," the "bell curve" in the title of Charles Murray's infamously racist book derives from intelligence tests rooted in eugenic race science (Newby & Newby, 1995), a legacy which established standardized tests and academic tracking as features of American public education (Hunter-Doniger, 2017). Standardization and normalization are demanded by the physical and curricular design of many schools and school systems, as well as the mandates of educational authorities.

Such sorting has long been manifested in spatial arrangements. Much like the design of many public schools, the design of 20th-century prisons aimed to distribute those within its walls according to specific classifications and roles (Jewkes, 2013; Johnston, 2013; McGowen, 1995; Niedbala, 2020), a taxonomic approach that has also been applied to asylums for those considered mentally ill (Topp, 2004, 2017). A classroom pursuing principles of Universal Design would embrace heterogeneity, while an abolitionist classroom would refuse constraint (Kaba, 2021). As its name implies, Universal Design focuses beyond the individual to consider exclusion in relation to "disablement" (Oliver & Barnes, 2012), the social process of situating and identifying someone as disabled. This understanding has come to be known as the social model of disability (Shakespeare, 2006).

This social model can be rearticulated as an "institutional model" (Stabler, 2020b), naming the spaces of enclosure (Sojoyner, 2016) that have undertaken the management of disability difference as well as racial and economic difference (Ben-Moshe et al., 2014; Ben-Moshe, 2020; Gilmore, 2022; Schalk, 2022): jails, prisons, detention centers, slums, reservations, and refugee camps, as well as schools, hospitals,

and asylums, some of which have become abstracted from physical space through mobile digital technologies (Kilgore, 2022; Schenwar & Law, 2020). An institutional model of disability thus extends to racialization, the process of situating people as members of a race, differentiated from other races. The impact of racialization extends beyond personal prejudices, into physical, economic, legal, and spatial structures that produce and perpetuate differentiation. As Universal Design arises from the practice of designing accessible spaces, it offers possibilities for thinking spatially about liberatory education.

The ideal of eliminating barriers in schools based on bodies, minds, and life circumstances is necessary to consider if projects opposing racism and ableism are to move beyond efforts around representation and prejudice. In what follows, I will sketch out ways that Universal Design has yet to fully address the abolitionist potential of education, in order to suggest how these approaches complement one another. I go on to outline how confinement has been addressed artistically through a carceral aesthetic, a relational aesthetic, and a disability aesthetic. My conclusion takes up these aesthetic frames to suggest ways in which teachers and students might study, plan, and make through appreciating the constraints and affordances of institutions.

Special needs and surplus populations

Universal Design is a broad approach rooted in architecture and product design, distinct from Universal Design for Learning, or UDL.¹ UDL can be summarized as a three-part pedagogical approach promoting multiple means of representation, engagement, and action and expression (CAST, n.d.). Numerous books for educators describe the benefits of UDL, promoting its value beyond a supplemental approach for special education classes. Like arts programming generally, however, UDL can be perceived as a way to increase engagement, rather than a means to address unmet student and community needs. The description for a 2018 book on UDL by Thomas J. Tobin and Kirsten Behling states that, "although it is often associated with students with disabilities, UDL can be profitably broadened toward a larger ease-of-use and general diversity framework" (para. 2). Despite the merits of the claim that a flexible approach to learning benefits everyone,

1 I want to clarify at the outset that the term Universal Design for Learning (UDL) doesn't merely describe a pedagogical approach or framework. Unlike Universal Design more generally, it is associated with a specific organization, an educational nonprofit known as the Center for Applied Special Technology, or CAST, founded in 1984. Their website states, "CAST created the Universal Design for Learning framework, and it remains one of our core levers of change to help make learning inclusive and transformative for everyone" (n.d.). UDL is their primary intellectual product, and they have worked with multiple Federal and state government entities, as well as private funders such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and corporations including Google and Pearson.

ignoring forms of ongoing confinement risks leaving disabled and other minoritized students in the margins.

In their 2021 book *Equity by Design*, Mirko Chardin and Katie Novak extend UDL into a register that seems compatible with the disability justice aims of some Universal Design advocates (Hamraie, 2017). Chardin and Novak assert that “one curriculum, without embedded flexible options using the principles of UDL, cannot possibly build equity within the classroom” (p. 9). The authors consider issues of implicit bias in arguing that educational access, a term often denoting disabled access, should be extended to all students who may be marginalized or excluded because of their culture or identity. They speak of minoritized students “who have been disabled by the system and our practices” (p. 10), echoing the social model of disability, in which a person’s inability to meet social expectations for functionality are attributed to those expectations, rather than to the physical, sensory, or mental impairments of the individual.

Equity by Design offers a salutary approach to using the lens of disability to enhance antiracist curriculum by addressing personal feelings and interactions. Similarly, attempts have been made to link UDL pedagogy with a “culturally sustaining” approach to education, putting both under the heading of “asset pedagogies” (King Thorius & Waitoller, 2016) and seeing them as a shared basis for coalitions that question existing practices of “inclusion” (Clare, 2009; King Thorius & Waitoller, 2017). But the shortcomings of these approaches, along with overlooking ways in which race and disability can intersect and interact, lie in a lack of discussion around deeper inequities undergirding the social model of disability, including vectors of colonial and racial exclusion (Puar, 2017). As in most treatments of UDL, there is no mention of the economic and legal circumstances that have historically rendered BIPOC, disabled, and sexually minoritized groups as surplus populations (Marx, 1867/1967), groups disproportionately excluded from economic participation and full membership in civil society (Charlton, 2010; Taylor, 2021; Wilderson, 2003), who were and remain targets of eugenicist policies (Hansen & King, 2013; Leonard, 2017; Mitchell & Snyder, 2003; Ordover, 2003).

In “Universal Design: places to start” (2015), Jay Dolmage (2015) calls Universal Design “a way to move,” and cites Aimi Hamraie calling it “a form of activism” (n.p.). Along with listing anti-ableist pedagogical approaches, Dolmage’s purpose in this piece is to productively criticize how UDL, a framework that originated in working with disabled learners, has been taken up as shorthand for the notion of “learning styles” and becoming a tool to activate areas of the brain, while erasing the centrality of disability. In their use of what he calls “neurorhetorics,” Dolmage critiques an instrumental tendency among education experts to reduce socially inclusive projects that require cultural shifts and

emotional effort to a checklist of activities and practices. In this spirit, Hamraie (2017) contends that, “The consumer-centric post-ADA narrative that dominates much of Universal Design marketing tells us little about the sociopolitical economy of design or what purpose profitability serves, who benefits, and toward what ends” (p. 257).

A more holistic understanding of how groups marked by difference interface with carceral authorities via punitive schools can be found in the work of Subini Ancy Annamma (Annamma, 2014, 2018; Annamma et al., 2020; Annamma & Hardy, 2021). Through an intersectional concept she names “DisCrit,” Annamma fuses critical disability and critical race scholarship, teaching, and activism. Annamma and Tamara Hardy (2021) speak of Dis/Crit as a recognition “that race and dis/ability are mutually constitutive social constructions with material realities” (p. 42), and they summarize overlapping regimes of marginalization in education:

Historically marginalized students—students of color, disabled students, LGBTQ students, and students at the junctures of multiple oppressions (e.g., disabled students of color, LGBTQ students of color)—lag in most measures of success (e.g., grades, test scores, graduation) and are overrepresented in spaces seeking to remedy differences (e.g., special education, discipline, incarceration). (p. 41)

In her writing Annamma opposes the integration of spaces and mechanisms of education, punishment, and medicalization, and questions the presumption of benevolence in coercive child custody settings. Her focus is neither on art nor UDL, but centers on a vision of educational justice that delegitimizes discipline and highlights the need to address trauma through consensual forms of mutual learning and support.

As critical pedagogues have long maintained, there is no apolitical form of teaching. But insofar as art is a subject area where teachers enjoy curricular autonomy (Stabler & Lucero, 2019), and where students can engage in uncoerced expression within the often coercive space of the school, the way in which art content is taught and the way in which the art classroom is managed both reflect a political attitude. Thus, both the form and content of art projects reflecting on incarceration may be a place to start in considering what an accessible abolitionist art curriculum might entail. Art reflecting fugitive forms of mobility within and against what theorists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) call “the apparatus of capture” can be a source of creative research. In the following section I outline three aesthetic frames, artistic approaches that reflect the exile of punishment, the exclusion of abnormality, and efforts, however imperfect, to provide confined groups with representation.

Institutional aesthetics

Art made by people in jails and prisons mostly circulates within those institutions, or between incarcerated people and their home communities. Incarcerated artists often cater to a demanding incarcerated clientele, but their work is rarely discussed outside of the aforementioned circuits. *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration*, a confinement-themed exhibition that opened in 2020 at the Museum of Modern Art, P.S. 1, featured work by currently and formerly incarcerated artists, as well as non-incarcerated artists. Curator, scholar, and activist Nicole Fleetwood, who organized *Marking Time*, coins the term “carceral aesthetics” in her book of the same title: “Carceral aesthetics is the production of art under the conditions of unfreedom; it involves the creative use of penal space, time, and matter” (2020, p. 25). She continues:

Immobility, invisibility, stigmatization, lack of access, and premature death govern the lives of the imprisoned and their expressive capacity. Such deprivation becomes raw material and subject material for prison art. The creative practices of incarcerated people fundamentally challenge aesthetic traditions that link art and discernment to the free, mobile, white, Western man. Indeed, carceral aesthetics often involves... being forcibly rendered out of sight, to imagine and then clandestinely construct other worlds, ones that speak to and through captivity. (p. 25)

Referencing Immanuel Kant’s ideas of beauty and racial hierarchy, Fleetwood succinctly elaborates ways in which the history of Western art and aesthetics is bound up with punishment via practices of social visibility, epitomized in the image of the “panopticon,” a model of prison surveillance introduced in the eighteenth century by British utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham, and later popularized by Michel Foucault. Apropos of this point, when I led a reading group on political conceptual art in the summer of 2012 at the prison where I volunteered, an incarcerated student observed that a prison is set up like an art exhibition, with the inmates on display like objects in a museum or gallery.

In keeping with Fleetwood’s comments, much of the work by incarcerated artists featured in *Marking Time* is unlike work in contemporary art galleries and fairs; incarcerated artists often use pilfered, smuggled, fabricated, hidden, and stockpiled materials to create painstakingly handcrafted pieces that engage traditional forms like portraits, dioramas, and lettering; an exquisite example is provided below (see Figure 3) with one of Dean Gillispie’s assemblage pieces, featured in *Marking Time*. Carceral artworks shown to outsiders usually make straightforward statements, if any statements at all, and avoid

sensational content. I spent most of a year working in a prison-based art program in the South before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, and this was consistent with the work I saw from the experienced artists in this program, as well as with the artists I met through the Midwestern college-in-prison program.



Figure 3. Dean Gillispie, *Spiz’s Diner*, 1998. Tablet backs, stick pins, popsicle sticks, cigarette foil. 16 x 8 x 5 in.

Though often made in the absence of arts programming, it could be said that these rigorous works exemplify what Arthur Efland (1976) called “the school art style.” Recognizing continuity among artworks produced by institutionally confined artists in different settings is intriguing to consider, without diminishing the skill, ingenuity, and labor shown by artists like Dean Gillispie. Rather, in the incarcerated artists’ works, the artist’s dignity is asserted through masterful precision and creative control that defiantly mirrors the presumed mastery of the institutional gaze, both declaring autonomy and avoiding censure.

As Fleetwood argues, the prison seeks to erase individuals as social subjects as it makes them visible objects, an objectification that is privately subverted by artists like Gillispie. But some incarcerated artists have become visible public figures through collaborations with non-incarcerated artists. One well-known example was a long-running touring art exhibition which was adapted into a 2012 documentary, *Herman’s House*, as well as a 2015 book, *The House that Herman Built*. Based on imagining and planning a dream home for Herman Wallace, a Black

Panther who spent over four decades in solitary confinement on highly questionable grounds, the project evolved through correspondence between Wallace and Jackie Sumell, a non-incarcerated artist. Introduced to the artist Marc Fischer through mail correspondence in the early 1990s (Stabler & Fischer, 2022, p. 59), an incarcerated creator known simply as Angelo eventually contributed artwork to *Prisoners' Inventions*, both a 2003 exhibition and a publication curated by Fischer's artist collective Temporary Services. In his drawings, Angelo illustrates and describes an array of devices improvised by himself and by fellow incarcerated people. Artists interred at Illinois' Stateville Prison have created a series of hand-drawn animations in collaboration with artists in the Prison + Neighborhood Arts/Education Project, one of which, *Freedom/Time* (2014), was publicly projected in 2015 on the wall of the Cook County Jail, in Chicago's Little Village neighborhood, shown in Figure 4. This was in collaboration with the arts education group 96 Acres, which explores the relationship between the jail and the surrounding community.



Figure 4. *96 Acres, Stories from the Inside/Outside, 2015, featuring Freedom/Time, animation by artists involved with the Prison + Neighborhood Arts/Education Project projected on the wall of the Cook County Jail. Dimensions variable.*

In describing work such as this, Fleetwood (2020) turns to the term, “relational aesthetics,” coined by Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) to talk about artwork that developed in the wake of the Institutional Critique movement in the 1970s and 1980s. Works of relational aesthetics directly engage an audience, often in a non-art setting. Terms such as social practice, socially-engaged art, and new genre public performance have

also been used to describe such collaborative work. These terms also encompass the anticarceral legislative lobbying project Tamms Year Ten, led by artist Laurie Jo Reynolds, Cameron Rowland's gallery exhibitions of products fabricated by incarcerated people, and the recent interactive online abolitionist exhibition “Re: Action,” organized by the group Envisioning Justice. Fleetwood reflects on the ethics of collaborations between non-incarcerated and incarcerated artists, stating that:

We must attend to how the structures of nonprofit arts and service organizations and carceral institutions work in tandem to define what collaboration means, who is being served, and how art projects can be instrumentalized to reproduce both institutions as sites of containment where social, cultural, and political value are unequally distributed . . . While we need forms of public engagement that do not separate incarcerated people from the nonincarcerated, we also need to be careful that prison art collaborations do not rely on a notion of art as intrinsically transformative or on a relationship to prisons that reinforces their power and function to dictate who is captive and who is free. (p. 159)

Both carceral and relational works tend to be readable as resistance and an assertion of the intellectual agency and moral autonomy of incarcerated people, although relational art tends to emphasize pedagogy and advocacy over form and technique.

Meanwhile, there is an institutional artistic archive that differs from much work produced in or about jails, prisons, or K-12 schools. This is the work of neurodivergent artists who would once have been readily found in psychiatric institutions. In 1922 German psychiatrist Hans Prinzhorn published a landmark study collection of such work, *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* (1922 / 1972), which had a major impact on avant-garde artists at the time (Dolbear, 2019). In the twentieth century, individual labels like “visionary,” “outsider,” and “self-taught” artists in the U.S., or the collective term “Art Brut” in Europe, became euphemisms for work by artists whom we might now understand as neurodivergent, possibly classifiable as having schizophrenia, autism, PTSD, bipolar disorder, and/or an intellectual or developmental disability.

For incarcerated and non-incarcerated disabled artists alike, reflection on internal states is often a significant expressive component. This is of course not an exclusively European phenomenon; I would propose that the transdisciplinary orientation of Afrofuturism (Boyd Acuff, 2020) owes its existence to the contributions of neurodivergent artists,

authors, and musicians (Isaacs, 2020; Pickens, 2019),² with Rammellzee, Pedro Bell, and Lonnie Holley as signal exponents in the visual arts. Rammellzee, whose work appears in Figure 5, was an influential artist and musician in the early days of New York hip-hop who propounded a mystical revolutionary philosophy of mathematics and language (Hsu, 2018).



Figure 5. *Rammellzee, Ignighter the Master Alphabiter, 1994–2001* (Headpiece and costume (found objects, paint and resin with garment elements)). Dimensions variable/ Photo by Joshua White. Courtesy of the Estate of Rammellzee and Jeffrey Deitch, Los Angeles.

Borrowing the title of a 2010 volume by Tobin Siebers, much of this wide catalogue of work by neurodivergent artists can be said to embody “disability aesthetics.” Siebers describes a modern art legacy indebted to anti-ideals of imperfection, strangeness, and excess that oppose the symmetrical, healthy, and harmonious virtues of European classicism. A renowned intellectually disabled assemblage sculptor, Judith

² I should note here that very few of the thousands of neurodivergent BIPOC people now incarcerated in the U.S. (Maruschak et al., 2016) may be able to summon the necessary stamina and other resources to both create artwork and make it visible to a wider audience.

Scott, whose work Siebers chronicles in his first chapter, developed a compelling style in an institutional environment. Scott spent 35 years warehoused in a state asylum in Ohio before her sister transferred her to a residential creative arts program in Oakland. Siebers writes,

Although materials were made available to her, Scott behaved as if she were pilfering them, and each one of her sculptures takes the form of a cocoon at the center of which is secreted some acquired object... Commentators have made the habit of associating her methods with acts of theft and a kind of criminal sensibility, acquired during thirty-five years in a mental institution. (pp. 16-17)

Siebers does not offer this “criminal sensibility” as a definitive reading of Scott’s formal approach, but there is no reason to diminish the influence of her traumatic environment on Scott’s fugitive artistic output, while her sculptures’ lush tangibility uncannily evokes a haptic sensibility that Moten and Harney (2013) identify as ubiquitous in subaltern social life.

Constraints define much disability-themed artwork. For contemporary disabled Black artists Panteha Abareshi and Carolyn Lazard, institutions represent constraints that must be simultaneously withstood and undermined. Lazard’s work in Figure 6, *A Conspiracy* (2017), is a collection of white noise machines that are installed on the ceiling of a museum in order to constrain hearing and permit private, possibly subversive conversations (Damman, 2020). Constraints are a central fact of life for disabled artists, whether embodied, medical, interpersonal, carceral, or bureaucratic, and perhaps the most ubiquitous constraint is time. Particularly as disabled people are incarcerated at far higher rates than non-disabled people (Rembris, 2014), the “crip time” theorized by critical disability thinkers as a slowed, nonlinear, inconsistent, flexible experience of chronology based on the individual needs and obstacles faced by disabled people (Samuels, 2017) can be productively linked with the traumatic but stubbornly contentious relationships to time articulated both by incarcerated people and by the wider Black community (Fleetwood, 2020; Guenther, 2013; Kim et al., 2018; Sojoyner, 2016).



Figure 6. *Carolyn Lazard, A Conspiracy, 2017. Dohm white noise machines. Dimensions variable.*

Through art, institutions can be meaningfully described, symbolically neutralized, or imaginatively transcended, but at the same time, following warnings by Fleetwood and others, art can also give those institutions validity and authority, or hide their power as structures of repression. In conceiving of a future without these structures, it can be useful to see how individual artists make artwork that can go places and do things that the artists themselves are unable to go or do. These fugitive aesthetics of the “carceral,” the “disabled,” and the “relational” describe differing but compatible perspectives on enclosure, from the respective and sometimes overlapping positions of those being punished, those being excluded, and those endeavoring to facilitate others’ creative refusal of institutional constraints. These headings may be useful in determining how teachers can engage with work by artists working in spaces of enclosure.

Acknowledge the frame

As mentioned earlier, the above examples provided by artists and other cultural workers are intended to provide three connected “aesthetic frames:” carceral, relational, and disabled. I intend these frames as reference points that can help to create, not a unidirectional teleological guide, but a field of possible routes, aligned in spirit with the multidirectional strategies employed by advocates of abolition and practitioners of Universal Design. In my usage, a frame can act as a border or boundary, but it also can call attention to something important that would otherwise be overlooked.

A frame acts as a container in a traditional figurative painting, the archetypal Western artwork, but so does the collection space, not to mention the commercial and critical entities that determine and sustain the value of the work. While acknowledging the context of the museum or gallery (framing the framework, as it were) was the central concern of artists involved in the Institutional Critique movement, artworks throughout time have pointed to their respective contexts. The flexibility of parameters that UDL inherits from Universal Design can allow artists to push and test the limits of the institutional setting (Lucero, 2013). Including an abolitionist critique of punitive control and a disabled critique of singular mastery can make the art classroom a space where parameters are negotiable, and students’ knowledge can be fostered and displayed.

Accessible art lessons in an abolitionist classroom can be a meditation on school as a frame for making art and for relating to others. Accessibility in this context should hopefully now connote not only respectful flexibility with regard to communication, media, and outcomes, but also with regard to individual and collaborative creative processes, and to relevant institutional parameters. Insofar as American public school teachers are an overwhelmingly white, cis, able-bodied population, their role, as described above, aligns with the non-institutionalized partners in relational art collaborations, while many of their students, particularly in non-elite schools, may be able to apprehend some aspects of the immobilized experiences of incarcerated and/or disabled artists. Teachers working with students can reflect on, describe, and depict explicit and implicit elements of their institutional roles, while also thinking about how roles can be productively transgressed in the service of students and communities.

By considering as wide a range of bodies, minds, and constraints as possible, and proposing and imagining the abolition of coerced confinement, we can create art classrooms that engage prefigurative politics (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). By learning from artists commenting on incarceration, hospitalization, and other forms of enclosure, conversations in the art room can prompt reflection by students and teachers on unstated parameters of educational settings. Emulating incarcerated artists, unexpected uses can be found for familiar and abundant materials, whether physical or metaphorical. Emulating disabled makers, speculative personal projects can be undertaken that disregard and displace the schedules and metrics of the school. Emulating relational partnerships, students can be part of public interventions that call attention to how the school serves its community. Art projects can encourage research on both enclosure and its subterfuge; borrowing from the radical psychiatric practices of postwar France or learning from Indigenous traditions of wayfinding, students can be encouraged to meander, creating based on affective inclinations rather than rules and roles (Marin, 2020; Nelson & Wilson,

2021). Starting in the classroom and moving out into shared worlds within and between communities, students can enact fugitive mobility. Classroom projects can involve planning and making art, but can also institute forms of communication that allow every student to feel respected, symbolically opposing youth criminalization (Morgan, 2021). While successful efforts at implementing restorative or transformative justice practices require administrative commitment (Meiners & Kaba, 2016), art classes have flexibility to patiently engage speculative practices. Teachers can look at the history of freedom schools (Hale, 2016) and other experimental efforts at bottom-up transformative learning among enclosed populations (hooks, 1994, 1995; Marin, 2020; May, 1999; Pewewardy et al., 2022; Rickford, 2016; Watson, 2019), as well as public and online spaces of free information exchange; these examples can also be intriguing points of departure for student discussion and research.

Disability scholars Liat Ben-Moshe, Chris Chapman, and Allison C. Carey (2014), borrowing from Michel Foucault's concept of the "carceral archipelago," offer the expanded idea of the "institutional archipelago" (p. 14), denoting an historically interconnected web of coercive and confining spaces. When presenting an abolitionist approach, it is important to not simply focus on the school as the one and only frame. Similarly, when discussing jails and prisons, it is important to not see the school in isolation from other enclosures, but also to acknowledge its unique assets and potentials, in distinction from more restrictive settings, as well as to acknowledge the ways in which many schools can and do enhance the mobility and access of their students. Those connections can be challenging to present to K-12 students,³ but collaborative community-focused art projects emphasizing process and participation can allow students, whether in educational environments that tend toward mobility or enclosure, to produce "minor" gestures challenging confinement and offering imaginative and evasive possibilities. As Deleuze & Guattari (1986) phrase it, "it isn't a question of liberty as against submission, but only a question of a line of escape or, rather, of a simple *way out*, 'right, left or in any direction'" (p. 7, italics original).

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³ Along these lines, Mariame Kaba's poignant children's books on parental incarceration, *Missing Daddy* (2018) and *See You Soon* (2022) are very much worth checking out.

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