



www.abolitionistdinnerparty.com



Hello. This zine is authored by the organiser of the first Abolition Dinner Party (of this guise at least!). It hopes to be a part-practical tool for (new) organisers; part-reflexive practice; part thought space.


It is a first edition. It is a zine. Draw on it.
Rip it up (please recycle). Do it different.
Do it better.

It is also available to download at:
www.abolitionistdinnerparty.com
Get in touch:
abolitionistdinnerparty@protonmail.com

cknowledgement

This abolitionist work is never not anti-capitalist.
And capitalism is never not racial capitalism.

This work is never not possible thanks to the
extraordinary work of decades of abolition work
carried out by Black women, indigenous women,
Queer Black women and women of colour.

bolition is not absence,
it is *presence*. What the
world will become already
exists in fragments and pieces,
experiments and possibilities.
So those who feel in their gut
deep anxiety that abolition
means knock it all down,
scorch the earth and start
something new, let that go.”

RUTH WILSON GILMORE

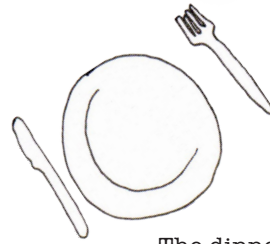
The Funambulist, Making Abolition
Geography In California's Central Valley

A dinner party. The purpose of these events is to create a conducive space for a group of people, largely unknown to each other (but not invited at random) to have 'courageous conversations' around prison abolition. To share ideas, language, positions and to build tools in furthering these conversations in our intimate and public communities.

The longer term ambitions of our party/ies is to co-create an abolitionist culture and encourage dialogue, particularly in spaces where the word 'abolition' feels as though it is akin to inviting a hungry lion into the room. Crucial to this work is facilitating space that embraces imagining and dreaming as political tools to build a decarcerated society and a non capitalist future.

this is slow
always urgent work

Abolition. Feminism. Now.
Angela Y. Davis, Gina Dent, Erica E. Meiners & Beth E. Ritchie



The dinner party format, came into being from three directions:

1) The organiser of the ADP was at a dinner at a friend's house. The hosts invited someone unknown to our organiser and this person's views revealed themselves as 'uninformed' regarding forced migration. It was difficult but dialogue ensued, and things moved - incrementally - but they moved.

2) Patrisse Cullors, calls for 'courageous conversations'¹ as step one in her Abolitionist handbook. These are specific, often personal and require practice. The ADP hopes to be a training ground.

three) Lois Weaver developed the 'Long Table'² as a theatrical intervention, here no food is involved but the table cloth is used as a canvas of debate. These are unfacilitated, de-centred conversations and they inspired much of the thinking in the design of this event.

1. An Abolitionist's Handbook: 12 Steps to Changing Yourself and the World

2. Split Britches. <http://www.split-britches.com/long-table>

Who?

Abolition is deliberately *everything-ist*; it's about the entirety of human-environmental relations.**
RUTH WILSON GILMORE

How can we reflect the everything-ist in a room built for creative dialogue?

Which friends, makers, thinkers, shakers, teachers and scholars, organisers, artists, activists, curious-ists are in your circle, or do you want to reach out to?

How many people do you imagine? A party of 10 or 20 or more people will have a different vibe approach to care, challenges and joys. (You might decide to work this out via the space available and how many that can comfortably accommodate or vice versa.)

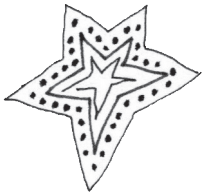
Not everyone invited will be available or it might not be for them. Organising your invite list to keep in mind who is and what experience is represented is useful. This might require sending invites in waves. 4-6 weeks is a healthy amount of notice.

All of this, whilst being mindful of your own positionality in the work, creating a space of trust.

* NY Times interview with Rachel Kushner <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/17/magazine/prison-abolition-ruth-wilson-gilmore.html>

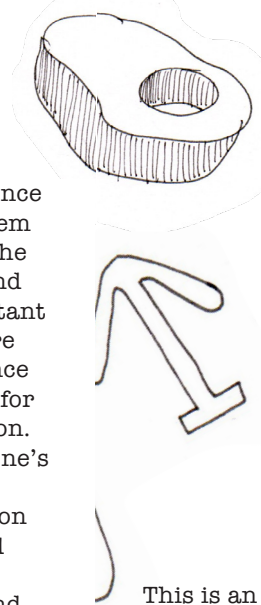


The organiser invited close friends who are curious, creative and/or advocates and workers within social justice. Also invited were a range of people working within the research and practice of abolition and those with lived experience of the criminal legal system. Each of these invitees was in turn invited to bring a guest. This was intended to firstly offer some anchor in a room of people unknown and secondly to edge outside of own circle to enrich and further proliferate the work. It was the risk and it was the provocation.



People with lived experience of the criminal legal system are never not crucial to the conversation of justice and abolition; it is also important to take care that there are people with this experience who would still advocate for some form of incarceration. You may not know someone's lived experience and it is important that information is only every volunteered and not requested. There are brilliant advocates and public figures who use their lived experience on public platforms; perhaps someone in your circle, or your circle's circle can connect with them. As this work continues, your network will grow and develop.

Inviting people into a room is an inherently political act, which is exciting. It can also be scary - make sure you have your people to lean on.



An*nything* that happens in the 'real' world must first be *imagined* in the images in our mind."

GLORIA ANZALDÚA

Borderlands/La Frontera :
The New Mestiza

This is an opportunity to build a community- is it a room with a diversity of lived experience, of race, of class, of culture, of sexuality, of gender and of political and religious orientations?

The collective work of abolition is expansive (everything-ist) it goes from psychiatry to sex work to disability rights. Within your resource, who are you able to ensure a 'safe' space to?

The first time you do this you will get some surprising yeses and some occasional disappointing nos. Whatever happens that experience carries you forward into the next action you do.



In early use the word

often appears where we would have its relative part (n.). Also from c. 1300 in the legal sense "person or a particular person" is from mid-15c.

etymology

c. 1300, *partie*, "a part, division, section, portion," a sense now obsolete; also "physical piece, fragment; section of a book or treatise," from Old French *partie* "side, part; portion, share; separation, division" (12c.), literally "that which is divided," noun use of fem. past participle of *partir* "to divide, separate" (10c.), from Latin *partire/partiri* "to share, part, distribute, divide," from *pars* "a part, piece, a share" (from PIE root **pere-* (2) "to grant, allot").

as any "group of people," also "a social class." Meaning "a person or group of persons involved in a lawsuit, agreement, etc.," and in the political sense of "a number of persons united in supporting a person, policy, or cause." From early 14c.

Party

Some thought prompts

Space is inherently tied to capital, and that's not always possible to avoid.

- Is there a space to borrow that is part of your community? A hall, a room or a creative space. A lot of the time people are very willing to support social justice work.

- Some of these conversations can become deeply personal and a neutral space (if such a thing exists in capitalist logic) can be most beneficial. It helps to focus the work on the community.

- Does your group reflect a lot of people with child care/caring responsibilities?

- Is weekend better/easier if people are bringing food? Do most of the party tend to work mon-fri?

- Is it in the summer - if so is it cool/ have outside space?

- Is it in the winter - does it have street lighting en route/ heating inside?

- Is it accessible via public transport?

- Is it an accessible building for wheelchair users or others that need step free access?

...

- Is it functional for food?

- Does it have other things you might need such as tables, chairs, dishwasher so as not to over-burden the organiser(s) - or if it doesn't how can this need be shared?

- What will people eat off?

- Can you set up the space to consider different dietary needs: halal/vegan/ allergies etc

- Does it have natural light?

- Is it not over securitised yet not overtly public?

The environmental considerations:

- Are there recycling facilities

- What is the least waste version of things i.e. napkins?

- At time of writing Covid-19 was still prevalent, what measures of care can you offer? e.g. ventilation, providing sanitising gel (alcohol-free)

- Assume this work happens off social media in the first instance as certain people might have reasons to remain anonymous.

Dinner...

F O O D

The humble gathering of people and food is a simple and powerful moment in community building. It can *feel* beautiful.

Food is: political - cultural - sustenance.
What does it mean to feed together (most particularly during a cost of living crisis).

We hosted a 'pot-luck' dinner party that meant the invitation to provide for each other and share in this simple act of care was part of our world building.

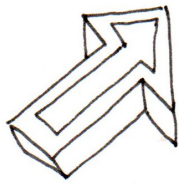
It is important here to set out expectation in the invite - it doesn't have to be fancy, expensive, home-mad, etc...

T h i n k i n g p o i n t s

- How will the food be laid out/shared/served?
- What happens to any left over food? Is there a nearby charity? (bearing in mind Covid and vulnerable circumstances)
- Can it be boxed up/shared out?

- Alcohol? We facilitated a dry space. Bringing together a group of people with different lived experiences means thinking about what that space might need to make people feel safe and welcome. Alcohol can also have an influence on dialogue that isn't always helpful.

Party



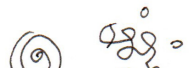
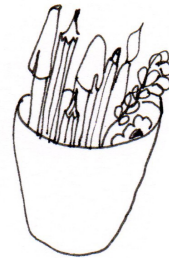
Joy! It's important that there is joy in this hard work. Create a communal playlist, offer a dance shake out, tell someone their salad was delicious. The work of this event is care, and care is joy and joy is care!

G e t t i n g c r e a t i v e
Inspired by Long Tables we used our table cloth as a literal canvas. For people to express, dream, imagine, doodle, think out what was going on during the conversation. This practice can also diffuse some intensity without being avoidant of dialogue.

It was a way to record our experience to say 'this really happened, we were here', without being academic about it.

If you have enough space it's also good to set-up a 'break out' area as these conversations have personal degree of intensity it's great to offer ways for people to check out, refresh.

We had a small break out space with tables and books near the music player and door to the outside space. Also provided were 'care cards' for people which are also available to download from the website.



learnings from
THE where.

As this was initiated as a research project for an MA at Goldsmiths, the original plan was to host the party there. In the theatre - a space of imagination that was accessible and free of charge. Had this come to pass, we would have had the conversation more explicitly about the institution as a venue and perhaps made a feature of the increased securitisation, surveillance and carcerality of education spaces, not to mention their consumption by corporations. Such as the blossoming romance between KPMG and Goldsmiths.

However the institution was not willing for food to be bought on site. It was a hard no.

A save the date went out in the meantime to give people at least 6 weeks' notice.

The second venue was a rehearsal studio, whilst acknowledging that theatre spaces aren't always safe spaces or often feel exclusive, this was an accessible studio run by a company with respected values. However the team were eventually unable to whittle down from a £1000 venue fee.

So, a community centre in Hackney became available that had very good facilities. They did have locks on all of the kitchen doors and would only rent out crockery to corporate hires. The locks on the kitchen doors isn't a great aesthetic for people with lived experience of the CLS but can, if handled with care become a useful part

of the conversation. It is also interesting to share the reflection about this space and the security overleaf.

This is all detailed here, so that we can consider that finding a space that is free, or "affordable", detached from institution, church and state, trauma informed and accessible - and also a dry space, is a hard needle to thread in neoliberal London. This is all part of the considerations of abolition. How capital organises people and in turn, how can people resist?



THE ABOLITIONIST DINNER PARTY.

learnings from the when

The event was originally set for an earlier date, however RMT and TfL train strikes meant the event became inaccessible. This posed a quandary and isn't separate from the work, as the UK faces more industrial action than seen for some time:

- Invite everyone to join a picket line instead (Covid conscious?)*
- Cancel the event entirely
- Take the only other date available at the same venue?

We did the latter, acknowledging then that it was a bank holiday weekend and... Notting Hill Carnival. There will never be the perfect date time and place, use it for the conversations.

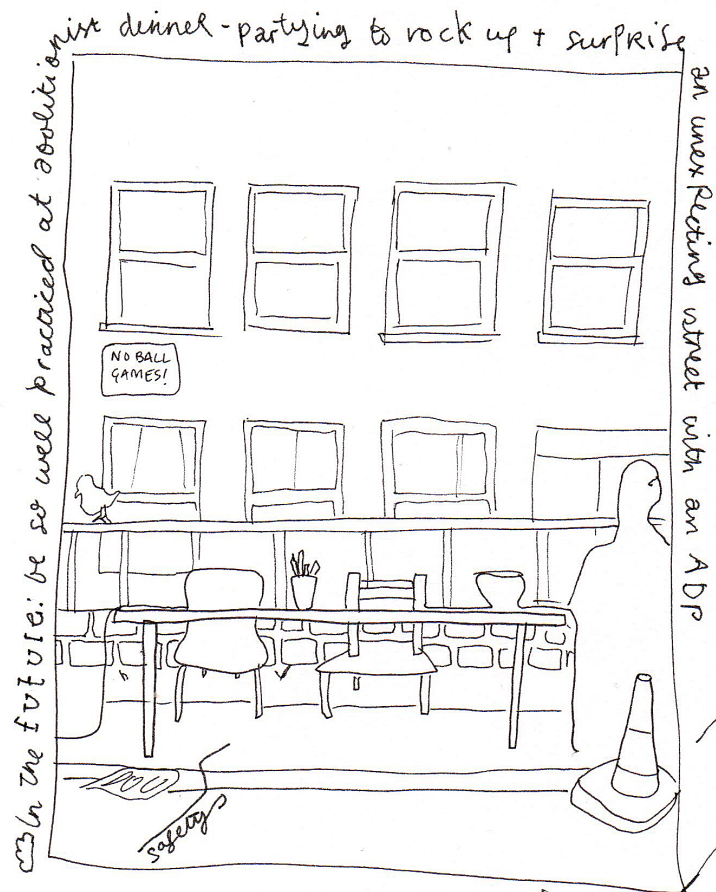
*are strikes non-reformist reforms?

In the feedback several people suggested moving the timings (from 7pm) earlier to use the outside space more and to have more time. In the rearrangements sunset time changed significantly earlier and to have more time in this instance, meant more cost...

It raises a deeper question of locale also. The transport issue was a problem for all but two of the guests. Because of the neoliberal property system “local” in London has very different implications. How can this work be further localised?

The change of date meant 6 people were no longer able to make it, after a lot of work to consider a balance of who is in the room this was at moments dispiriting, but we have to trust in the process and in the work.





We have
courageous
conversations
because our goal
is to live inside
of a healthy
community that
values the *dignity*
of every single
human being.”

PATRISSE CULLORS

An Abolitionist's Handbook: 12 Steps
to Changing Yourself and the World



What are the starter conversations?
(Sharing definitions of abolition?)

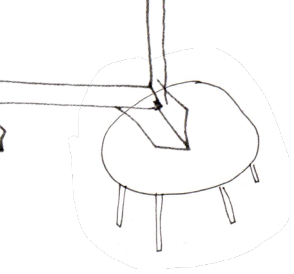
What are the ‘main’ conversations?
(Non-reformist reform?
Transformative justice? Community
building etc)

What the dessert conversations -
something of a ‘take away’? (What
does it mean to be an abolitionist on
the day-to-day)

There are available to download
some ‘prompt cards’ - the dynamic
of the room should facilitate agency
at all times, but if chat runs down or
needs a new lease of life these might
be useful. They are deliberately
‘unbranded’ and some are visual.
If you create your own and want
to add to resource please drop an
email!

It’s good to remember too that
dialogue is sometimes silence,
and that the most active part of a
conversation is listening.



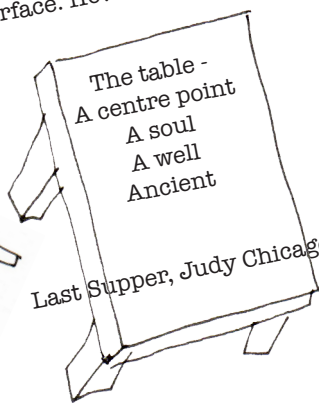
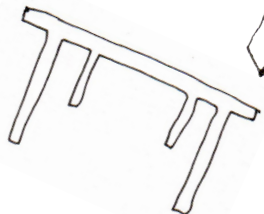


Tables

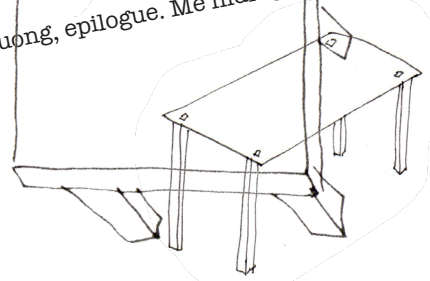
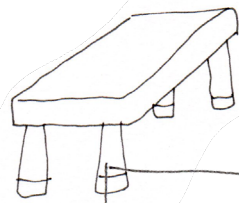
Is there a link between Agnes Martin's rose - the beauty is in the mind, the rose the vessel- and the table? 'Im not sure.
.....I feel it but Im not sure I have the words. If I was to make an attempt it would be something like the potential [creativity]
is in us, all of our component parts not just our minds and the table is a vessel to harness...the potential-creativity.

Our tables fold down, have transience non permanence, it has the potential for travel.

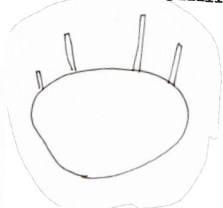
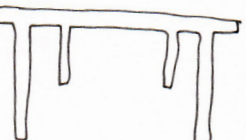
Does a wooden table get taken more seriously? Do our imaginations allow us to trust in grain of memories held, that time splits
its history and holds the wounds in its splintered surface. How we read furniture is not-not part of how we live in this world.



Last Supper, Judy Chicago, Ocean Vuong, epilogue. Me hiding under the table.



Dream learn play draw feast counsel wrestle challenge resist declare conceive strategise fracture
commit propose mediate meditate share think discover.
Deliberately uncomma'd



Actual care is hyper-power. The organiser has extensive facilitation and trauma-informed training experience from the work they do as a theatre practitioner and understands that care is fundamental to meaningful spaces.

Critically this practice isn't about "being nice" but thinking through the needs (your own included) to create a sense of trust and safety. It is thought. It means having awareness of one's positionality, about taking time to engage your imagination to consider the potential experience you are inviting people to be a part of.

Care turned out to be a central theme of conversation during the first ADP. Its centring in the design of the event became a useful tool to talk about how abolition is also about how we live. The daily values beyond the structural...

This work, as with all intersections of art+politics, becomes very personal. When asking a group of strangers to imagine a new world, the temptation is to start with the one we currently have - and that might mean referencing violent structures or experiences of harm. It is important to acknowledge this.

Beyond the implicit thought into time, space and invitation, things that were provided were: • a care note wrapped in a napkin (available to download), • cheesy conversation starters, • taking cushions from home to add to chairs in a break away space and • having more spaces at the table for guests to facilitate some free flow movement for people if they wanted to move conversation. Other details are threaded through the booklet.

care



“Over the past few decades, many of us have experienced living in an accelerating social system of organised loneliness. We have been encouraged to feel and act like hyper-individualised, competitive subjects who primarily look out for ourselves. But in order to really thrive we need caring communities. We need localised environments in which we can flourish: in which we can support each other and generate networks of belonging.” **THE CARE COLLECTIVE**

“The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence: The Care Collective”.

are is an antidote to violence.”
SAIDIYA HARTMAN

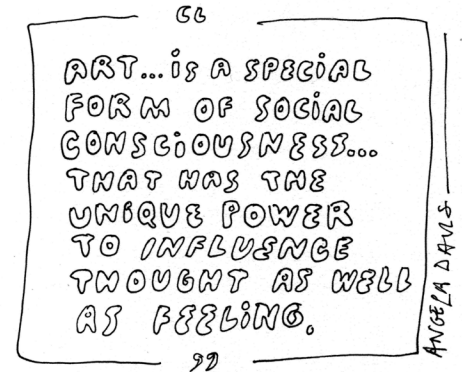
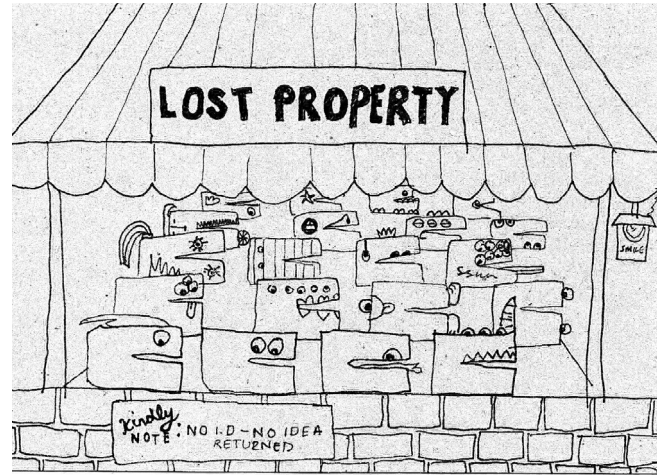
Saidiya Hartman at In the Wake: A Salon in Honor of Christina Sharpe

harm
harm

“Strangers can
come together
and have hard
conversations.
Dig deep with
care.”



Feedback from ADP guest.



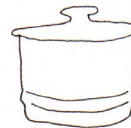
ANGELA Y. DAVIS Mandate for a
People's Culture



"The night before the Chicago program was supposed to open, police broke into the church that was hosting it and urinated on all of the food. The government's attacks on the Black Panther Party are evidence of mutual aid's power."

DEAN SPADE.

"Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)".



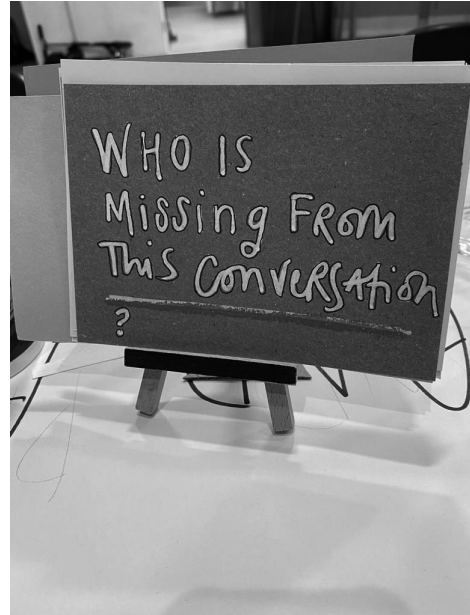
- Pizza
- Chicken
- Stew
- Salad
- Falafel
- Ethiopian
- Hummus
- Profiteroles
- Cake
- Bruschetta
- Magnums
- Doughnuts
- Cavolo nero
- Ice cream
- Bao Buns
- Gyoza
- Watermelon

Provision

the beginning of something

what is it?

JUST SEE



surety put setou
for your dreams

How do we
hold power
accountable
in matters of
state harm?

AFTERCARE

Following up after the event is a good idea. A group message (keep people's contacts private unless agreed otherwise) to say thank you and offer any feedback to the organiser. If you can offer different methods for this; a voicenote, postcard, email, phone call, we also provided a survey that could be completed anonymously.

People will or won't want to respond to this as is their wont. When ready to start thinking of your next event, you might want to consider contacting people ahead of event confirmation to ask how and if they might want to be involved.

Some feedback might require some space to think about, it's okay for things to take time to marinate. As Patrisse Cullors advocates in her Abolitionist Handbook, it is necessary to practice responding and not reacting.



FEEDBACK

Conversation
fragments from
the party

Prompt: Care

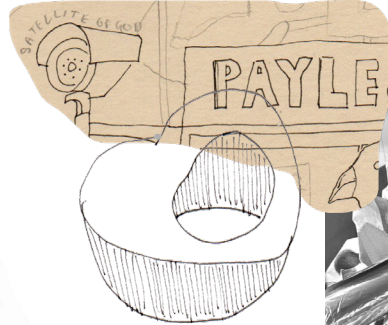
- > What it means to care
- > How it is possible to care for others w. ...st, unselfishly, also needing to care for yourself
- > The amount of energy it takes to care, the reservoirs of energy needed
- > How it is easy to care 'for the sake of' caring, rather than with ulterior motives or specific "impact targets" or objectives/guidelines
- > How caring-for-caring's sake takes less energy than caring with targets
- > Experience from the system, how "caring" for those within the system can lead to harm e.g. when care of individuals leads to compromise in health and safety concerns

Segue: Harm

- > How the existing system is harmful not only to those incarcerated but also those working in the system
- > Upon retiring from the system, those workers have expressed how they simultaneously missed it and recognised that it was very harmful to them
- > It is an abusive / toxic relationship

Prompt: Imagination

- > Imagination as a tool is not to be underestimated
- > Sometimes imagination and creativity are belittled as they are not “concrete” in their solutions
- > It is therefore worth remembering that the existing system was at one point imagined and subsequently, created
- > So what is required is a new imagining to create a solution



Segue: Norway

- > Norway often held up as a “shining example” in reimagining justice
- > In e.g. UK, when a citizen ‘commits’ a ‘crime’ they are considered to have failed society, in Norway, society feels they have failed the citizen - not without its complications.
- > It is hard to ‘imagine’ that mindset in the UK. - it feels like a very long distance to travel / reset

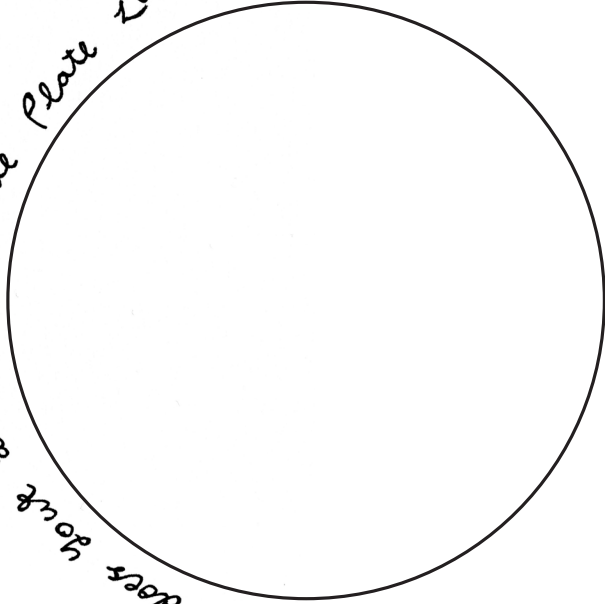
Segue: Society

- > How when a person is deemed to be anti-social they are removed from society and placed in a de-societied institution thereby perpetuating the anti-society
- > Fundamentally the existing system does not work (for anyone other than those profiteering) in this, and in many other ways

believe imaginative thinking is **fuel**
LOLA OLUFEMI

~Experiments in Imagining Otherwise

What does your
evolutionist side plate look like?



A personal note from me from in-between what happened and what will be:

Content warning: the below paragraph references alcohol use and police detention.

There is so much we subsume in the business of living. A process that has occupied psychologists, artists and curiosists for time. When I was arrested on 17th August 2004 the behaviour that led to that moment, was not purely of that moment, but of a history of moments before. I don't remember a whole lot of detail from that evening, I was heavily inebriated. And I know deep down that I could reveal more but I protect myself from that gruesomeness. I do remember the bruises that adorned both my wrists the next day from where I had strenuously resisted the handcuffs, before being hustled into a van for one. My detainment was brief. It was a night. I was lucky. I caused other people known and unknown to me that evening significant stress. There is a lot of shame. That most indiscreet power of human living. I hadn't given too much thought to this incident in the last few years, I have been able to process and let go. But in doing this research-work, this tiny yet personal example, of which I won't divulge more detail, it is clear to me that what I needed in that moment was not handcuffs, swabs, metal bars, or to be isolated in a cell, but what I needed was a hug. Was care. Was mental health support I had never had real access to.

Perhaps it becomes easier to give more of what you need than what you receive. Perhaps there's no logic to it at all.

When I started an MA Art+Politics I had no idea how personal things were about to get. And perhaps the '+' that

lives in mobius with art+politics is personified by how we turn experience into action. The metabolic function of the political animal, of which we are all one. I imagine this as a turning over, perpetual and kinetic and it makes me think of Karen Barad's diffraction and that is the very mechanics of forming new "spacetimematterings"¹. The components of new worlds.

Directions, detours, third ways² and enigmatic constellations of time and space have developed into a theme of possibility across my study, research manifests as more questions than certainties but as I go on, with more of the art of how to ask them.

Through research journeys I became drawn to the actual and the simulacra of the table and all the poetical/political potential that bought with it. I wrote an imaginary epilogue situated at a table with Sartre, Said, de Beauvoir, Genet and more. "What about Palestine?"

*

"Humans have always joined in groups to imagine how best to live"³

In imagining the Abolitionist Dinner Party, it was intentional to bring something that both seemed 'slight' into being - a dinner party, something that is recognisable, has awkward

¹ Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart by Karen Barad <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2014.927623>

² This is in reference to Svetlana Boym's Another Freedom: An Alternative History of an Idea

³ Novara Media podcast with Ruth Wilson Gilmore <https://novaramedia.com/2022/06/09/abolishing-prisons-is-only-the-start-w-ruth-wilson-gilmore/>



bourgeois connotations, and is of a naturally theatrical dynamic – and lift this domesticated event into a slightly ‘third way’ – something performed without rehearsal.

Abolition isn’t new but it brings about newness.

Do you want to know - Q: ‘did it work?’ A: Yes+No.
Because it doesn’t have hard edges, it is, instead - *working*.

Prisons. Caging people is archaic (at no time humane), cruel, nothing to do with ‘rehabilitation’, counter-useful, righteous and in its actuality a deeply racist, classist, gender abusive system, that is also profiteering more and more on the labour of those incarcerated.

As this project grew so did the presence of the brackets (prison) abolition as I reveal more and more to myself how a carceral state of mind is franchised by capitalism. No matter how much care you put into the design of something, most particularly an event with real people with their whole lives lived with them, you will forget or non-think of something(s). And you won’t always make the right decisions, but if you have done enough of the work those mis-steps will be a detour on the journey.

I was surprisingly nervous on the evening and ironically it meant I wasn’t as “present” as I would have liked to have been, not in the least because I had quoted Wilson Gilmore across our table with “Abolition is a presence...”. Perhaps it was the fragility of a looming deadline. A little pressure and a lot of risk. I have to accept this as a curve of learning and appreciate that sometimes a little vulnerability can go a long way. I am strengthened here to think of Judith

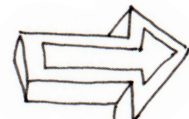
Butler and understanding vulnerability as precondition of resistance.⁴

I designed the event to take myself out of the position of “host” or “facilitator” as much as possible, as with Weaver’s Long Table no one person is authority of the conversation, and I thought this de-centred approach with the lightest touch facilitation (i.e. prompt cards encouraging movement between courses) was the most appropriate way to. However a lot of the feedback suggests a little more facilitation would have been welcome. When considering its a group of people unknown to each other this is going to require some thought, assuming that not everyone there has trauma-informed training. However, because of the systems that exist agency in a community is not a common condition and I need to think about the best way to move this forward...

Imagination work takes time. I wish we would have had more. (perhaps something I took for granted from theatre), Our creativity can be curtailed so often in the day to day living from the systems that seek to extract and exploit our labour time.

I think in the thinking of future iterations considering the facilitation need through this lens will be exciting.

The plates that were offered to party-goers to paint on went down like a storm (in a side-plate) and this marker of solidarity of permanence, of we were here and we tried something has been really powerful.



Thought manifest, thoughtfulness enacted, is a rupture to the biopolitics of lived capitalism that tells us to go faster quicker better. Look down not up, zone out not in, take care of yourself not each other.

CARE being such a common theme of the evening was meaningful and it made me think of our most recent dialogue around care-workers, in light of the pandemic. And it makes me wonder: what if we were to imagine the world, or actually to be in the world, understanding and performing as if we are ALL 'care-workers'... sound too big? What about incarcerating millions of people around the world....

“Imagination gives us borders, gives us superiority, gives us race as an indicator of ability. I often feel I am trapped inside someone else’s capability. I often feel I am trapped inside someone else’s imagination, and I must engage my own imagination in order to break free.”⁵

Also, I/we might try configuring the tables differently

All the feedback affirmed “yes” they would come again and nearly everyone would consider organising there own ADP. This is hope.

As the co-authors of ‘Abolition. Feminism. Now.’ point out, that whilst resource is unending for models of surveillance and policing, “no one is hiring poets and artists”.⁶

“Yet.”

I imagine.

5 Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds by adrienne maree brown

6 Abolition. Feminism. Now by Angela Y. Davis, Gina Dent, Erica R. Meiners and Beth E. Ritchie



**Resources available at
abolitionistdinnerparty.com are:**

- This zine with clickable links
- A bibliography of the research work
- Prompt cards to download
- Care card example
- Conversation starters

The webpage used for info and comms for the event

Democracy Now!

ANGELA Y. DAVIS



Abolition is not primarily a negative strategy. It's not primarily about dismantling, getting rid of, but it's about re-envisioning. It's about building *anew*."