Abolition is about presence, not absence. It's about building life-affirming institutions.

-Ruth Wilson Gilmore

Abolition is an act of presence—of things being here, rather than an act of absence—things not being here. It is an overwhelmingly positive project despite the connotation of the word that represents it.

This understanding is central to understanding the collective future that abolitionists struggle towards: the understanding that not only do we have to destroy, but we have to build as well, and it is through that building that we maintain the destruction of institutions that seek to limit our multiplicities.
Destruction is a creative enterprise when existing institutions prevent new ways of living—of course it is. Often, destruction is the precondition for creation, given that we are still limited by our physical imperatives of both time and space. The razing of fields so that new life may grow.

But destruction—and its byproduct, absence—alone will not guarantee anything other than new growth. If you raze a field without sowing new seeds, it’s likely that the crop that once occupied that space may return—now with the experience of fire at its disposal. No, what we gotta do is overwhelm the soil with the New, with a seed that does not allow the Old to return.

What we need is presence—an overwhelming, undeniable presence: The presence of networks of mutuality that address the conditions that allowed prisons to exist in the first place. The presence of a constant ethos of attack, rallying passionately against those who wish to put living beings in cages. The presence of radical care that responds to harm with healing rather than with more harm.

We’ve been told for so long that justice is something deferred from everyday life: that it belongs in courtrooms overlooked by credentialled magistrates of the Law undergirded by the power of the State through people in dark blue uniforms holstering powerful death machines. How have we so normalized this? Because we were taught to normalize it!

Fancy philosophers thought they were really doing something when they pointed out the similarities between prisons and schools, but forced-students around the world have come up with this analysis since time-immemorial!
If only we took children seriously in their cries and rallies against going to school.

In every rebellion against the monotonous ordering of their bodies—when to piss, when to shit, how to sit, how to be a snitch, how to stay awake, how to contort their lips, how to modulate their vocal chords to suit a proper tone, how to eat, when to eat, when to speak, when to be silent—lies an inherent critique against the caging of their bodies.

On top of the every-day ordering of our youth, classroom dynamics teach young humans to mediate their interpersonal problems with one another through an authority with power backed ultimately by violence and containment and incarceration. If you don’t do as I say, you’ll get called down to the office. And if you refuse that, uniformed men will come down and drag you there.

How would our relationships to one-another change if we practiced talking things out among only the parties involved in the classroom? How would students learn to take responsibility for their actions and their own protection? In what ways does the current model of classroom punishment and soft discipline and mediation enforce carceral culture?

Reflecting back on your own experience of schooling: How often did you see conflict resolution that involved the students having control over the process? When problems arose, what happened to the students who were deemed problematic? Were they calmly talked to as if they were human, or were they taken away for the sake of the lesson continuing? What happens over time as a result of this model of discipline and punishment and mediation during the early ages?
We’ve known we want autonomy, but many of us were conditioned to accept its repression as NORMAL and have internalized the violent prison-structure of the school as NORMAL. Do out of school suspensions work? Do in school suspensions work? Decidedly: no. How can separation of people from their localities, from their spheres of socialities make them even more social? How does separation—a complete absence—contribute to growth? It doesn’t! It disapparitions people so that the rest can go on with business-as-usual.

Our co-individual journeys through life uncoincidentally prepare us to accept abolition as impossible through convincing us that prisons are inevitable. But they aren’t. They’re historically contingent and consign us to their reproduction. What does that mean? It means that we often reproduce Carcerality through our everyday-ness. When we seek to hurt rather than to heal. What could we do instead? What can we do?

We will tell each other we hurt people, and who. We will tell each other why, and who hurt us and how. We will tell each other what we will do to heal ourselves, and heal the wounds in our wake. We will be accountable, rigorous in our accountability, all of us unlearning, all of us crawling towards dignity. We will learn to set and hold boundaries, communicate without manipulation, give and receive consent, ask for help, love our shadows without letting them rule our relationships, and remember we are of earth, of miracle, of a whole, of a massive river—love, life, life, love.

—Adrienne Maree Brown from “We Will Not Cancel Us”
The reproduction of Carcerality in our everyday lives is necessary for it to go on, but it certainly isn’t sufficient. What this means is: it needs our complicity in order to continue to reproduce itself, but that certainly isn’t the only thing it needs. The folks in power rely on Carcerality in order to continue to uphold this violent Order.

They need the continued existence of the Cage in order to threaten us—those who refuse the wanton violence of the Old—with containment, torture, incarceration.

We must incessantly refuse. We must constantly stand in solidarity with our friends and neighbors who are currently incarcerated. We must listen to their voices as we continually destroy the walls that separate us and build the communities we collectively deserve.
Each of us is precious. We, together, must break every cycle that makes us forget this.

—Adrienne Maree Brown from “We Will Not Cancel Us”

Nobody else will do this for us. If not now, when?
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