

Contemporary Conversation: Carceral Continuum

Thu 20 Jun 2019, 6.30 – 8.30pm

Nottinghamshire's carceral geography consists of four penal establishments, three of which operated by Her Majesty's Prison Services. HM Prison Lowdham Grange is a men's prison privately financed, constructed and managed by Serco, a limited liability multinational company that operates in six sectors of public services provision in the UK: health, justice and immigration, defence, transport, and citizen services.

A minimal account relates our local experience to the globalised infrastructure of security, militarisation and social disinvestment that pervades all levels of public service provision and affects with great disparity economically dispossessed communities worldwide.

Carceral Continuum draws attention to the ways in which different carceral techniques of the state are shaped by and work with the imperatives of global capitalism, how the latter is not disfranchised from black immiseration, and how a global pattern of environmental racism adds to the forces of production that make black and indigenous lives disposable, yet intrinsic to the capitalist creation of value.

Drawing from ideas of ecology, the branch of biology that deals with the relations of organisms to one another and to their physical environment, this evening session asks: what are the historical crossovers between mass incarceration, economic precariousness and racial vulnerability to 'the weather'? Inasmuch the latter refers to the slow violences enacted on the environment it also borrows from literary scholar Christina Sharpe, a critical analysis of how contemporaneity can be defined as an atmospheric condition of time and place wherein anti-Black and anti-Latinx racism is pervasive as political climate.⁽¹⁾

The violence of capitalist accumulation is often incremental and concealed from public view, embodied in the figures of the slave, the migrant worker and the chronically unemployed. Incarceration refers to the different forms of segregating people, in other words, models of captivity and confinement that include economic abandonment, border securitisation, and occupation by encirclement that persist and extend racial and class struggles. Sociologist Avery Gordon mentions a parallel movement by which these forms of imprisonment become more extreme, such as solitary confinement, and simultaneously more abstract, including open-air camps, such as the city of Gaza in Palestine.⁽²⁾

This Contemporary Conversation explores how racial violence is perpetuated in the multiplication of prison complexes built nearby residual toxic centres, the thread of toxicity through the institutions of U.S. border security and the prison, and how justice campaigns of racialised victims of air pollution may further their claims in view of law's role in producing and sustaining racial violence. It offers a forum for thinking ways forward, to imagine and map out a set of geographies onto which contemporary aesthetics can insert themselves. Learning how carceral structures work makes legible its deep historical injustices, whilst setting grounds for change. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore movingly notes, "Carceral geographies develop deliberately but not inevitably."⁽³⁾

This event is part of the series **Contemporary Conversations**, which looks at arts position to its present. Acknowledging artists' role in neither coinciding nor departing from their time, but working with its passage, pressing and transforming it. The evening dialogues explore the present tense in its cultural and political dimensions, visual cultures and postcolonial debates.

- (1) Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2017. p.106
- (2) Gordon, Avery F. and Natascha Sadr Haghighian. *Speaking from Prison*. Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin. Sep 30, 2015. Online.
- (3) Gilmore. Ruth Wilson. *Ruth Wilson Gilmore with Rachel Kushner*. Lannan Foundation, Santa Fe. Apr 17, 2019. Online.

Nadine El-Enany is a Senior Lecturer in Law at Birkbeck School of Law and Co-Director of the Centre for Research on Race and Law. Nadine teaches and researches in the fields of migration and refugee law, European Union law, protest and criminal justice. She has published widely in the field of EU asylum and immigration law. Her current research project, funded by the Leverhulme Trust, focuses on questions of race and criminal and social justice in death in custody cases. Nadine has written for the Guardian, the Open Democracy, Media Diversified, Left Foot Forward and Critical Legal Thinking among others. Her book, (B)ordering Britain: law, race and empire is forthcoming with Manchester University Press in 2019.

Nicholas Shapiro is an incoming assistant professor of Biology and Society at the University of California, Los Angeles. He is a co-founder of the Environmental Data and Governance Initiative, a longtime fellow at Public Lab, and a collaborator on the Aerocene project. He is a critic and practitioner of environmental monitoring and mitigation, collaborating across the social sciences, the natural sciences, and the arts. His work related to the Carceral Continuum involves apprehending the environmental justice implications of mass incarceration in the US as prisons are routinely placed on residual toxic land (on top of old mines or dumps) or next to polluting industry. Shapiro's writing has been translated into Korean, French, and Spanish and his research has been featured in a broad range of media from NPR, The Late Show with Stephan Colbert, and The Art Newspaper among others.

Related Events

Performance: d'bi.young anitafrika *Concrete Jungle*
Thu 11 Jul, 6.30pm–8pm

Join a poetic movement-monodrama on Blackness, imprisonment and death. As Afrofuturism meets dub poetry and dub theatre in a state of mythic witchery, *Concrete Jungle* defies linearity of time and space, occupying an abstract suspension in our psyche through a soundscape of electronic Afro-spiritual dubs scored by Mohammed Rowe, asking us to question our understanding of Emancipation. The artist will be in conversation with Jade Foster following the performance.

d'bi.young anitafrika is a queer Black feminist artist, Canadian Poet of Honor, YWCA Woman of Distinction in the Arts, and three-time Dora Award winning playwright-performer.

Workshop: Carceral Ecologies
Thu 11 Jul – Fri 12 Jul, 11am–4pm

Is it possible to imagine a world without prisons? What leaps of the imagination might be required to overcome incarceration? This workshop explores the links between the world's prison systems, racist and colonial structures.

Sophie Fuggle is Senior Lecturer in French at Nottingham Trent University.