When the Invisible Punishing Machine is everywhere...

How the Mechanism of Social Control (Mass Incarceration, Institutionalized Racism, Slavery and Repression) in the USA Shapes the Individual as Well as the Social Space

by the

Counter Narrative Society (CNS)

a.k.a.

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SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN ART, CULTURE AND TECHNOLOGY

AT THE

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

FEBRUARY 2012

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ABSTRACT

When the Invisible Punishing Machine is everywhere, creeping into my body, life and spaces, it is like living in a colossal architectural nightmare"; this thesis serves first as a testimony of the author's personal stories. Second it illuminates the machine as a punitive and disciplinary system affecting the body in visceral ways (although the author resists its power by inventing critical and artistic counter narratives that are described). Thirdly, it analyzes the nightmarish machine, the genesis of the machine and how the machine as a mega structure infiltrates the institutional systems in this country. Therefore, the purpose of this written thesis is to interrogate, reveal, and ultimately work to transform radically the intangible effects of the invisible punishing machine on our bodies, minds and souls. Once we have remedied ourselves of the effects of this omnipresent force, we can begin to eliminate the institutions in this country that perpetrate brutal repression and inequality.

This thesis uses various methodologies including ethnography, social theory, artistic conceptual strategies and a methodology created specifically for the project: "The Paradoxical and Interrogative Remedies" (PIR). This is an analytical and artistic method to communicate meaningful bio-political issues and encompasses radical live action, performance, multimedia installation, documentation and the production of tactical objects. PIR is applied to artistic research, activism, personal therapy and radical pedagogy. The new methodology of criticality developed through these projects will contribute to the fields of contemporary art, social sciences and prison activism.
This "Written Thesis" serves to distill ideas culled from a body of personal stories ("Check Points"), artistic works (Glaciers Under My Skin), and historical research ("The Colossal Architectural Nightmare"). The distilled concepts from this written thesis are being used to shape the ongoing artistic thesis project "When the Invisible Punishing Machine is Everywhere: The Weight I Carry With Me."

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................... 5

THESIS STATEMENT ....................................................................................... 9
 Definition ........................................................................................................... 10
 What if I were in a society of control? What would my life be? ...... 11

Counter Narrative Society (CNS) ................................................................. 13

INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................... 15
 Initial Conundrum ............................................................................................ 17
 Overview ........................................................................................................... 25
 Wounded Witness, Wounded Storyteller [Manifesto] ...... 27
 General Framework: The Totalizing and the Individualizing Dilemma and Approach ................................................................. 30

PART 1. WHEN THE INVISIBLE PUNISHING MACHINE IS EVERYWHERE
 ......................................................................................................................... 33
 When does it feel that the invisible punishing machine is everywhere? .............................................................................................. 35
 Check Points .................................................................................................... 35
 Mission High School ...................................................................................... 37
 In the streets / in the neighborhood................................................................ 38
 Not too far from home................................................................................... 39

PART 2. CREEPING INTO MY BODY, LIFE AND SPACES ..................... 41
 How does it take over my life and how do I find myself making counter narratives as paradoxical and interrogative remedies to counter act its effects? ......................................................................................... 43
 Paradoxical and Interrogative Remedies to Overcome the Invisible Punishing Machine ................................................................. 47
 Problem: “Silent Isolation” ........................................................................... 49
 Paradoxical and Interrogative Remedy: The Inmate | You and Me ......................................................................................................................... 49
 In San Francisco, CA ..................................................................................... 50
 At MIT, MA ..................................................................................................... 57

Problem: “la llorona” ....................................................................................... 61
 Paradoxical and Interrogative Remedy: Passing the Ball: Wounded Witnesses, Wounded Storytellers ................................................................. 61
 MIT ACT / Fall 2009 ....................................................................................... 62
 Projects ............................................................................................................ 64

Problem: “The Elephant in the Room” Institutional Race-Class and the Neo-Eugenic Thinking in an Era of Mass Incarceration ...... 69
 Paradoxical and Interrogative Remedies: Indecent Acts | Glaciers Under Our Skin with the Double Skinned Nation | Funky Hunch in the Atrium ................................................................. 69

MIT ACT / Spring 2010 ................................................................................. 71
 The Institutional is also Personal .................................................................... 72
 A Different Artistic Approach ....................................................................... 73
 A Difficult Path ................................................................................................ 74
 The meaning of White and Black as an abbreviated historic record of class-race and eugenic thinking in USA: .......... 75

Addressing the Elephant in the Room ............................................................. 78
 Project: Indecent ACTS ................................................................................. 80
 Context ............................................................................................................ 80
 Artistic Influences .......................................................................................... 81
 Experiment: Indecent ACTS 1 & 2 ............................................................... 87
 Performance: 02.16.2010 at MIT-E15-001 (Cube) ....................................... 88
 ACT 1: Any African Americans .................................................................... 88
 ACT 2: Blond Hair Extension ....................................................................... 89
 The general response ..................................................................................... 89

Project: Glaciers Under Our Skin ................................................................. 92
 Initial Concept Outline: ................................................................................. 92
 Middle March 2010 ...................................................................................... 93
 Late March 2010 ........................................................................................... 93
 Early April 2010 ............................................................................................ 94
 Late April 2010 ............................................................................................ 94
 Early May 2010 ............................................................................................ 95
 Early June 2010 ............................................................................................ 95

Multifaceted Pilot Anti-Racism Workshop 5.4.2010:
 Glaciers Under Our Skin ............................................................................. 96
 Statement ...................................................................................................... 97
 Performance’s Score ..................................................................................... 98
 Each Zone Had a Specific Function ............................................................. 100
PART 3. IT IS LIKE LIVING IN A COLOSSAL ARCHITECTURAL NIGHTMARE

Under what conditions or in what situations is the invisible punishing machine a colossal architectural nightmare? .............................................. 115
SOME INFLUENCES & THOUGHTS .................................................. 118
  What is a nightmare in the first place? ........................................ 118
  What is it like for me? ............................................................. 119
  Then, what is this colossal architectural nightmare all about? .................................................. 119
  Then as all nightmares, has there ever been a beginning?
  And, does it even have an end? ................................................... 123
From the “Self-sufficient Industrial Village” to the Industrious Disciplinary State: .................................................. 123
The City-State and its Modern Prison .......................................... 127
A Necessary Good or Just a Greedy Bourgeoning Iniquity
Walnut Street Prison ................................................................. 129
Bigger more Industrious and Tougher ......................................... 130
The Mega Superstructures: From the Industrious Disciplinary City-State to the Urban Society and the Society of Control in the Age of Cybernetics: .................................................. 133
SUMMER TRIP: The Genesis of an Idea ...................................... 135
  The Journey ........................................................................ 137
  The following 4 spaces are the 4 encounters that I witnessed during the summer and are the manifestation of this colossal architectural nightmare: .................................................. 137
  Roxbury - Boston, MA / via Detroit, MI .................................. 138
  CSP SAC - CA................................................................. 142
  California State Prison the places my brother is forced to call his home. .................................................. 143
  Prisoner Hunger Strike – July 2011 ......................................... 147

CONCLUSIONS .............................................................................. 161
  About the Process .................................................................. 163
  Few Paradoxical and Interrogative Remedies for the Near Future .................................................. 165

Acknowledgements .................................................................... 175

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES .................................................. 177
THESIS STATEMENT
(Biographical / Artistic / Ethnographic / Sociological)
**Definition**

The *invisible punishing machine* is an idiomatic, social science fiction-esque expression and multifaceted original research concentration that I designed in order to examine aesthetically, morally, emotionally, and historically, the underlying illegible social, spatial and technological causes that produce inequality and invisible punishment – a consequence shaped by mass imprisonment, persecution of individuals, the prison-welfare system, urbanization, neoliberal policies and social-urban control in the USA. - (CNS)
What if I were in a society of control?
What would my life be?

In 2010, I created the social science-fictional proposition
*when the invisible punishing machine*¹ *is everywhere*,
to extrapolate the conditions that are affecting my life, my
family and community at large (incarcerated, immigrant and
poor) from being under siege in one of the most prominent
and dominating Neoliberal nation-states² on the planet (the
USA). The proposition was a tentative hypothesis for the
purpose of exploring a range of life experiences and critical
views that at the time were becoming clearer. As the
embodied actor within *the habitus of control (as a cognizant
actor of its environment)*³ who has lived and travelled as an
immigrant, artist, worker and resident around this nation, I
am interested in discerning and analyzing the essence of

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¹ "The invisible punishing machine" is an essence definition or proposition to identify the abstraction
of a feeling and social condition which I am extrapolating from life experience, philosophical and
social theory that concerns with social/spatial control.

² Elizabeth Martinez and Arnoldo Garcia. 2001. What is "Neo-Liberalism"? A Brief Definition. Global
Exchange. Online Source.

this proposition\textsuperscript{4} in this experimental “Written Thesis” which complements the “Artistic Thesis Project”. I explore the following questions: When does it feel like the invisible punishing machine is everywhere? Why do I make counter narratives to counter act its effects? Under what conditions or in what situations is the invisible punishing machine a totalizing and individualizing apparatus? Could it be subverted or abolished?

\textbf{Methods:} life experience, art, activism, counter narrative, phenomenology, history, urbanism and social theory.

\textsuperscript{4} An essence proposition or definition is a kind of statement to be viewed as a tentative hypothesis used as a basis for further exploration. By Douglas Walton. 2006. Fundamentals of Critical Argumentation: Philosophical and Scientific Definition. Cambridge University Press. 6: 251-25
Counter Narrative Society (CNS)

Before moving forward, I would like to introduce to you that much of the work I am developing at MIT has been with the Counter Narrative Society (CNS). Since 2007, I have worked as the lead artist for the CNS, an art studio and collaborative research unit I founded to work at the intersection of civic engagement, extra-disciplinary art practice, parody and social sciences to initiate counter narratives about bio-power, urbanism, culture and technology.

In 2009, I enrolled in the MIT program in Art, Culture and Technology and under the CNS asked the question, what is mass punishment? In the process of tinkering with ideas, traveling and learning about practices and theories of social control, statehood, criminology and the habitus, I discovered that I was looking at the invisible punishing machine.

My interrogation of the invisible punishing machine through multidisciplinary practice was born from a seminal and devastating event in my life: In 1995 my brother was sentenced to a 15 years and indefinite to life term in prison. Through the familial tragedy, I became deeply involved in
radical pedagogy-activism and began to create an integrated art practice as a vehicle for personal and social change.

I now make art from this perspective, as a method to convey practical, philosophical and poetic concerns congruent to my activities as an artist-researcher and activist. I am exploring this practice through the counter narrative method I call "Paradoxical and Interrogative Remedies" which symbolically uses the idea of poisonous treatments. On the one hand this method playfully counteracts undesirable and traumatic conditions by creating sometimes painful and difficult emotional, anomalous situations; on the other hand, this analytic method opens up new possibilities for healing, socializing and communicating meaningful bio-political issues. In the appropriate social and spatial conditions I produce radical live actions, performances, multimedia installations, tactical objects and multifaceted projects for artistic research, activism, personal therapy and radical pedagogy.

Further explanations about some of the strategies I am using are available throughout the entire document.
INTRODUCTION

What is it like to live in a country when one feels constantly under siege, and as coping mechanism against its often punitive illegible apparatuses, one has to create antics to heal from them, study them to get a grip on its prevailing and confusing forms and perhaps ideally in the process of searching for answers, one may find ways to subvert them or even better abolish the illegible machine that creates them?

I begin with this question because this written thesis is an opportunity to explore some fundamental questions about what it means to be a subject of governance within the nation-state (as the reason d'état) when it is only a recent invention in the life of humanity⁵. Since I was born, the mode of existence around me has been about people organizing humanity into populations and humanity resisting exploitative governance.

I am interested in studying these issues with a critical and social practice that analyzes the systemic and phenomenological conditions of our notions of statehood, identity and justice from a personal perspective. The work I am currently doing with the Counter Narrative Society is based on the life experiences in reference to critical views about one’s place – the place that the people around me and I inhabit. Therefore, the purpose of this experimental written thesis is to look at the invisible punishing machine as a warning signal, as a candid act of love, and artistic research from an artivist⁶ who is doing difficult work at the intersection and trenches of the most marginalized, criminalized and contested spaces in this Neoliberal nation-state we name the United States of America (or as I like to call it artistically the Unequal State of Amnesty⁷).

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⁶ Artivist is the combination of (artist+activism) born from the anti-globalization movement. M.K. Asante defines this in his book “It’s Bigger than Hip Hop” — “The artivist (artist+activist) uses her artistic talents to fight and struggle against injustice and oppression—by any medium necessary. The artivist merges commitment to freedom and justice with the pen, the lens, the brush, the voice, the body, and the imagination. The artivist knows that to make an observation is to have an obligation.”

⁷ Counter Narrative Society, 2010. Unequal State of Amnesty, instructional video component for the performance workshop Glaciers Under Our Skin - It instructs the genesis of race making institutions and policies in the USA, such as eugenics views, the census, white supremacy, affirmative action.”
Initial Conundrum

In the summer of 2010 on my return from travelling across the country, I was preparing for my thesis when I realized for the first time, that I was studying something generally unintelligible beyond my comprehension. It was something I have been feeling and sensing in bits and pieces for years, however this time I had found it. When the time came to present my initial thesis project, I was able to put together the following abstract idiomatic proposition:

"When the Invisible Punishing Machine is everywhere, creeping into our bodies, lives and spaces, it is like living in a colossal architectural nightmare."

I presented this proposition as an idea, as a concept, along with a photo travel log (see image) I designed to recount orally and visually my story about a summer trip from June through August. In combination, I reused the Sensible Housing Unit (SHU) project and another object from the many significant personal ones I have been carrying with me for more than two years. Here is an introduction:

When I was designing the travel log, I took two objects out of box that was stored on one of the shelves in my studio/office and tied them up into a bundle. One was the
Sensible Housing Unit (SHU) (a fabric replica of a prison cell I designed in 2008 as a way to share the traumatic stories from those incarcerated in solitary confinement) and the other one was my brother’s shirt. This shirt came to my possession after he was sent to Corcoran State Prison, CA, where he was placed in solitary confinement for a disciplinary infraction in the summer of 2007 at Coalinga State Prison.

Figure 1 - Objects of my first bundle: Sensible Housing Unit with brochure; my brother’s shirt; travel log; adjustable strap with safe pins / October 2010 - Source: Author
Figure 2 – Making my bundle in my studio/office / October 2010 – Source: Author
I presented my study in the graduate studio space in the Venus Lab at MIT, which has an open center space surrounded with multiple offices. Each office has a glass wall and I chose the largest room to accommodate and separate the audience space in relation to the space of presentation. Between the audience and me, on the glass wall I wrote the graffiti that said, “When the invisible punishing machine is everywhere”.... While I was unpacking the bundle everyone could see me through this glass/text. Then I invited the audience to enter into the SHU.
When everyone was inside the SHU, I begun to tell my story...

Figure 4 – Unpacking the SHU (Sensible Housing Unit) and audiences hearing a 10 minutes summer story at the ACT Venus Lab, E14-140 / October 2010 – Source: Author
I introduced them to several spaces that meant something to me and initially represented the social-spatial dimensions of the invisible punishing machine. These spaces are Alcatraz Island, CA; MIT, MA; Roxbury- Boston, MA / via Detroit, MI; and CSP-SAC, CA (Figure 5).

Each one reproduces the disciplinary apparatuses within and beyond the prison walls. Alcatraz Island is a former Federal Prison and Fort, which is now a historical site administered by the National Park Service. MIT is a scientific academic institution, which has had a long partnership with the United States Department of Defense (USA war machine). In Detroit, MI, during the USA social forum I met a group of workers/prison/activists from one the oldest Boston neighborhoods, Roxbury, which has had a long civic history of unrest and work against slavery, racism, poverty and housing inequality. Finally, the CSP-SAC (California State Prison - Sacramento), is the place my brother is forced to call home today.

After this presentation, it was evident that the most significant place I needed to pay attention to was the closest place to me. This meant that I needed once again to look very deep inside my cognizant body, my family and my history with out losing sight over the significance of the
overarching artistic research, and also resist the exploitative nature that comprises the two forms of investigation – the analytical ‘Written Thesis’ structured in dialogue to the ‘Artistic Thesis Project’. These are two distinct forms of technology of power that if I am not careful I can easily be forced to authenticate my experience against the skeptic and end up visually and physically exploiting my body and those near me.

Then, I needed to identify how the *invisible punishing machine* has affected the community at large, my family, and myself, without exposing them as a subject of study for either the artistic thesis project or the written thesis. If anything, I needed to address this issue very differently from the post and neo-colonial discourse where the performance artist explicitly inflicts symbolic and physical pain onto their bodies to demonstrate the atrocities committed against humanity or where the writer has to narrate in details the way people have been mistreated. In other words, I struggle with the “regime of evidence and directness” but likewise I struggle with the “regime of ambiguity” that prevails among privileged classes who carelessly and naively avoid the responsibility of their own power. Ambiguity in the hands of power can be equally destructive and insidious because it is an implicit form of violence, which when it is employed collectively, can be just another “silencing” device.

So, I began to question how I was going to address this problem because the closest situation that I could think of was my own experience in relationship to this machine. Just as my brother has had to endure the pain of incarceration, so have my mother and I. In visiting my brother in different prisons over the years, this has been my chance to witness the machine working in its most rigid formations not only through his body, habits and environment but also through my own. I now realized that his incarceration doesn’t only hurt him, but also hurts my mother, me, and anyone who may come too close inside because these are the cruelest enclosed environments.

Every time, I have had a chance to visit my brother who is confined in the deepest concentric segment of the *invisible punishing machine*, “it is a bittersweet experience. It is a wonderful experience to be near him, but also it is the unfortunate moment of truth where I can witness the *invisible punishing machine* at work. (But actually I don’t think I can see it completely.) Because even when I could see the rigid brutal architecture, I could only discern over time some aspects of how it changes the sense of being, as
well as the physical and mental condition of those near such places.

Therefore, in order to *dismantle the master’s house*; I decided to address my subjectivity very differently. I made the decision to use the autobiographical narrative style coupled with the paradoxical counter remedy for the artistic thesis and for the written component. For the written thesis I am carefully using the stories of those near me for the purpose of understanding why I have been affected and learn more about what it is. I recognized this is an exploitative form of dealing with the problem, therefore the moment I am done writing this thesis, I will deliberately blacking out their names and sensitive information. For the artistic thesis, I am only using the information from my brother and friends that it is already public. Everything else from everyone around me, I will use as reference to embody a collective consciousness for my performances and installations.
Overview

This was my first attempt to make sense of a problem on such a scale, which then and even today seems overwhelming and humanly impossible to decipher. However, in designing my artistic thesis project in dialogue with my written thesis under an abstract idiomatic proposition and as a yearlong conversation piece, I am able to combine my scholastic investigation, my life experience and my artistic pronouncements into a hybrid and amorphous ephemeral practice. I am using the roles of the ethnographer of the machine, the wounded witness and the critical artistic provocateur as an approach to shift identity and deal with the situation where my life and my body are the central subject of my own study. I'm using memory recollection and language, multimedia, tactical objects and performance art as the basis for the overall strategy of the work. These roles I have taken, and the mediums I am using, form the perfect ingredients to elaborate the conceptual framework for the written component of the thesis (I'm now writing) and the artistic component which has come to be entitled The Weight I Carry with Me.

In particular, speaking out loud has been an important attribute to the research because it dematerializes the work. It allows the body to transverse social fields and talk to many people about the subject (which is inside and outside of me). If I had jumped to materialize the invisible punishing machine too quickly into an object without making conversations with other people about their experiences part of the project, I would have reduced it into a mere thing. As a result, the concept would have lost its plasticity, abstraction, totalizing and individualizing qualities.

From this perspective, I admit that this research concentration is expansive and lacks the resources to study every aspect of this peculiar illegible and punitive (machine, apparatus, mechanism, matrix). To study it completely could take a lifetime. Yet within my means, I recognize it is important because when the invisible punishing machine is everywhere creeping into my body, life and spaces, it feels like a colossal architectural nightmare. It feels as if it takes over me.
Of course, the phrase “when the invisible punishing machine is everywhere...it is like living in a colossal architectural nightmare” may sound like an outrageous claim. It can be said that it is an irrational claim, and sometimes it is. The phrase is pure emotion trying to make sense of something that often is simple too deep inside and in our conscience... this was born from my gut feeling after my return from traveling across the country in the summer 2010. It was the indirect and direct contact with the war machine, state machine and rigidity of the social space around me that got me thinking about this strange state of its existence; it was one of those moments in life where I felt its multiple chains of commands, its multiple authorities in a clear way, or somewhat clear way. On numerous occasions I had witnessed its power, but this time I saw aspects of its peculiarities: the punitive, the invisible, the illegible, the machine.
Wounded Witness, Wounded Storyteller [Manifesto]

In trying to answer questions raised in the midterm of 2009 FALL, I understood that it was not a task I can do alone. Drawing on my experience of years of activism, I recognize that in order to envision ways to transform the State Apparatuses that control our lives, we (families, ex-prisoners, activists...etc) need to unite to form a political body. However, just like myself who is affected by the traumatic effects of having to live with the removal of my brother from society and witness his unbearable conditions, it is an extremely difficult task to even speak about my stories.

As an artist, educator and activist for social change, I have come to the conclusion that formulating abstract voyeuristic interventions or creating socially engaged work locally without a connection to a community is not adequate. On the one hand I will be positioning myself, as the “rebel artist”. On the other hand, I will be crossing ethical lines – the artist as the “Social Worker” or the amateur “Ethnographer.” 11 Instead, I am taking a radical position – I will be working as the wounded witness, wounded storyteller.

Figure 6 – Wounded Witness. 2009 / Close-up of Projected Image on Wall and Chair on the ground / Installation and Digital Photograph – Source: Author

11 At the time I didn't know, I could be an ethnographer of the machine, which I discovered early this year. In any case I am referencing to something that Grant Kester says about the roles of the contemporary artists who intrinsically benefits by working temporarily with communities who are in precarious social and economical situations. The source comes from his book “Conversations Pieces” - Chapter 5.
Therefore the wounded witness, wounded storyteller is a social agent who can be described in four ways:

- She is a witness by chance. In general, the witness by chance accidentally observes people who are susceptible to state abuse, torture, mistreatment, incarceration, negligence, marginalization and so forth. (Ex: prisoners, children, elders, disable, immigrants, refugees, historically oppressed citizens, etc.) They are close relatives, friends, and even neighbors who are vulnerable in losing their civil liberties and human rights or taken away by the State.

- She is a wounded storyteller; is “a person who has or has had a disease” and “talks about the sick body” that lives beneath the normal façade of her physical structure. She has been living in an ill state because she suffers from an invisible illness, but in this postmodern era she can claim her wounded body and share her story.

- She works with a community that shares similar concerns with the artist.

- She is not immune to State and Institutional violence because she can be a target as well. However, she cannot afford to succumb to physical restraint, lose the ability to speak out and to be arrested. Therefore, she stays in the margins, between the privileged and the dispossessed of society. This situation allows her to voice her convictions along the spectrum of both groups.

After years of trying to work around the pain inflicted in me by my brother’s situation, I recognize that I need to examine, study and find ways to speak out laud about these circumstances. Yet it is not a task that can be done alone. But working in the company of others, this will assist me to overcome my fears, abolish my sense of shame and confront my own misconceptions; enabling me to help others too.

Oct. 2009

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12 Arthur W. Frank. 1995. The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness and Ethics. Ch.1 When bodies Needs Voices and Ch.7 Testimonies

In his book "Wounded Storytellers" talks about how patients who had survived of severe illnesses they enter in a state of silence, which can be counter beneficial. However, in our times recognizing that every body is imperfect is also an act of political justice.
In general terms, my area of research is to study critical social engagements and real-time actions, to address social-ethical dilemmas.

In specific I am looking at how to utilize these practices to find disparate ideas about how mass punishment in the USA manifest in the social and spatial landscape. Then, I want to start imagining ways to subvert and transform this phenomenon. (something like that)

I am planning to do this in phases:

- Phase 1: mapping:
  A) the social network of information/resources for the research (Analyze Social Issue)
  B) the (bio-political) apparatus that produces/designs/implements mass punishments in the USA. The focus will be the Boston area, state of Massachusetts, CA and other states perhaps. Don't know!

(not sure yet)
Phase 2:
Phase 3:
Phase 4:
General Framework: The Totalizing and the Individualizing Dilemma and Approach

When I accepted to study at VAP - Visual Art Program (today ACT - Art, Culture and Technology), I wanted to figure out the following idea (see Figure 7).

This interest comes from personal life experience and from being involved in activism at the micro-political level. When I wrote this, I knew what I was sensing and seeing was not far fetched. I just needed to figure out some key important perspectives in order to bring this together. I wanted to define not only the way Total Institutions like the prisons function, but also how mass punishment as a consequence of a matrix of disciplinary mechanisms are carried out beyond the prison walls through out a much more fluid territory of social, spatial and political-economical dimensions. Therefore, what I am defining as the invisible punishing machine has come to be a totalizing and individualizing symbolic strategy to study the ways this (machine, apparatus, matrix) comes across in my integrated practice (art/activism/life). On one hand I study it as being a totalizing machine because I can examine and speculate where this object and subject is within the milieu of the nation-state as the raison d’État. On the other hand, it is an individualizing machine because it is also subjective because of how I perceive it.

The following list is an overview of the three parts I explore throughout this thesis. Each part addresses one or two of the questions I introduced in the thesis statement. Also, I try to weave within each section the totalizing and individualizing perspectives presented earlier.

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13 “A total institution is place of work and residence where a great number of similarly situated people, cut off from the wider community for a considerable time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life. The term was coined and defined by American sociologist Erving Goffman in his paper “On the Characteristics of Total Institutions” presented in April 1957 at the Walter Reed Institute's Symposium on Preventive and Social Psychiatry.”
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Total_institution
PART 1 – WHEN THE INVISIBLE PUNISHING MACHINE IS EVERYWHERE, I describe personal anecdotes, journeys and commentaries to examine when sometimes does the invisible punishing machine feel it is everywhere?

PART 2 – CREEPING INTO MY BODY, LIFE AND SPACES, I describe and analyze, how does it take over my body, habits and environment and why I find myself making counter narratives as paradoxical and interrogative remedies to counter-act its effects. I discuss how the Counter Narrative Society is addressing this predicament through the production of intimate interrogative and paradoxical remedies and accordingly in relationship with some of the contemporary emerging cultural practices that are dealing with this invisible punishing machine. My main focus is to discuss the role these remedies play in the context of today’s critical, anti-aesthetics and oppositional techniques.

PART 3 – IT IS LIKE LIVING IN A COLOSSAL ARCHITECTURAL NIGHTMARE shows under what conditions the invisible punishing machine is a totalizing and individualizing machine.
“By relying on incarceration as the predominant mode of crime control for the past [forty] years, the United States has developed a social policy that can be described only as mass imprisonment. With [about 2.4] million Americans behind bars in the nation’s prisons and jails, the impact of these policies on American society is more profound than any precious point in history.” – Marc Mauer and Meda Chesney-Lin
PART 1. WHEN THE INVISIBLE PUNISHING MACHINE IS EVERYWHERE
When does it feel that the invisible punishing machine is everywhere?

Check Points
In the summer 2010, I planned to attend the USA social forum in Detroit, Michigan. Several friends were going and it was my chance to see what people were doing around the country and reconnect with others. I had the feeling that I was going to run into someone who I had not seen in ages. So, I bought a one-way train ticket from Boston to Detroit. This was my first time travelling on the train in the eastern states. It was exciting. It was going to take me about 20 hours with one transfer in the city of Toledo around 7am the next day.

The departure was on Saturday around noon on June 20th and I arrived a few minutes earlier and I waited. Then, the train conductor made the signal to board the train. I sat by the window in the middle of the car with the destination to Toledo. A woman sat next to me. I don’t remember if she was from India or Afghanistan, but she was a very nice lady. She was going to visit her son. We talked for few hours. Along the way I could see different towns and cities and a whole range of people boarding the train.
It might have been around 2 AM when the train stopped in Rochester. Most of the people in my car were sleeping. I was too. The lights were dim. Then, I heard from the distance behind me, some commotion. The train was taking longer than usual to depart. All of a sudden I heard a commanding male voice asking a passenger if he was a citizen. I looked and saw that the man asking the question was a white male officer from the INS (Immigration Naturalization Service), Homeland Security. His question was upsetting because immediately, I thought what would happen to me if I say I am a resident or I say no, or I say yes. I was also upset because I started noticing that he would only ask those who had an accent or who weren’t “white” or “black” for ID verification. At that moment I was furious. So, decided to play a game just to see how far he could use his authority and how far I could resist. I decided to say I am a resident and I knew he was going to ask for my ID. So, I told him that it was in my luggage and that it was going to take me a few minutes to find my documents. In the meantime, I started to ask him questions about why there is no official notification by the train company that there would be a checkpoint; we weren’t crossing the border. At some point he started to get impatient, and he said if I didn’t have my Identification I would have to come with him. At that point I made it look as if I was trying harder. Then, I showed my ID. He then replied: That’s all I needed! And I said: still this isn’t a good reason to be woken up in the middle of the night!

Whenever I travel, I have to carry all my documents just in case I have to go through any kind of checkpoint. I carry my USA green card, my California ID, my Chilean passport and my student ID. I normally use my California ID to travel within the country; the other ones are just in case something happens. You learn from being an immigrant that you never know when “la migra” (the homeland security authority) is going to show up at your door and you better be ready to prove that you are legal.

...
Mission High School

On the 4th of July 2009, my friend [redacted] came to my farewell party. [redacted] stayed late into the night with us and somehow, we started talking about [redacted] and I learned that [redacted] was on the run. The whole story broke my heart because it reminded me of my [redacted] story when [redacted] was [redacted] age. The circumstances were very similar too. Both grew up with a single immigrant parent, who had to work all day, and while [redacted] was born in the USA, [redacted] life was defined by [redacted] mother’s circumstances.

Like all the children of immigrants often have to do the best they can to deal with all the social pressures that come with living in the urban centers. In this case [redacted] was born and grew up in the barrio La Misión (The Mission neighborhood), which has an abundance of possibilities for something to go right or wrong because there is a lot of the good life and the bad. The Mission for decades has been known for its vibrancy, but it is also a complex place. For the outsider in the 1990’s and 2000’s it may seem to be one of the most dangerous places in San Francisco, but for those who knew the place it was also an amazing refuge.

In general for several decades the place has been considered to be the heart of the Latino community but La Misión is extremely diverse. It is highly political and artistic. There is never a lack of activities to celebrate. However, the neighborhood also has also struggled against high level of state paternalism, criminalization, and gentrification in the last four decades. This was the climate at the time when [redacted] was studying at Mission High School and got in trouble. What [redacted] did could have been resolved with parental and counseling support, but instead because the school has already been under the supervision of the police and social workers, employees for the Juvenile system, [redacted] and [redacted] friends were immediately bunched up with other brown kids into the pipeline of delinquency.
...

...
In the streets / in the neighborhood

From 1998 the city of San Francisco started to be affected by a new wave of gentrification and by 2000, with the dot.com boom, it was hitting hard in the Mission. At the time, the up-and-coming middle class young professionals were thriving in Silicon Valley and as they were settling in the big popular city, the house market started to skyrocket. At this time the Mission district started to see the effects of gentrification. Several sectors of the population began to feel the effect: low-income families being evicted, the rampant sale of drugs in the streets, and the criminalization of the youth. One could see the inequality growing. There was a serious class war (burglaries, outsiders being robbed or bitten). One could see the neighborhood turning into a hip place along Valencia Street, and slowly creeping into Mission Street and 24th Street (the heart of the community).

By 2007-8, a new resident pursued and achieved a gang injunction in the neighborhood. It put the old time residents and activists on the fence. From right to left the youth were hunted. Many kids of color were under siege because either they knew of someone who was in a gang or were affiliated.
Not too far from home
In the spring of 2005, something terrible happened. One weekend in May消失了. All I knew was that had visited. I called every possible institution and friends until one of my's friends who knew someone from the sheriff's department contacted me. We talked and she searched for . A couple of hours later she called me back and she broke the news. was nice and kind, and with a hesitant voice, she said that has been arrested and was currently at the Fresno County jail. My whole world crumbled in front of me. I just couldn’t believe what I was hearing. It all seemed once again surreal, terrible, and horrible.

How could a middle aged, hard working be arrested?

Immediately after the horrible news, I planned my trip to visit. I arrived at the Fresno County jail with around noon. We had a quick visit with . This was first time arrested in all life. was scared, I was scared, and everyone was scared. But immediately made friends inside the jail: the (inmates) were comforting .

Then, with the help of close friends, I arranged the bail bond for release. We waited all day for ; it was late afternoon when was finally released.

Breaking the Law.

On our way back home the mood was solemn, but we talked. Apparently, during visit with , the guards suspected that maybe was giving something to and they separated them. They placed in an isolation unit and a couple of female guards conducted a search on entire body. had to be naked and so undressed. They didn’t find anything on . Then they requested to search car. was so scared and at the moment didn’t have anything to hide so thought: what could be the worst thing that could happen? A few hours later, they accused of trespassing narcotics and possession of a weapon into a state establishment. Apparently, when they searched car, they found a left over and a small tiny that was of personal use. At that moment, just couldn’t believe it.
Losing [ ] privileges.

From this moment and on for two years [ ] was in a legal battle and [ ] lost [ ] privileges to visit [ ].
PART 2. CREEPING INTO MY BODY, LIFE AND SPACES
How does it take over my life and how do I find myself making counter narratives as paradoxical and interrogative remedies to counter act its effects?

After the terrible misfortune with , I was confronted with a new reality. Before this happened, I had stopped visiting because I was studying at the San Francisco Art Institute. I needed the mental and emotional space to make it through the school term. Previously when I used to visit , I would come home feeling overwhelmed and disturbed from seeing suffer and seeing other prisoners and families suffering. The symbolic violence of the prison is just beyond comprehension. Even remembering right now brings tears to my eyes.

I had one more year before graduating so I postponed my visit. Sometimes he would write and call us. This was our way of staying in touch. We knew he was in terrible shape emotionally but I just couldn't gain the strength to deal with his situation. After a year and half from court hearing, I saw for the first time out in the distance. was also in the courtroom because was witness.
looked unusually pale. [redacted] looked presentable but his entire demeanor was in a state of... (how can explain this) It reminded me of the prisoner who had been in solitary confinement for too long. It is a certain look that it is hard to define. I can just recognize it.

For the outsider, it may look like someone who is insane or disturbed, or something like that. All prisoners who are subjected to this kind of punishment will develop post-traumatic syndrome and other serious mental conditions. In the case of my [redacted], [redacted] gets panic attacks when [redacted] is forced to stand in front of people who are the instruments of [redacted] oppression (the authorities). However, for the outsider who has never seen this or learned about the psychological and physiological consequences of incarceration, this kind of demeanor can be easily misconstrued as the stereotypical behavior of a sociopath: a profound look of detachment, of not caring. For the one who is in the know, it is a look that comes with being institutionalized and traumatized.

Five months after seeing [redacted] in the courtroom, we received a call from [redacted]. [redacted] was going to be transferred for a disciplinary infraction. We were scared, because either he was going to be transferred to the Corcoran State Prison or Pelican Bay. Both are horrible places, because people there are confined 24/7. Under these extreme conditions of militarization, humiliation, deprivation and starvation (hunger), people create such a culture of extreme resistance towards the establishment that anything and everything goes. This is a significant reason why these places become dangerous. (But, how could a system be critical of itself when any threat could ruin the entire business of punishment?)

14 The act of being placed in an institution and the individuals embodying the norms and rules of those institutions - these places are like the prisons, schools, military schools and psychiatric hospitals. Here are two songs, which talk about being institutionalized. Hard Core Punk: "Institutionalized" by Suicidal Tendencies (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institutionalized_%28song%29), and Rapper Ras Kass' album: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ras_Kass#Incarceration%2C_Institutionalized%2C_Priority_Release

15 As in the Stanford Prison Experiment a classic psychologies experiment that parallels with the abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, they created a dramatic simulation of prison life conducted in the summer of 1971 at Stanford University. The central questions were: What happens when you put good people in an evil place? Does humanity win over evil, or does evil triumph? For more information visit the online source: http://www.prisonexp.org/
was sent to Corcoran State Prison, and I decided to start visiting. I knew and sensed if I didn’t help was not going to get out from that prison within the prison system. Coupled with my fear of imagining becoming excessively violent towards self or others to survive and to resist the abuse, or seeing perish in agony and loneliness, this was also too painful.

This was a serious decision to make because being involved in environment was going to be a grueling task for me. Over time I learned how to help, because you figure it out, however it is not easy. It is not easy for the psychologies of anyone. Life inside prison is completely different. What people are able to do to survive would be unthinkable unless you were in their shoes. They have to become vigilant and when times call also be callous and cruel because it is their life over someone else. It is like hearing the stories of a soldier, a survivor from a war zone, or under captivity. In all I knew intuitively that I needed to do something to resist the violence, the pain, the destitution, the solitude, the eternal sadness, the forced isolation, the madness, the torture, the symbolic and verbal abuse from guards and the environment from within and the outside prisons that denies, silences and replicates its existence. (I didn’t know how to call it, but now I call it the invisible punishing machine.) So, I went back to my old ways and started to be active and join the advocacy efforts in the Bay Area and make art along the way.

By then, I had more tools as an artist and as an activist. As an artist, I was very much influenced by the public and political art practice of the (Chicano/Mexican American movement, Feminists, Anarchists, Punks, the Socialist program from Latin America and from Europe the Realists, Dada’s, Situationists and Fluxus). And as an activist, I was exposed to the political education from Oakland and San Francisco prison activists and anarchist-punks, which taught me radical community organizing and the
performative nature of direct actions. So as a necessary move I began to make art with my friends and acquaintances as a way to communicate what we were going through. Also, I just couldn’t see myself perished in agony or apathy. I needed to transform even in minute ways the governmental tyranny that is exercised onto our lives.

Ironically, I am only able to say this today because being at MIT I have had the time to study, and realize all of this. After the following intermission I will talk more about it. Enjoy it.

Intermission.

I invite you to listen to this song from Nina Simone.

Ain’t Got No...I’ve Got Life

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GUcXI2BiUOQ
Paradoxical and Interrogative Remedies to Overcome the Invisible Punishing Machine
Problem: “Silent Isolation”

Paradoxical and Interrogative Remedy:
The Inmate | You and Me
In San Francisco, CA
Before I decided to join my brother in his life again, the month I saw him in the courtroom, I was in shock. After a month I did my first public action on January of 2007. This was my first time trying to externalize in public my anger towards the system. I had been invited to a women's show titled *Il Gardido Secreto* (The Secret Garden) in Italy. The show explored the inner secrets of a woman. So I took this opportunity to speak about this experience both in the public and abroad. At first they didn't understand my project or see the relevance for the show because originally the curator was interested in one of my performance-based photographs from the "Appearing Naturally" series that was (somewhat) beautifully stylized. However, after I explained to them that I wanted to make a new piece to address that in every human there are secrets, which are hard to talk about, and are not pretty. They seemed to understand and they accepted my idea. I proposed to make a live action and video, which I titled *The Inmate*.

Figure 9 – Pg. 48. The Inmate | Public Action in San Francisco Feb. 2007 – Source: Author
**The Inmate** was an antagonistic person who walked, knelt, and did several other body postures along a journey I planned in the performative matrix — to confront the abstract place that silences the community of the incarcerated. This is a kind of community that goes unnoticed because often people feel ashamed or too sad to speak out. Also there is a lot of censoring and self-censoring. Therefore, the moment I entered the space, I changed or undermined the program (the norm) in me and from my surroundings; I became aware of the power of symbolic actions and public address. Strategically, I was wearing anomalous attire, like in the Porte-Parole project of Krzysztof Wodiczko. The protagonists of the Porte-Parole wore a mouthpiece; I wore an Orange jumpsuit. The jumpsuit as the mouthpiece quickly provided the visual queues to occupy the front stage of the public space. In The Inmate, like in the Porte-Parole, the process of entering that space became a cathartic situation. Any approval, indifference or disapproval became a meaningful recognition. It was a form of psychotherapy. (I needed that). Simple subverting the silence that produces the invisible punishing machine was enough for the moment.

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16 Here is a link to the statement of this project: http://mabelnegrete.com/wb/by-portfolio/current-series/prison-invisible-culture/the-inmate/statement

17 Wodiczko, Krzysztof. 1993. The Porte-Parole Mouthpiece is an instrument for strangers: its function is to empower those who are deprived of power.

Figure 11 - The Inmate, 2007 / Union Square / San Francisco, CA - Source: Author

Figure 12 - The Inmate, 2007 / On the 14 Muni Buses / San Francisco, CA - Source: Author

Figure 13 [a-b] - Krzysztof Wodiczko, Porte-Parole, 1995 / NYC, NY - Source: Interrogative Design online
After that experience several months passed, and I started to organize a public action campaign with family members of the incarcerated near my life. The campaign was named *Wear Orange for a Day, Prisoners Awareness Campaign.*[^19] I did it with my newly founded group Plain Human in collaboration with the Intersection for the Arts’ *The Prison Project.*

![Figure 14 - Plain Human, Wear Orange for a Day: Prisoner Awareness Campaign, March 11 2008 / Action in front of the San Francisco City Hall, CA -Source: Author](image)

About the same time, I was helping my brother to get out of solitary confinement. I knew that this was going to affect me, but I didn’t know to what extent. My main focus was to help him. So, I conjured different creative ways to keep us connected and desperately keep his mind out that place.

[^19]: An on-going project, my collective Plain Human developed in 2008 to draw attention to how the deplorable conditions suffered by people who are incarcerated can also affect everyone in the outside. http://plainhuman.org/
Thus when I was invited to participate in the exhibition of *The Prison Project* organized by the Intersection for the Arts and San Francisco State University, immediately I wanted to do the art project with my brother. The exhibition was scheduled to run from February through March 2008. Sometime in November or early December of 2007, I told him about the project and when I visited him once a month for an hour after a four hours drive we would talk about the project. The talks were simple and hard to do at the time it was very hard for him to focus and make complete sentences. But, over a period of several visits and letters, we discussed several ideas and one of them was where I would interview people with his own questions and then do a sound-escape outside the gallery. I was excited about the idea, but the curator wanted me to do something inside the gallery space. Since all Jose had was just a pen, paper and his own mind, I thought why don’t we both share a day in our lives.

From this idea, I made a minimal performative installation and action, where it compares a day of our lives in our domestic spaces – one who lives in prison and one who lives in freedom. Conceptually the installation titled *You and Me* was designed to function as a dialogical work, which coincidently resembles the installation *Badge of Honor* by Pepón Osorio (1995). In the same way Osorio compares the bedroom of a son and the prison cell of a father side by side, my installation compared my bathroom to my brother’s prison cell. For this idea, I used a minimal comparative scaled blueprint of my apartment bathroom and the prison cell of my brother rendered with white vinyl. I installed the two vinyl drawings slightly off and slanted from the wall. Then, I used the wall to fabricate two adjacent walls; one wall I painted light yellowish and the other one I built it to appear similar to concrete but also hollow to function as an amplifier for the action I was going to do for the opening and during the exhibition days. The final result was an open performative space.

*Figure 15 - You and Me, 2008 / Installation Details / San Francisco, CA - Source: Author*
During my action on the opening day, I etched a letter of my brother and wrote one of myself upon the two fabricated walls. When I wrote his letter on the hollow wall, the result was a visceral and dramatic sound effect. For the other wall, I inscribed my letter in a careless free style with a black charcoal pencil. The combination of the floor plans, walls and my action called the attention of the stark differences of the physical and psychological confinement of imprisonment and what a “free society” takes for granted.
Also, during that period Jose wrote other meaningful texts in response to questions I had designed for him, which I was able to include in the installation for the opening and I will include in part 3 because it is profound. In between the presentation of the project You and Me, he was able to transfer to Sacramento State Prison, which has a psychiatric unit. He was by now closer to San Francisco. I could visit him often. He was still in solitary confinement but there were more efforts from the institution to assist him with his depression and other conditions, which I had to intervene institutionally in order for him to receive his proper medication. It took him another year or so for him to be back in the general population.
At MIT, MA

Coming back into the present, as I mentioned in the introduction, before discovering the invisible punishing machine I had a hunch about what could be happening in the USA. I don’t know where it all came from, perhaps from the activists around my life, friends, the environment. In any case, I knew something was going on in this country that at the time was hard to define, but viscerally, I knew there was something much deeper. It was something similar to Jackie Orr’s panic attacks, who after years of research she uncovers that the locus of her anxieties are deeply hidden in the imprints of an era where the national social unrest has been the workings of a matrix of machine from the military, scientific, governmental and media.

Therefore, in 2009, when I had moved to begin school, it was all very exciting, but also strangely difficult. Moving to MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), while I was happy to study again, I was also feeling shock. Perhaps this is normal for everyone, but I was feeling something else, which I had not been able to attend or care before, but once I started school and began to see a counselor, I realized that it was the trauma I carry from witnessing torture, social unrest, discrimination, police brutality, persecution of individuals and the day to day fear from knowing that at any moment a friend, a student a neighbor was going to be arrested, deported or killed.

All my life in the USA was invested in California, specifically in the Bay Area where I often lived among immigrants, homeless, the working and middle class. I always had someone to rely on, or I was always doing something with someone. But in between the isolation of being a new student and also being confronted with the opulence that the MIT academic culture has, I was in distress. I was seeing the extreme sides of the institutional spectrum of this Neoliberal Nation state – the prison and the university right in front of my eyes. This was disturbing. I couldn’t deal with the inequality I was experiencing between my brother and I. On one hand I was in one of the most privileged schools in the world with a full scholarship and on the other hand my brother was eating shit and mistreated every day of his life. This was insane, same country, two extreme realities. (Any extra money, I had, I send it to him. He could eat a little better by buying stuff from the vending machine. You could imagine, the amount of money those companies are making out of the misery of others).
MIT
Staff: 8,771
Faculty: 1,714
Students: 10,566
Operating Budget: $2,383.6 Million

Simultaneously, I was also trying to understand [a] story (which I introduced in part 1). Strangely [a] story was very similar to mine. Therefore, before coming to MIT, out of desperation, from sensing that [a] was going through the same path my family had to deal with when Jose was an adolescent, I accidently became [a]'s temporary advisor. I put together a team of close friends to help [a] and her daughter to address the isolation and oppression the judicial system perpetrates on people and their communities. I didn't want [a] to suffer. However there was only so much I could do because I was also leaving soon for MIT.

Once at MIT, [a]'s situation gave me the impetus to study the impact that policing and the criminal system has done to inner city schools and their youth. I learned about the pipeline to incarceration that is being studied for sometime, and it was mind-boggling. Awkwardly, in response I began to imagine different interventions and public projects, which I haven't been able to realize because they are too radical for the times. But in the near future, I may be able to do something about this, one idea I have is to develop a campaign to remove the police from schools city by city. At the moment, it was too specific of a problem, which needs a life long commitment.

As my ideas evolved and I looked closer into why I was concerned about this situation. I realized that I was identifying with [a] because as a family member, we were both deeply affected. The day [a] shared [a] story, it was a wake up call for me. [a] cry was a calling about [a]self and [a] family being torn apart. Our situation seemed very similar. Then, I started to imagine the numbers of relatives who have lost their daughters and sons on the hands of the juvenile correctional system. The institutional violence (the invisible punishing machine) was running deep.
Problem: "la llorona"

Paradoxical and Interrogative Remedy:
Passing the Ball: Wounded Witnesses,
Wounded Storytellers
In response, somehow intuitively, with the help of my professor Krzysztof Wodiczko and with the help of my counselor I started to study and map my traumatic experiences, which were inflicted from familiar places and others that I still trying to understand. In the process, I also realized while the general assumption by the academic community at MIT it is for us to be inventive and be able to help others. I couldn’t simply help others. In recognizing that I was also wounded from witnessing traumatic experiences, it was very difficult to speak about social justice issues without crying, and feeling awkward. It was also difficult to take the role of the altruist. This trend in socially committed arts to help the “other” just to alleviate ones guilt or political concerns, it was inadequate to me. I may have achieved further than any other member in my family professionally, but this doesn’t mean that I am less vulnerable to the effects of the invisible punishing machine. As an immigrant, the uncertainty to continue to be subjected to precarious labor is very likely, and even after finishing this degree the competition for artists and art teachers is very daunting. Also this doesn’t mean that I cannot help others beyond my family, friends and community. However I needed to prepare myself artistically and analytically before I can share my practice, skills and find ways to join any efforts that deals with the injustices affecting my community along with other communities of the incarcerated, immigrant and poor. To engage in altruism without belonging to the community or committed to; it was too evangelistic for me. I couldn’t simply drop in any community in Boston to test my ideas about art and social justice without having the precedence of a meaningful relationship, which in my experience can take years of commitment. Something I learned in my formative years in San Francisco.

Figure 21 – Pg. 60. Passing the Ball: Unlocking Trauma and State Violence, 2009 / Version 2 / Photograph from Sketches 2009-2011 – Source: Author
Therefore, while I was addressing those ethical concerns, I was also searching for a new kind of artistic approach that I could own. This is the time when my body became the subject and object of my study. It was strange because on the one hand doing anything artistic that references one’s inner conflicts or desires can be viewed as self-absorbed for the community of artists that claims to be engaged in collaborative or socially engaged work. On the other hand, if the work is altruistic and politically committed, it may seem as non-artistic by those engaged in the fine art and contemporary practices. It may seem to lack the self-expressive retinal qualities. It was at this moment between these generalized two schools of thought that my own body was intuitively saying I needed to do something differently. My own body was searching for an integrated practice, where the personal, the artistic and the political can coexist. This was the time when I realized that I needed to do something about my state of “la llorona”20 (of the crying woman). There was no coincidence that my own body was automatically finding ways to relieve my mind from the traumatizing experiences I had accumulated inside my body. My eyes and tears had become its vehicle, but they were getting ridiculously swollen and I needed to find another solution.

From this insight and need, I created a pilot project, which strangely had several purposes.

1) It was an attempt to communicate with others about how family member of the incarcerated feel.

2) I needed to learn to express my heartbreaking stories and of those near my life in a safe, playful and inquisitive way in order to overcome “la llorona” effect inside my body and be a better advocate in public life.

3) I sought to create something that could help others to overcome the frustration, the pain, the shame, the isolation and the trauma one carries, which it is an intangible and invisible kind of collective censorship and punishment.

b. La Llorona is a Spanish word, which means ‘the crying woman’. It is a very popular legend in the world of the Spanish, and in cultures in South America, and even America. There are many versions of this story that are told from person to person.
The first experiment started with me. October 2010. One day I asked my counselor if she could interview me while I video recorded my eyes and my voice during a live counseling session. In this session I spoke about how it didn’t help separating Miki or my brother from his or her families, instead made the situation worse for everyone. With this material, I conjured a multimedia participatory live performance Figure 22.

It consisted of me doing a 10 minutes action where I had my eyes blinded folded, I used a black ball and I had a video-sound piece playing in synchronicity with my action. For example, I simulated the effect while the ball was rolling, simultaneously everyone could hear the voice and see the video behind me. The moment the ball stopped moving, the video and sound stopped too. But relentlessly I was not going to let that happen. I needed to let the ball roll at least until the end of the video-sound piece. Thus, the moment the audience noticed that the ball needed to roll for the performance to work many continue to play back and forth with me. In doing this, I was eliciting and implicating everyone to replay the story, and by replaying the story I was also passing on the story to him or her even when it was not very legible and from time to time, it was a
frustrating situation for everyone. Since I was blinded folded or in other words handicapped, many times I would miss the ball and this situation forced the audience to take action, and he or she did. Several took the initiative to reach the ball and in rolling it back to me, we were back in the game. I named this presentation, *Passing the Ball: Unlocking Stigmas of Violence and Trauma.*

Then, I tried two other scenarios. For one scenario, I did a public performance at the location from where Flora’s stories had originated (at Mission High School, San Francisco - CA) see Figure 23. This public performance I did with Flora and among friends. The ball this time was larger and unique. This object was a self-contained transitional object audio piece, which my friend Flora named the **Talking Ball.** The Talking Ball became the transitional object that psychoanalyst and theorist D. W. Winnicott identifies as a special object a youngster unconsciously creates as companions but helps them transition into an awareness about themselves and their environment.

In my case the Talking Ball served as a playful transitional device, which when I used it in combination with my eyes blinded folded, it helped me connect, learn and decode intimate memories, which were too close and inside of me. To be blinded folded during the action; I learned that it helped me trust on those around me as well as I learn that in listening to my story through a device in public space help me overcome my own silence. Also, the combination of devises helped me create an opportunity for others to learn upwardly a little bit of my experience. Unfortunately the sound quality of the talking ball was imperfect again and my voice was also obscured by my accent and cry, which added to the paradox of the wounded witness.

Nonetheless, this didn’t limit the work to have an impression on those who experience the work. In fact on the day of the action something beautiful happened. I had mentioned to Flora that she could cover her eyes too at any moment during the action because I was dedicating this work to her. Just as I knew who it has helped me previously, I thought this would help her too. Then, at some time during the action, she covered her eyes, and afterwards, we talked about our experiences with the ball. She mentioned to me that for some reason she had heard herself and she asked me how did I do it. Was this her voice? And I said that I had gone to therapy to do this piece and it was my voice, but it was about our stories. Flora was impressed by the result. There was a warm sense of solidarity between us that it
would have not been possible if I have not had the experience. The action ended up being an intimate public psychotherapy.

Figure 24 – Version 3 | Passing the Ball: Wounded Witnesses, Wounded Storytellers, 2009 / Digital Design and Photograph from Sketches 2009-2011 – Source: Author

Then on my return to MIT, I did the last version of the **Passing the Ball** for finals presentation at the Program in Art, Culture and Technology. I included the stories of three women in my life (Mary Ann Brooks, Flora Compay and Miriam Alfaro) that I interviewed and I asked: How has the incarceration of their relatives affected their life?

This time the project wasn't about me only but it was an integration of my transitional object (which I modify its audio quality) with my friends' and mother's stories. In this version I subtitled the project as Wounded Witnesses, Wounded Storytellers because as we were witnesses, we were also all wounded storytellers. Each one of us was dealing in different ways with the post-traumatic effects of having to witness the *invisible punishing machine*, through the courtrooms, the streets, at home, the media and including in our bodies.
From all of these experiments, paradoxically, I learned that sometimes some audiences took the time to listen to the curious object; at other times, the event triggered a sense of play or frustration. The work as a performance and transitional object helped me overcome aspects of my own silence, but I feel it is an unfinished idea. I am yearning for a critical mass, which one-day may come true. In the meantime especially in my program at MIT, I still feel that I am the only one caring on the experience of knowing someone who is incarcerated, knowing what it feels to be discriminated, isolated, abandoned and even worse torture.

In the future I would like to choreograph a public action. This version I imagine designing a Talking Ball with motion/thermo sensor and wireless system to add headphones for multiple players.
Problem: “The Elephant in the Room”
Institutional Race-Class and the Neo-
Eugenic Thinking in an Era of Mass
Incarceration

Paradoxical and Interrogative Remedies:
Indecent Acts | Glaciers Under Our Skin with the
Double Skinned Nation | Funky Hunch in the
Atrium
... It is an awry experience whenever I go visit my brother as I see that the majority of the families, relatives, friends and children are Latinos (Chicanos/Mexican American, Immigrant, and others), African Americans, Native Americans, Multiethnic and then White/European-Americans. It is an experience that breaks my heart because I can see the problem which is race-class discrimination but there is nothing I can do at the moment to change the course of this country's history...

At the time I didn’t have this issue about race-class and the new eugenic thinking worked out but I started to look at the possible situations that could have set the environment of mass incarceration and invisible poverty under the radar of a liberal bourgeois and now neoliberal capitalist State. This led me to question why some portions of the population today in the USA are more vulnerable to experience mass imprisonment while other portions of the population have a higher chance of pursuing a meaningful education? What are the underlying reasons?
As I have been concerned (in the fall of 2009) about how the pipeline of incarceration in public schools has fostered hostile environments for the children of the community of the historically discriminated (poor, incarcerated, disabled and immigrant). In 2010, I began to examine the stark differences in the ethnic composition between my University and my brother's Prison.

A difference between this two institutions, I noticed there was a higher number of African Americans and Chicanos/Latinos incarcerated in my brother's prison and I found out that the majority of the prisoners in California were Chicanos/Mexican American/other Latinos and African Americans in relationship to the their respective populations. At the same time, about 2.4 million people were incarcerated nationwide and African Americans and Hispanics, together accounted for about two thirds of the state prison population. On the contrary, all major universities continue to struggle to recruit students that have been under represented in this country and a point in case, I found out that more Whites or Euro-Americans

students are attending and employed at MIT than any other ethnic/cultural group. So, why is this happening?

With this in mind, I noticed that the faculty and staff from my Program in Art, Culture and Technology were very much European-Americans and Europeans and our curriculums lacked the focus of a Post-colonial and Pan African / African-American and Latin American contemporary critical theory in art history and contemporary practices. I also found that the list of graduate students lacks African-Americans enrollment. I also read the diversity reports from MIT and their results gave me the impetus to conclude that Blacks/African-Americans were underrepresented, but to my surprise there had never been an African-American student, much less a professor in my graduate program. Then, I asked myself, can I bring up these issues? And how is it that by looking at my university and my brother's prison the inequalities were more evident? And lastly, why are the disparities between the Black/White important today?

21 Western, Bruce. 2006. Punishment and Inequality in America. Russell Sage Foundation

22 In this context, I am using the European-American nomenclature politically to acknowledge the European cultural heritages. In some instances I may use the racist categorization "White" to accentuate this problem of supremacy.

23 In some instances I use the racist categorization "Black" to acknowledge the Africans who bear the history of slavery over the ones who were free.
The Institutional is also Personal

At the time I didn’t know exactly how I was going to approach these loosely related questions but I figured if I focused on the immediate political environment to develop new strategies, I was going to learn different methods to address the institutionalization of race-class and neo-eugenic thinking from the systemic to the personal. Derived from the “personal is political” that came up during the civil rights and feminist movements across color lines; I am reframing my position today and claiming that the body and its political role in the public sphere, is also the process of institutionalization. Therefore how our social body is educated and governed is essential to the individual and to the masses – even if the institutions are in the hands of private investors. In every sense as the French philosopher Michel Foucault says we are bio-political social beings.

With this in mind, I revisited the anti-racism education I learned several years ago from folks working at the Prison Resource Center and Critical Resistance. I studied artists like (Adrian Piper, Guillermo Gomez-Peña and Damila Ayo) and contemporary leading theoreticians who have found ways to address the institutionalization of race-class and neo-eugenics thinking like the work from Bell Hooks and Tim Wise; and I joined this foundation. With the new information I was learning from writer and sociologist Bruce Western who was teaching “Sociology of Crime and Punishment” at Harvard University (whose research was thoroughly engaged with the inequalities between Whites and Blacks in the USA).

I became interested in the disparities between the Whites and Blacks within the prison and university system, because at the moment there is a crisis in the USA society. For example, African Americans are highly criminalized and stigmatized in proportions to their White counterparts on a day to day. Nationally 1 out of 9 African American (ages 25-29) men are incarcerated\textsuperscript{24}. The percentages are more gruesome when we look at the male population in relation to their general national population between ages 20-40 who had dropped out from high school. By 2000 the figures were for (African-American %32.4; Hispanic %6.0; European-American %6.7).

In contrast, at MIT, we have about 2% of the graduate student population of African-American descent, while about 45% are European-American graduate students.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{24} William J. Sabol, Todd D. Minton, and Paige M. Harrison, Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2006, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007, p. 9
\textsuperscript{25} http://web.mit.edu/facts/enrollment.html | …“Of the 6,267 graduate students enrolled in 2010, there are 2,356 international students. Of the domestic graduate student population, there are 153
This demonstrates that there is a higher rate of young African Americans institutionalized into prisons nationally, than entering to the pipeline of higher education like my university and others.

A Different Artistic Approach
After the previous brief comment about why the institutional is personal, I began to observe who was employed and attending the School of Architecture and Planning. Consequently, the context of the artwork I developed over the course of the spring semester 2010, took on a different spin than the previous one. The previous semester I was engaged in a psychoanalytical and introspective approach, which looked at punishment as an invisible form. This time I started to question, how could I learn to communicate about the historical and institutional race-class and neo-eugenic thinking as another mechanism of social control and punishment that is prevalent in our prisons and educational systems?

A Difficult Path
To even begin to communicate the issue that my program lacks the representation of the African American intellectual and academic scholarship in our environment was a difficult task. In the past I have initiated discussions to demonstrate how this is happening in my community. At other times no matter what I did, this had been a complicated task; genuinely people want to believe that we are beyond these concepts.

But, how can we speak beyond these conceptions when we cannot communicate without offending others? How is it possible to imagine a post-class, post-race, post-gender, post-prison society when everything that makes this country work is based on the workings of a political economy rooted in the inequality and scientific research that separates humans into races, classes, genders, biological heritage, intelligences and other fixations? How is it that when the old eugenic thinking (the field for the betterment of the race) in the name of human improvement goes unquestioned today when it had played a central role in instituting notions about superiority and inferiority; humans and subhuman; the abnormal and normal; the intelligent and unintelligent; the atavistic criminal and the civil citizen; social order and disorder; black and white and all the other binary categories that upholds judgments of what is good or bad.

Then, it was essential to me that in order to understand how the root causes of race-class and the new or neo-eugenic thinking persist in the social imagination of my environment, I needed to look back in time and find their locus in how they have affected the community near me.

I started by recognizing that my Chilean family lineage, which comes from South-American, African and European descent and in looking at the history of slavery and indentured servitude from this country and through the Americas and considering the history of this country's prison and educational systems, I took a paramount path. My starting point was ridiculously broad circa [1700-2011]. It included aspects of the Colonial era with the transatlantic slave trade. It also included the rise of the Modern State under the Young Republic at the expense of Slavery. Finally, I also included the formation of its liberal institutions like the Prison and the University as branches of a Cybernetic era* – where in the name and art of democratic governance, human improvement and systemic thinking would come to integrate
science/information/technology/culture as its pillars. Then, in sorting out this information, I found important historical moments about how race-class and the old eugenic thinking, has persisted today institutionally. In doing this list I wanted to illustrate part of my preoccupation about how the hell these horrendous classifications such as White/Black have come to denominate two multifaceted groups of people in the planet who are extremely influential in my lives from living in this country but also share such as horrible history that can still be felt. Also, I am presenting this list for the purpose to use some of this information for later parts in this thesis.

The meaning of White and Black as an abbreviated historic record of class-race and eugenic thinking in USA:

In Pennsylvania (prior to the Bacon's Rebellion 1676 that took place in Virginia\(^{26}\)) the wealthy ruling class distinguish the European indentured servants as White and Africans as the Negroes / Black. However, when these two groups of indentured servants joined forces in the rebellion this action appeared to threaten the ruling class and as the importance of slavery grew between the 18\(^{th}\) and 19\(^{th}\) century, the poor European-American became assimilated into the political economy and the identification of "white and whiteness" not only became to be used by the law to make the distinction between the slaves and the servants but in all aspects of social-political-economical life. Consequently, Africans came to bear the mark of "black/blackness" came to equated with slavery\(^{27}\). Blacks, free or not, were treated as the inferior race and the White indentured servants as the lower race and Whites elites as the superior race. This was also corroborated in a time when scientific positivism about hereditary evolution was around the corner. Thus, here are a few meaningful historical moments I found to be important in how race, class and eugenic thinking took precedence in the initial stratification of the social/spatial imagination of this nation:

1726 – The "Act for the better Regulation of Negroes" was passed in Pennsylvania to control the African Slaves. Africans free or not over the accusation of stealing of property from Whites or involved the marrying, fornication or adultery with Whites. For example, under this law high penalties were enforced on the free black person who harbored runaways' slaves or for the possession of stolen items from masters. Under other provisions, a black man could be sold into slavery for life if he was found married to

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1776 – Corroborated by a range of literature and ideas of the period, Johan Blumenbach, a leading naturalist of the 18th century laid the template for race in his book “On the Natural Varieties of Mankind” 1776, and although he opposes slavery he mapped a hierarchical pyramid of the human kind, placing the new constructed idea of the “Caucasians” at the top nominating themselves as the superior race.

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1790 – Under the new idea of “race” and a high interest in hereditary human degeneration, influenced a variety of new policies and cultural beliefs. For example:

- The first USA Census for the first time introduces the concepts of the White race and the Negro/Black to count those who were free and or enslaved.
- Naturalization was reserved only for Whites.
- Simultaneously the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries in Prisons introduces the single prison cell at the Walnut Street Jail as a form of penitence and punishment. (At the time the radical view from the wealthy White elite was to move away from the horrors of corporal punishment and saw that the poor, the indigent, the slave and the unfit that committed crimes were souls that could be corrected and rehabilitated. Individuals’ characters took precedence over a range of measurement to determine their self worth. Thus the type of race, class, and gender; age, mental abilities and legal statuses were used to determine who was more likely to be corrected or be a criminal for life (the atavist criminal.) These new views paved the
road to the construction of the Reformatory and Penitentiaries across the country for each new state.

1859 – With the introduction of Charles Darwin’s theories on the Origin of the Species, and the initiation of other emerging scientific fields, White-Supremacist Eugenicists who were highly interested in the improvement of their race through hereditary, genetic intervention and governance would lead the way to groundbreaking discoveries in biology, genetics, social engineering, but also developed disturbing science/theological schema. Often working with wealthy families and prestigious institutions like the Rockefeller Institute, Harvard, Stanford and Yale, many eugenicists from various disciplines would work arduously to pass national policies to study and eradicate the poor, the immigrant community, the criminal, the unfit, the disable and anyone considered downtrodden.

1865 – The 13 Amendment is ratified and slavery is abolished but prisoners would bear the mark of the condemned, the unfit, the subhuman, the abomination of humanity, and the one who deserved to be punished indefinitely or eradicated. Therefore, officially prisoners would, from this date on be the only group of people subjected to slavery and involuntary servitude of the State as a punishment for any crime.

1868 - During the Reconstruction years, the 14th Amendment is ratified and guaranteed citizenship to African Americans. A few years later, it would be debunked by a second wave of Black Codes under the Jim Crow Ordeal. This would last for another 100 years.

The list continues but I will stop here, because I am running out of time.

1964-5
1980’s
1990’s
2000’s

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28 Black, Edwin. 2003. War Against the weak. Eugenics and America’s Campaign to Create a Master Race, Ch.4: Hunting the Unfit (43-61) Ch.5: Legitimizing Raceology (63-85), Thunder’s Mouth Press. NY.
**Addressing the Elephant in the Room**

Taking into account the list I just mentioned, my impetus to seek out answers not only about the crucial inequalities in academia became more prominent when I realized that I was also interested in understanding how the construction of separating humans into species and organizing the everyday life affairs of the modern man and women and children into specific categories has had repercussions beyond imagination. Therefore, I was interested in who is admitted and excluded into my university? How the social space is distributed in this country? And how decisions can impact the future of entire groups of people?

In other words, I became invested, for the entire spring semester of 2010, in the complexity of how race-class and neo-eugenic thinking have had a direct effect on the lives of thousand of African Americans who had suffered the effects of slavery, who are today behind prisons walls, who still struggle to have full citizenship and those who struggle for a fair place in society through the access of an education. I saw this instance as an opportunity to stand up for an issue that affects us all because the physical and symbolic violence that is exerted indirectly or explicitly in our lives matters. I became devoted into addressing the elephant in the room through the use of aesthetics, history and ethics.
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**Project: Indecent ACTS**

Impolite, Unapologetic, Rude Actions, and Participatory Art with an Implicit Intention to Create Subversive, and Polemic Speech Acts

February 2010 - On Going

**Context**

At the beginning of the semester, I started a conceptual working method. The method title *Indecent ACTS* consisted of an experimental performance, and a web-blog, which helped, framed several independent projects (Blues Calling, Glaciers Under Our Skin and Racial Pre-Filing Vest).
Artistic Influences

Indecent ACTS was the conglomerate of ideas derived from artists and theorist who have a wide-ranging discourses about the institutionalization of the post- and neo-colonial body – stigmatized by race-class and eugenic thinking. For example, an artist/group that was central to my conceptual framework for that semester was Guillermo Gomez Peña and his company La Pocha Nostra – a critical performance and radical studio, which explored the Other-as-freak, and the hybrid-wounded-body as the spectacular, enhanced, contested space which plays and over-exploits with our desires, fears and the dominant imagination.
Likewise, I studied the work of Adrian Piper and Damila Ayo because their work also examined the exploited body, the wounded body and dominant desires but they offer conceptual approaches more specifically about the nuances of xenophobia and the disparities between the Black/White paradigms in contemporary USA.

For example an evocative project that was canonical in the field of conceptual arts of the 80's was the *Funk Lessons*, 1983 by Adrian Piper. The work, partly a live performance, workshop and a video, elicited audiences to learn how to dance funk music and engaged in a self-awareness process of consciousness. Staged with blacks and whites participants and others, the lessons reveal the socio-psychological interactions and questions, is there white funk aesthetics versus a black one? Is it possible that the color lines are more porous when bodies work/dance together? Can white people dance?
Figure 29 | Adrian Piper, Funk Lessons, 1983 / 00:15:17 | Video Stills |
Sources:
http://www.adrianpiper.com/va/video_f.htm
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kn5o0gFPuM2c
On the flip side from the *Funk Lessons*, which elicits the participation of black and white audiences to join in a seemingly fun activity, the work of Damila Ayo is sharp and witty. For example, I was also interesting in her project *Rent-a-Negro.com* (2009) because it was and is multifaceted, poignant and funny. It consist of a book, website and manual which elicits the reader to rent an African American for a variety of mundane and useful tasks. In other words, the project offers the "black body" as a property, and in doing this she exposes the gruesome realities and ambiguities that many African American experiences in a country that carries on the legacy of racism and eugenic thinking. Humorously she touches on the symbolic violence when someone uses the body of the other as a token. Thus the project in reversing the power relationships, provokes the reader to enter in a critique about how African Americans continues to be a commodity in segregated social gatherings and in Institutions (Often of White Americans) that are in need to diversify their public image. From the title and its numerous recommendations, the work teaches us many ways African American are subjects of desire, exchange and display, and yet wittily offers new solutions to counter act this unattended often unquestioned social behavior.

For example, Bell Hooks in “Killing Rage”, proposes a variety of ways the wounded body, the colonized body can overcome white supremacy, patriarchy, victimhood, class betrayal and racism. She writes not only how to understand racism as a systemic issue but also as an internalized device of control which I also see as another invisible punitive mechanism of control. A case in point is in the chapter Black on Black Pain: Class Cruelty. She brought to light the critical issues about how class, racism and white supremacy have been internalized among the Black elite and middle-class population. She sharply criticizes the burgeoning Black population for contributing to the exploitation, vilification and deification of the black lower income class who has been economically and historically unjustly underserved. For example, she addressed this betrayal by pointing out how blacks leaders, especially male leaders during the civil rights movement, easily ignored the courageous lower-classes who were the ones who refused to sit on the back of buses, who stood up to the oppression of the police and have continued to stand up against racism through numerous riots around the country. Similarly, the book brings to light issues about how the Black elite and middle class have shown distastes to gangster rap lyrics for depicting the contradictions of impoverish neighborhoods affected by violence and the underground economy, but they are disengaged in sharing their wealth to radically improve the social and political conditions of those directly affected.

Conversely, growing up as privileged White male Tim Wise makes an introspective analysis about the growth of segregation and racism. In his biographical book and his public talks “White Like Me”, he exposes a fearless perspective about how being raised in a white supremacist society and among blacks he began to understand how in daily life through seemingly invisible codes and knowledge white supremacy or racism is exercised. In his books and speeches, he proposes a range of solutions about what European Americans ought to do about race and class in America.

Lastly, “Thinking About Race” by Noami Zacks gives a great overview about the production of race making institutions and eugenic thinking in the USA. Her research emphasizes how this form of thinking develops over the
centuries though scientific, governmental and cultural practices and policies. It also points out how the idea of whiteness shapes the socio-spatial geography in the United States and how the “whitening effect” is also found across the Americas and other continents that had been historically colonized and re-colonized by European and (Estados Unidenses) ideology on race.

Working from this range of artistic and theoretical views, I devised, during the Spring 2010 academic year, my own method. It is titled Indecent ACTS, which in essence aims to deploy a satirical, direct and social science fictional aesthetics that dismantles the illusion of the emperor wearing new clothes and challenges the elephant in the room. It is a fearless but absurd speech. It is a kind of political truth telling that exposes in public space a forbidden history. It defaces and destabilizes our desires and the dominant imagination.

From this viewpoint, to employ Indecent ACTS was a kind of intrepid conceptual framework to initiate projects that provoked, disputed, and exposed those who are empathetic, colorblind, and skeptical about ones involvement in race-class and eugenic thinking. So, I took

on the task to create unstable, immoral, naughty and tricky situations for the entire semester to test my limits and those around me.


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28 The Spanish name for USA nationality.
Experiment:
Indecent ACTS 1 & 2

I began this series of Indecent Acts after doing an experimental presentation at my performance class at MIT led by artist/professor Joan Jonas. I undertook this project because I have grown tired of the level of politeness found in institutions like MIT and Harvard. I find the polite speech, as a powerful communicative mechanism, to be passive aggressive and socially oppressive. So, the concept Indecent ACTS has come to represent an interesting way to use art as "speech acts"\(^3\) to oppressing institutional settings. However, I recognized in using indecent acts, it was a difficult kind of language because on the one hand, it had the strengths to be useful to initiate a critique and dialogue about the elephant in the room. On the other hand, if it were deployed without taking into consideration that people needed to respond to what they had experienced in a safe environment, it could also be alienating.

The first manifestation of Indecent ACTS was a performance I did in two acts that referenced the conceptual practices and social realities of two artists, Guillermo Gomez-Peña and Damila Ayo. The connecting social issues I drew from these artists were "white dominance", institutional racism, assimilation, and inequality. In addition, I added a 5\(^{th}\) concept "mass imprisonment", as another implicit mechanism of oppression in the USA that is directly connected to the discrimination of education, and other civic aspects.

The performance didn't mimic the artists nor intended to replicate what they do. The main goal was to connect my performance in relation to the micro-political issues at my school. The result was an institutional critique, in the form of speech acts, directed towards my Program, "Art, Culture, and Technology - (ACT)", which has not had any African American students, faculty or staff for sometime or maybe ever.
Performance: 02.16.2010 at MIT-E15-001 (Cube)
(There is no video recording of the event, only some photographs.)

Figure 33 | Detail from the objects I used for the experiment Indecent ACT 1 in 2010 | Source: Author

ACT 1: Any African Americans
The performance begins with a board that has an enlarged paper picture profile of the people who had been in my program with the phrase on the left top "Indecent Act 1" and on the right bottom corner "Any African Americans". On each picture I placed a tracing paper creating a patchwork of an even milky veneer. One could see there was a series of pictures of individual members underneath but the tracing paper provided a facade as a metaphor to the systemic social issue. Then I used various water based brown colors that I squeezed onto my hands. I used spit to loosen up the color and walked around soliciting more spit from the audience.

The act was both seductive and extremely controversial. Implicitly my action was implicating everyone in the act of denouncing that we are all participating in unconscious discrimination by not speaking out that we did not have African Americans in our program. Once I had enough diluted paint in my hands I stamped my colored hands on each tracing paper covering the photographs of classmates, professors, and staff. I repeated this forceful gesture for each profile. At that moment, it would have been too simplistic to say that only African Americans have brown skin or that they don't have beige skin, yet considering the circumstances visually my decision made sense. Creating a sharp aesthetic and ethical decision in how race-class and eugenic thinking expresses itself can be a powerful tool to address these issues. It can make audiences respond and speak of our worse fears.
ACT 2: Blond Hair Extension

The performance was very simple. I turned the board around which had the phrase "Indecent Act 2" and a "blond hair extension" that I attached to my hair in front of the audience. Then, I briefly talked about assimilation, after which, the audience started to respond and have a debate. In general the performance hit home. Some liked it, reaffirming that the issue of representation of the community of color at MIT was not over, while some defended the progress achieved in the last decades. Few were lightly offended because they felt that I was aggressive towards the people who are my support system. Others asked why I had not chosen other groups who are equally discriminated.

The general response

As I am studying mass-imprisonment and inequality in the United States of America, I am also finding that the plight to citizenship and equality to civic participation are essential for the African American as it is for the Latino as it is to other ethnic groups. I explained that what had been done to them, have set the precedence to do similar harm to the Latino and the immigrant communities. For example, studies demonstrate that the majority of the African Americans who are living in poverty today have been
deprived of opportunities to a meaningful education and other opportunities because over decades a growing number of the young population has been criminalized, stigmatized and discriminated on a day-to-day basis. Understanding this history is also a way for me to understand the systemic issues, which are also affecting the Latinos/Hispanics/Americans. While the Latino is one of the growing communities in this country, they are also highly vulnerable to draconian policies, which unambiguously exclude them from participating in the politics and economics of this country fairly. Often they are excluded on the pure basis of their physical characteristics, language and cultural practices.

Therefore, the issues of who is allowed to participate in higher educational institutions are as important today as ever. I think it is important to recognize who is being left out of the universities and colleges, and to learn to be unafraid to speak out about these injustices. In the case of my department at MIT it was clear to me that we didn’t have African Americans and I wanted to make it apparent because the politics of human diversity and coexistence matter. It matters with who I am in solidarity, with whom I am working, with whom I am studying and with whom I am learning as well.

I think it is true when Martin Luther King Jr. said, “our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that matter”, because silence can hurt us. I can relate to this very intimately, because I have also been silent and hurt in immeasurable ways. Thus, I am learning that in speaking out, I am also learning to be certain about my convictions and in turn, my life feels fuller.

Figure 35 – My temporary entrance to my studio with a quote by Dr. M L King Jr. / Spring 2011 / MIT ACT – Source: Author
Project: Glaciers Under Our Skin

An Immersive Site-Specific Performance, Intervention Workshop, Videos and Manifesto Tackling Domination, Assimilation and Racism in an age of Mass Imprisonment

Duration: March-June 2010

Initial Concept Outline:
Between March-June of 2010, I designed a durational piece, which was divided into 5 parts centered on my desire to connect on why we didn’t have African Americans in my program, and why are they discriminated. Thus, this piece engages in a series of informal and performative conversations about how white dominance, assimilation, inequality, and mass-imprisonment, are invisible forms of oppression. Then, as a technique to organize this durational piece, I designed a chronological conceptual outline, which I named Under Our Skin | Mon-Sun | 24/7. From this process; I designed a science fictional society named the Double Skinned Nation, and a performance workshop and manifesto entitled Glaciers Under Our Skin.

31 Zack, Noami. 1998. Thinking About Race. White Dominance – in this project it refers to a series of race based concepts to explicitly identify the political nomenclature as “White Race, White Culture”. Other relating concepts are internalized white supremacy, unconscious racism, institutional racism, and the whitening effect.
32 Garland, David. 2001. Mass Imprisonment: Social Causes and Consequences. Mass Imprisonment – “What are the defining features of mass imprisonment? There are two that are essential. One is sheer numbers. Mass imprisonment implies a rate of imprisonment and a size of prison population that is markedly above the historical and comparative norm for a society of this type. The US prison system clearly meets these criteria. The other feature is the social concentration of imprisonment’s effects. Imprisonment becomes mass imprisonment when it ceases to be the incarceration of individual offenders and becomes the systematic imprisonment of whole groups of the population. In the case of the USA, the group concerned is, of course, young black males in large urban centers. For these sections of the population, imprisonment has become normalized. It has come to be a regular, predictable part of experience, rather than a rare and infrequent event.”
Middle March 2010
I initiated conversations with key faculty and friends about the central concepts and elicited their participation to develop a final project.

Late March 2010
I presented a 10 minute performance exercise that explored, through conversations with my peers, what it means to "assimilate white dominance". As we video recorded each other talking and I read a passage of Bell Hooks' book "Killing Rage", we tested in our upper bodies various lycra panties of different skin color.
Early April 2010
I wanted the final project to be only an ACT Mini Residency Program for my African American friend Mary Ann Brooks who lives and works in San Francisco CA. I wanted to share all my privileges for one week with her. However, my proposal was censored so, as a compromise she joined me as collaborator.

Late April 2010
CNS' collaborator Mary Ann Brooks, an African American queer female, movement conceptual artist and writer, from San Francisco was invited to join the Art, Culture and Technology Mini Residency (ACT MR). I developed the residency under the sponsorship of my MIT Presidential Scholarship and we developed our first indecent acts heart to heart conversations as performances. She was at the ACT MR for 5 days and we recorded our conversations over the weekend of April 24th. As part of this collaboration we shared ideas, life experiences, practices and research.
Early May 2010
Under the research unit the Counter Narrative Society, I choreographed a multifaceted performance workshop with video-performances that Mary Ann and I did together. It was titled *Glaciers Under Our Skin*. The goal of this workshop was to explore how domination and inequality have been absorbed into the social fabric of the United States. It took place on May 4th, 2010 at the MIT - Program in Art, Culture and Technology.

Early June 2010
The project culminated in a written manifesto and photo essay based on the videos and performance workshops entitled *Glaciers Under Our Skin*. The manifesto uses a language inspired by science fiction and radical aesthetics to imagine what it means to overcome colorblindness when it is one of the main modus operandi in this country.

For this portion of the project, in addition to Mary Ann Brooks' contribution, I worked with John Hulsey, a European American male, Harvard filmmaker and writer. He provided critical recommendations for the manifesto which is now published in the book N52, designed and edited by MIT - ACT Graduates Students, Y2010.
Multifaceted Pilot Anti-Racism Workshop
5.4.2010:
Glaciers Under Our Skin

By the Counter Narrative Society
Mabel Negrete with Mary Ann Brooks
+ Joan Jonas' Performance Class + John Hulsey
Statement

There are about 2.4 million people incarcerated nationwide and African Americans and Hispanics, together account for about two thirds of the state prison population. How has this situation come to be this way? What are the systemic issues keeping these two groups and others in a state of crisis? Why are they disproportionately criminalized? In trying to find answers to these hard questions, and find ways to communicate about this crisis, sadly I found that some of the reasons lie on institutional and cultural practices that have alienated portions of its population over others since the dawn of this nation.

Therefore, **Glaciers Under Our Skin** used immersive performance and social parody/critique to create a science-fiction deviant society, the Double-Skinned Nation to explore how domination and inequality have been absorbed into the social fabric of the United States.

The project consisted of inviting participants to be initiated into the Double Skinned Nation by wearing gray monotone coveralls and lycra masks matched to skin tone. Then they were led through a site-specific performance score, which on each stop playfully instigates a basic critique about race-class making institutions that have kept American society torn apart and segregated in pernicious ways. The workshop-intervention made an attempt to visualize and experience the concealed essentialist ideological formations that have crystallized under our skin, under our social fabric. For example, the work cited, through the choreography the historical lineage of the *White and Black Caste System*, the *Census Racist Stratification*, and the pseudo-scientific *White Essences of the 1800’s*. All of which has been manifesting till this day through how cities are zoned and segregated; public schools are racially/ethnically divided; federal funds are distributed across counties; and law enforcement agencies disproportionately are racially profiling non-white populations.

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Performance's Score

The performance is divided into four parts, each corresponding to four spaces in the Media Lab Complex of MIT. Beginning in the 'Dark Zone', the lower level of the Weisner Building, and ending in the 'Light Zone', the atrium of the Maki Building, the performance functions like a ritual. By recalling myths about white dominance, it invites participants to question assimilation, racism and a radical critique of discrimination.
Each Zone Had a Specific Function

In the first space the ‘Dark Zone’, participants were initiated into the *Double-Skinned Nation*. We changed our clothes and read the manifesto which stated the following:
We, the Double-Skinned Nation, have come together from a long lineage of humans who have been overexposed to institutionalize racist toxins. These noxious elements have taken the form of dangerous classifications, which have crystallized into unnatural and massive formations under our skin. They have caused unthinkable harm to our bodies, friends, and neighbors. They have divided and segregated us into ‘dark’ and ‘light’ zones. They are used everywhere in the most pernicious ways. So, after today our goal is to:

1. Become even more un-assimilated everywhere.
2. Undertake radical change in our bodies and minds and liberate us from racist pseudo-scientific, historical and economical significations.
3. Make visible the white/black caste system taboo that has led to the mass imprisonment of our brothers and sisters.
4. Further this work at the margins and centre of all institutions.
5. Improve our grotesque appearance.
6. Be lovely individuals.
7. Find our path to deliverance.
In the ‘**Loading Zone**’, a transitional space between the two buildings, members of the DSN were invited to *dance out our funk* to the sound of Janaelle Monae’s “Tightrope.” The song makes poignant remarks about the psychiatry system as an instrument of repression to the human spirit, and yet if there is a will the body is going to continue to dance. At the beginning of the video-song cites the following:

“*The Palace of the Dogs*” (Asylum)

– And then it states,

“Dancing has long been forbidden for its subversive effects on the residents and its tendency to lead to illegal magical practices.”

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36 Source: [http://youtu.be/jene6JIAK5c](http://youtu.be/jene6JIAK5c)
In the 'White-and-Black zone', participants bawled out the words "black" and "white" alongside a video in which these words were repeated on a continuous loop.
(Duration / 00:08:49)
In the ‘Light Zone’, participants staged a public intervention in which an instructional video, "Unequal States of Amnesty," is shown.
The video is an indecent heart-to-heart conversation that Mary Ann Brooks and I are having about various passages from the book “Thinking About Race” by Noami Zacks. For example, we laughed, talked and made poignant remarks at the genesis of the pseudo-scientific concept of Race, the White Essences, Affirmative Action, and the Census Bureau. (Duration / 00:11:10)
Project: Funky Hunch in the Atrium

The Blues Calling (Version.2)

Pilot Public Intervention with Sound and Visuals with DJ-Double Skinned Nation

May 18, 2010

General Goal

In my final attempt to deal with the elephant in the room during the 2010 term, I organized an *indecent act* as a public intervention with sound and visuals for MIT residents visiting my program and the general public that visits the Maki Building at the Media Lab at MIT. For this event, I designed a minimal cardboard/masking tape visualization comparing the USA 2008 Census statistics between the general population of blacks and whites with those who were incarcerated nationwide at the time. I also had two speaker horns made out of cardboard and sampled live historical and contemporary songs to make tangible the intangible and invisible territory that it is uncommon to the burgeoning elite and middle class but familiar to those who on a day-to-day basis experience discrimination, the disparities and the categorization from being perceived as the minority, the criminal and the unfit.

Figure 36 – DJ-Double Skinned Nation preparing for a 10 minute presentation. May 2010 – Source: Author
Figure 37 – Mix media statistics visualization on white marble floor, 2010. Statistics: By July 2008 the National Census by Race was: National Population of: Blacks – 39,058,834 Whites – 199,491,458; Incarcerated: Blacks – 913,800 Whites – 807,000 – Source: Author

**Statement for the Event**

Segregation is an invisible and intangible territory. It delimits and divides the social body and its places in impervious ways. On the one hand, it propels people to cultivate the development of unique languages, costumes and all sorts of cultural manifestations; on the other hand, segregation can be used as a device of control and domination. It can be deployed to divide people of similar lineage, fracture traditions and make an ever-unstable territory much like the entanglement between the white/black paradigms in the USA.

Working from this epithet and shouldered with Loic Wacquant’s four peculiar intuitions – that situate “the prison in the full lineage of institutions which at each epoch, have carried out the work of race making by drawing and enforcing the peculiar ‘color lines’ that cleaves the America society asunder... Slavery...Jim Crow system...Urban Ghetto...Hyperghetto+Prison” – I am presenting a modest sound performative installation where I sampled a fractured and tenuous lineage through music, video and audience participation. The music I am playing comes from two different historical periods; one, the prison blues, marking the Jim Crow system; the second one, I used RAP (hip-hop) marking the contemporary existence of the Hyperghetto+Prison or the New Jim Crow Era.

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Photographs of the installation and digital collage with lists of sounds played during my 10 minutes event:
Photograph with audience and participants listening to the live event and digital intervention of word balloons with responses they gave me afterwards:
By July 2008 the National Census by Race was:

**National Population of:**
- **Blacks** – 39,058,834
- **Whites** – 199,491,458

**Incarcerated:**
- **Blacks** – 913,800
- **Whites** – 807,000

Statistics used for Furry Hunch in the Awium project
Source: July 2008 USA National Census

**Rate of incarceration in the state of Massachusetts in 2005:**

- **Blacks** 1635
- **Hispanics** 1229
- **Whites** 201

PART 3. IT IS LIKE LIVING IN A COLOSSAL ARCHITECTURAL NIGHTMARE.
Under what conditions or in what situations is the *invisible punishing machine* a colossal architectural nightmare?

**My short answer is:** When the invisible punishing machine feels like a totalizing and an individualizing complex system.

**My long answer is:** WTF - I don’t know where to start. This is a huge question. For the most part I have talked about the way the *invisible punishing machine* has come across in my life through the workings of law enforcement, invisible punishment and inequality, and more or less on a one-to-one scale at the micro-political level. I have talked about the way the individualizing machine affects my family, my friends, and those around me. In other ways, I have talked about the individualizing system, and have hinted to the totalizing machine through some forms of analysis on the way when I mentioned the prison system, the inequality in the University, and the workings of race-class and the eugenic thinking in some historical terms. However, when I think under what conditions or in what situations is the *invisible punishing machine* a colossal architectural
nightmare, I have been able to feel and see its presence with clarity only a few instances in my life.

One of those instances was in the summer of 2010 when I discovered the invisible punishing machine. In my introduction to this written thesis, I briefly explained while travelling across the country that summer, I was able to recognize the machine. I saw multiple technologies of power through the prison (my brother is forced to live in), through the national historical site Alcatraz Island (a former federal prison), the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (where I am studying and which has a long partnership with the Defense Department), and Roxbury (one of the oldest neighborhoods in Boston) where the history of slavery, class struggle and the criminal justice system intersects.

From these four locations, which I didn't discuss in depth earlier because I wasn't sure how to address them, I am now exploring them through this complicated question. I won't claim that I grasp the significance and the history of each place because there is much more I haven't been able to study, but my general goal for this section is to speak about the way the colossal architectural nightmare began to take shape in my life and to use this material as a catalyst for artistic research in the near future. This section in particular I foresee being the place to explore the architectural nightmare in the years to come. It combines the personal with the systemic in some meaningful ways.

To this end I am going to introduce some of the studies and theoretical works which have influenced my thinking concerning this problem. The list is longer than what I can write at this time. Also some ideas are newer to me and I have been unable to embody them yet because either they don't quite make sense or are not precise enough for what I am looking. As I said earlier in the introduction, this is a colossal problem, which I think is going to take me a lifetime to fine tune. However, considering the place I am in, I am going to give it a try. I am going to combine the theoretical influences, which helps me articulate some of the complex ideas about our civilization today in the USA; with the four locations I mentioned earlier, and key artistic facets I have produced for the Artistic-Thesis, which was entitled *when the invisible punishing machine is everywhere...The Weight I Carry with Me.*
SOME INFLUENCES & THOUGHTS

What is a nightmare in the first place?

- A frightening or unpleasant dream

- A terrifying or very unpleasant experience or prospect: the nightmare of racial hatred | an astronaut's worst nightmare is getting detached during an extra vehicle activity.

- A person, thing, or situation that is very difficult to deal with: buying wine can be a nightmare if you don't know enough about it.
What is it like for me?
It is an overwhelming, bad, anxious feeling. It is the general feeling of an impossible situation that is hard to overcome. It wakes me up at nights and it frightens me during the day. It is to witness cruelty but I have no power to change it.

Then, what is this colossal architectural nightmare all about?
It is the architecture that is used as an instrument to punish, alienate, torture, dislocate, organize, manage and even make disappear the social body that may be undesirable, or disadvantageous for the interests of a group, a nation-state or a corporate enterprise. It is a kind of architecture as the “manageable instruments” that Christopher Hight calls in his Prologue: Infernal Returns from “Architectural Principles in the Age of Cybernetics” 2008. It is the architectural device that becomes the instrument to absolve our complicity to any violence done to people guilty or not, such of those who are held indefinitely in Guantánamo Bay, or who are held in hidden confinement and in captivity by the millions across the terrains of the United States. It is a kind of architecture that is hidden, like the effect of the panopticon in prison cells in remote places, the control room in government territories remotely dropping bombs in Iraq; the radio and media channels mediating our visions day and night; like the sirens of police cars chasing someone on the road; or it

is like the clear crystal buildings such as the Maki building at MIT.

Likewise, the colossal architectural nightmare is the endangered body/space, the terrorized body/home, which Sartre saw during WWII being destroyed and dismembered when the bombs were dropping and obliterating everything. It is the nightmarish fear of sensing that our homes are endangered everywhere, and so are our bodies. It is the image of our bodies embodying the spaces and places around us and the nightmare in this case is the horrible sensation of one’s body being annihilated and in so far his or her home.

It is the kind of fear that disseminates terror in the mind of its population. It is like what Jackie Orr, in her book Panic Diaries (2006), asserts as the diffusion and regulation of panic calculated to inflict terror on the population. The new mode of power was able to obliterate or distort our perceptions. Through her diaries she exposes – how the media, in combination with social scientific research and psychiatry, the US Military and government and transnational drug companies – have been able to initiate panic over the American population. Working from her own experiences dealing with panic attacks from witnessing the overload of propaganda on Nuclear Warfare and the Cold War, she brings an insightful view about how panic as a technoscientific device has enormous repercussions in the social-psychology of our population. Like Noam Chomsky points out in Manufacturing Consent in the early 80’s, the USA government and those owning the means of information have used this in powerful ways to manipulate the public opinion and therefore our civic agency.

From that lineage of perspectives, the Colossal Architectural Nightmare in the USA is then a kind of mediated technology of power led by a corporate, militaristic, governmental social elite and middle class who at any moment and fixation may hunt, manipulate and exploit the existence of people whose lives are vulnerable and dreams are different from theirs. For example, since the 70’s to this day in California, we have had a burgeoning war against the youth and the young adults living in poverty and in precarious economies without citizenship. It is estimated that the majority of the population that is incarcerated today in the state of California has had a poor education, has lived on precarious incomes, has been historically discriminated, and it is often the youth who have been involved in petty drug related crimes. In 2006, “the average California Youth Authority parolees upon release
were 21 years old, which excludes them from state’s responsibility to provide a public education.” Yet the general public continues to exhibit conservative views on how crime must be managed.

Since the 80’s, I found two general factors concerning this issue. One is the heavy campaign on the War on Drugs, and the other is the Tough on Crimes policies, by the US Defense Department and Government, as the backdrop of massive joblessness and unsteady jobs. Unfortunately, the repercussions of this national and international war often go unreported. Therefore, the public doesn’t know what is going on in the lives of the young population who are forced to live on precarious incomes, and all the public may know of them is often what is broadcast on sensational television news and radio shows. Often this news points at the growth of gang related violent crimes and youth violence as isolated instances, despite the fact that violent crimes have dropped significantly in the last two decades.

What has increased is property crime and this is most likely an indication of complex economic disparities. So, I remember vividly that during the 90’s and into the 2000’s the image of the Latino and the African American young adults, especially males involved in violent crime, was constantly broadcast in mainstream media, but we will never hear the names of those benefiting from the production and consumption of drugs and much less those who are benefiting from this civil warfare against the poor.

Then, I think it is true to say that when Foucault boldly maintained that the major problem in late 20th century and into the 21st was going to be the struggle against the concentrated “mode of power concerned with the management and control of bodies and persons” to maintain its legitimacy. I think we are already there and our days perhaps are counted. How can we override the governmentality that is repressing, manipulating and oppressing us through all kinds of technologies and systems that are not at our reach? As of today, in the thousands we may have the will to deal with this colossal machine, but do we have the expertise to change it, or abolish it if necessary? If anything, we are at a time where the diffusions of power across government departments, research institutions, media outlets, private businesses and territories beyond the jurisprudence of its own law is so vast, that if there is going to be an equal fight or resistance.

41 Christian Parenti. 1999. Lockdown America, Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis. (20-44)
It is going to require an equal or greater amount of human effort to overcome this colossal architectural nightmare on all fronts (scholars, workers and youth...etc).

However, I am uncertain at the moment. If the American government and dominating class (elite and middle class) continue on the path to increase the technologies of power that reproduces global enterprises under the pretext to improve the human condition, the question still remains to what ends. A case in point, the state of California, between 1990-2007, has built 20 prisons and only 1 state university and 1 UC campus\textsuperscript{44}. This trend has increased the income bracket of impoverished farm communities with citizenship, but in return, the exploitation and criminalization of undocumented farm workers and their families continues. Similarly, at paramount scales, young Latinos, African Americans, poor Whites, Native American and other communities are seeing the passage to incarceration as their way of life – as their life cycle\textsuperscript{45}.

So, I wonder if this is even reversible, like the high profile leader of the powerful criminal organization Primer Comando de la Capital (PCC) Marcos Camacho says in reference to the corrupted elite/bourgeoisie class and government from Sao Paulo in Brazil: (Here I am translating and paraphrasing some of his words)

\textit{You ignored us... you exploited us... and you imprisoned us... but now from our own misery we are educating ourselves, learning to be ruthless... and efficient at mass scales. We are now the post-miseria who generates a new culture of assassins and experts.\textsuperscript{46}}

\textsuperscript{44} Directly quotes from The Prison Project. 2008. Golden Rules. Intersection for the Arts
\textsuperscript{45} Vincent Schiraldi and Jason Ziedenberg. 2002. Cellblocks or Classrooms?: The Funding of Higher Education and Corrections and It's Impact on African American Men – “In the 1980s, African American enrollment in higher education in California declined, as 50,000 new African American inmates were added to the prison system. In California, for every African American male subtracted from a University of California or California State University campus, 57 were added to a state correctional facility. During the same period, three Latino males were added to the prison population for every one added to California's four-year public universities.” http://www.justicepolicy.org/research/2046
Then as all nightmares, has there ever been a beginning?
And, does it even have an end?

From the “Self-sufficient Industrial Village” to the Industrious Disciplinary State:

In trying to find the beginning of this nightmare I was truly taken by surprise when, in one of my conversations with a friend, she convincingly taught me that incarceration was also a form of slavery. At the time, I was confused by the idea because I didn’t see how slavery and imprisonment were related other than that both group of people are subjected to an extreme, regimented and tortured life.

From this generalized view I started to question if the prisoner was in fact also a slave, I questioned what kind of slave was he or she. How could a general public understand this situation when there is so little information about what is going on inside prisons and jails? And what kind of slave institutions are the prisons today? In fact, in one of my many talks with my brother about why he didn’t work inside the prison, one of his answers was, as follows (and I am paraphrasing):

*All they do is to paint pretty pictures that they are rehabilitating us… but for what reason when they are not letting us out… you see, these are human warehouses… and all the prisons are the same… and if you work, it is a joke what they pay for our labor… it is all just a bunch of*
lies. If they want to keep me here for life\textsuperscript{47} then let the state pay for my misery. I rather be in my cell listening to my music…

His refusal to work inside the prison became my concern because I also had the idea that at least working would be a way for someone to keep his or her mind occupied. However as I thought about the conditions he has been subjected to – strip-searched everyday to go to work and stand the humiliation at the expense of slave labor, it is terrible. In fact all level 4-security prisons, the “services” as the CDCR calls them, are a joke. They are degrading and they have no significant purpose in the real work place when someone is released. In addition, if anyone of them is released, the likelihood to be discriminated in the job market is very probable. The only most useful services he sees useful are the ones that have counseling purposes to help him cope with his depression from being incarcerated but even they are gate-keeping remedies. It doesn’t cure the pain and grief of incarceration, much less the effect of being buried alive.

Thus in my quest to understand the \textit{invisible punishing machine} as this colossal architectural nightmare, I have been studying how the institution of slavery in the USA is perhaps one of its origins. From this concern, I have studied the social and spatial hierarchy of the plantation. What is interesting about these place is that I think they constitute the initial visions on how the city-state-prison came to be hierarchically segmented and the idea of rehabilitation be equated to labor or for that matter legally stipulated as slavery or indenture servitude under the 13 Amendment of the constitution in 1865\textsuperscript{48}. So here is an overview:

\textbf{The Plantation}

As James Scott asserted in chapter 4 Taming Nature of his book “Seeing Like a State” 2009, the origin is the moment people of the dominant class from the North Atlantic societies like the USA and alike began to domesticate nature in simplistic standardized ways in order to improve the human condition. It was also the beginning of a spiraling environmental devastation, expropriation, and dislocation of

\textsuperscript{47} My brother was sentence for 15 years to life term. In our hearts, my family and friends agree that it is an unjust sentence, because the Parolee system is in California is not letting people leave the prison. So, everyone inside knows when you received an indefinite sentence, you are a lifer.

\textsuperscript{48} 1865 – The 13 Amendment is ratified and slavery is abolished but prisoners would bare the mark of the condemned, the unfit, the subhuman, the abomination of humanity, and the one who deserved to be punished indefinitely or eradicated. Therefore, officially prisoners would be from this date be the only group of people subjected to slavery and involuntary servitude of the State as a punishment of any crime.
people that was not considered part of their worldview. It is under this general perspective that the plantation based in slave labor had a significant place in USA history. Sharon Paton in her book African-American Art: Colonial America and the Young republic 1700-1800, hints on this issue. She pointed out that the plantation is one of the earliest agricultural economic modern enterprises to develop by the late 18th century and was the economical engine at the turn of the 19th century. The simplicity of the plantation as an early stage of modern agribusiness – “self-sufficient industrial village” – was also an early phase of a modern disciplinary space.

For example, the general structure of the landscape from small to large scale-plantations was often segmented around three main areas: the master’s house, the field and the slave houses. Segmented by lines of sights, grids, fortresses as gardens, and by a rigid and porous social hierarchical order. In these early plans, the master was able to oversee and administer his domain, and the slaves could be aware of the overseer. This plan ensured an implicit social order, which played an important aesthetic and moral role in the construction of power relations between White and Black Americans. Then, with the expansion and growth of the cotton plantations in the Southern states, which boomed with the inventions of new machinery like the cotton gin, the social/spatial hierarchy became more notable by its exhibition of wealth and prosperity and starkly hid any disciplinary signs. For example, contemporary artist Kerry James Marshall brought this issue close to home when he painted two murals in the atrium of the San Francisco Museum Of Modern Art in 2009. He depicted George Washington’s Mount Vernon and Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello. The interesting part of the work is that as a reporter from the SFgate.com said: “the more you scan the lush green hills and fields, stately mansions and manicured gardens of these colonial plantations, you begin to see the faces and shadows of black figures embedded in the landscape. The slaves.”

50 Lewis Cecil Gray, History of agriculture in the southern United States to 1860 (2 Vol. 1933)
– “cotton, at first a small-scale crop in the South, boomed following Eli Whitney’s invention in 1793 of the cotton gin, a machine that separated raw cotton from the seeds and other waste. Soon, large plantations, based on slave labor, expanded in the richest lands from the Carolinas westward to Texas. The raw cotton was shipped to textile mills in Britain, France and New England.”

51 Jesse Hamlin, SFMOMA murals’ African American history lesson. SFGate.com February 21, 2009.
Incongruence of the USA history and its empire, which is still unfolding as we speak.

In this case George Washington's Mansion / the master's house shows the representation of an economical enterprise. The plantation as the symbol of wealth and prosperity is the symbol of national pride. Conversely, the back-story of the New Liberal economy is the field, the slaves and their houses, which often are hidden from the imagination of the public. But the artist is doing just the opposite, in bringing up the hidden story by embedding the faces of black slaves, his strategy points at the
The City-State and its Modern Prison

Continuing my journey to unravel the genesis of the colossal architectural nightmare, I found it interesting that about the same time Thomas Jefferson and George Washington were building their enterprises in the Southern states, other city-states were patterning the city in the image of the southern plantation. For example, in the city of Philadelphia the White/European American burgeoning elite was building a new urban utopia, which resembled the hierarchical order of a self-industrial village and disciplinary space.

If we think about how the plantation as an early agribusiness carries on a specific hierarchical order, we will see how the role and place of the master, the overseers and slave laborers serves as metaphor to the social-spatial hierarchy of the historic city of Philadelphia. For instance, the city-state embodied through the production of the space and social order similar emblematic ideas about place/space as the plantation such as Prosperity, Paradise, Order, Industrial/efficiency and the Hidden Space.

Figure 40 – Illustration of Mount Vernon – Sources: Online Mount Vernon Estate & Gardens

The Mansion/Plantation is emblematic of the Prosperity and Social Order of the New Nation, and so is the Independence Mall of Philadelphia. For example, the open gardens in a Mansion functioned as a paradise and fortress but also were symbolic of the burgeoning participatory democracy, as the Independence National Historical Park where the Independence Hall is centered. The field is the emblem of the industrial space; in the city the work is distributed and parceled among private and government functions and enterprises. Lastly, the houses of the slaves and overseers in the plantations, I see as representation of two separate spaces. The first phase consists, of the
houses of the slaves/laborers. In the city, the houses were divided according to income and social strata. Second, the slaves houses functioned as heterotopias of crisis, which Foucault writes in his essay “Of Other Spaces” 1967, as being replaced by the disciplinary heterotopias of deviation that now occupies something of other space – of a hidden space. Thus the houses of the slaves, which were hidden from the front view of the plantation as the heterotopias of deviation, the prisons, the asylums or all sorts of spaces, would occupy a similar ambiguous place in the city scape. As for the prison and jail, they would come to symbolize the dungeon and the purgatory, and the penitentiary for the emerging young liberal democracy.

Figure 41 – Areal view of the Independence Hall, shows the Park and the Walnut Street Jail which was perpendicular to the Hall (Btw 6th and 5th Street) | Google Map 2010 – Source: Author
A Necessary Good or Just a Greedy Bourgeoning Iniquity
Walnut Street Prison

By 1790, the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons — which was composed of all male elites who deeply believed in the expansion of the new economical and political thinking — worked arduously to influence the new government. Led by numerous Quakers who had a strong belief system based in Christian values, the society prompted that if prisoners were placed in isolation, they would repent and therefore, “these people” could join the social new contract. At the time this was a radical idea. If the sovereign body was to retain power, they needed to declare a new form of governance that was ruled by principles of civility and law. Thus the Pennsylvania Prison Society, as it is called today, came just in time to legitimize the new modern industrious state.

They proposed the expansion of the Walnut Street jail for two reasons. The first reason was a growing opposition to the gruesome spectacle of corporal punishment, which at the time was 25% of the cases. The second reason was that, public jails were overcrowded. Many people were arrested for a myriad of infractions but the most common reasons were from debts, larceny, burglary and receiving stolen goods, which in the mind of the society could be correctable. Consequently, the Penology Act that took effect on April 5, 1790, prompted the construction of 16 cells in the yard of the Walnut Street Jail. Located across from the Independence Hall and outside the periphery of the park, the jail for a little while was used to imprison the “hardened prisoners” that could have been sent from all over the country.

As the first penitentiary system to ever exist, this new kind of technology of control marks in the history of the USA a new vision of prison construction and “social engineering”.

--- (This reminds me that at the moment all over the country many prisons and jails are getting overcrowded. There is historical pattern here, but I cannot delve into at the moment but this is important.)

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52 “It was the Quakers of Philadelphia who came up with the concept for what they called a penitentiary—a place where prisoners could reflect on their crime and become truly sorry for what they had done. The Quakers believed that through reflection and repentance, inmates would give up crime and leave prison rehabilitated. Shortly after the American Revolution, a group of Quakers formed the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons, whose goal was made clear in its name. (Later the group became known as the Pennsylvania Prison Society.) In the years after the Revolution this group worked to encourage prison reform, and its efforts finally paid off in 1790 when the Walnut Street Jail became the first state penitentiary in the country.” — source: http://law.jrank.org/pages/11192/Walnut-Street-Prison.html

Bigger more Industrious and Tougher

Therefore, after the construction Walnut Street jail, the first urban prison to control prison overcrowding, a new experiment emerged. At the hand of a stronger wealthier social body/State, an efficient scheme paved the way for the construction of the Eastern State Penitentiary (ESP) - 1829. Built miles away from the Independence Hall, the ESP became the first self-contained architectural industrious machine to provide city jobs and warehouse hardened prisoners in solitary confinement.

Figure 43 – Rendering of the Eastern State Penitentiary original plan – Source: OPACITY
http://www.opacity.us/siles/8_eastern_statePenitentiary.htm
However, critics like Charles Dickens\textsuperscript{54} challenged this concept of disciplinary technology for being ill and cruel, because prisoners become mad and delusional. This model revealed that it was already a failed experiment. Over time The Pennsylvania System (which is how was promoted worldwide) eroded and by 1913 authorities changed the penitentiary model to a collective prison population. Then solitary confinement at this prison came to be used only as an extreme disciplinary measure within these walls.

A century after the construction of the ESP, many new jails and maximum-security prisons were built across New England and with the expansion of the country by the early 1900’s, they provided the climate for another new experiment. Around this time officials sought to profit from the enslavement of the prisoner by creating steady revenue for the State and at the same time presuming to benefit the prisoners by teaching them farming skills. The vast state prison plantations established since then were in Arkansas, Tennessee, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. All of them were built and managed as plantations. Similarly prison labor was used for the building of roads and railroads as well as other industries. (One thing to note of these places in the Southern States in particular, often time they were populated by African Americans and Euro-Americans who had been slaves or indenture servants which pointed to another very important issue about the social stratification of this country.)

Almost two centuries after the construction of the ESP and with the economical transnational expansion from the 1960’s at the expense of the downfall of the manufacturing industry across the USA, the prison-confinement-slavery state system was found to be an instrumental device to control the political opposition, underground economy and surplus population once again\textsuperscript{55}. Since that time the prison farms have been diminished but by the 1980’s the new boom of Super Maximum Prisons emerged and have become a multi-millions business nationwide to warehouse

\textsuperscript{54} in 1842 Charles Dickens visited “Eastern State Penitentiary in the Seventh Chapter in his travel journal, American Notes for General Circulation. The chapter is titled “Philadelphia and its Solitary Prison.” “In its intention I am well convinced that it is kind, humane, and meant for reformation; but I am persuaded that those who designed this system of Prison Discipline, and those benevolent gentleman who carry it into execution, do not know what it is that they are doing.... I hold this slow and daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain to be immeasurably worse than any torture of the body; and because its ghastly signs and tokens are not so palpable to the eye,... and it extorts few cries that human ears can hear; therefore I the more denounce it, as a secret punishment in which slumbering humanity is not roused up to stay.” Source: http://www.ushistory.org/tour/eastern-state-penitentiary.htm

(political and social) prisoners for years and decades 23/7 days a week.

It is hard to imagine what the Prison Society had in mind for the future when they first proposed the blueprint of the prison cell in 1790’s. However, from this blueprint what it seems to have transpired is how a simple and failing idea became a durable and impervious system. As an inseparable disciplinary hidden technology of the liberal state, the prison cell has reached a place that no one seems to have a sign of how to abolish it because it is already perceived as the only solution. Thus, I question: have humans become even crueler than they used to be? Or is it simply that we have become so entrenched to technological advances that it has blinded us to believe otherwise? So, are there no possibilities that we could ever live in a society like ours without prisons?
The Mega Superstructures: From the Industrious Disciplinary City-State to the Urban Society and the Society of Control in the Age of Cybernetics:

By the end of the last century the USA became the spin-off of a sophisticated system of urban plans and governmental strategies. Henri Lefebvre in 1970 pointed out this phenomenon in his book The Urban Revolution, as the transition from which the rural and city life would endure a paradigm shift. Cities not only would become the centers of commerce, industrial and lavish human activities but also serve as a managerial entity for the state and global multinationals that could maneuver and entrust power to its borders. In this process for example, the American society as a whole would convert into an urban society in which each part of its federal power (juridical, economical, political, educational and so on) would be transferred into every state, county, city, town, and institutions.

In all, the city became the plan of a 'compulsory' and 'contractual social order'. Each City-State is now the reciprocal order of an advanced capitalist nation. The division of labor is practiced at every cog in the wheel. Life in every aspect is stratified and enclosed around a set of spatial and social regulatory domains (roads, homes, parks, institutions, neighborhoods, districts, regions, race, demographics…). The social establishment – the institutions in everyday sense of the term and its social (managerial) bourgeois class – now plays a considerable role in transferring power through social norms, disciplinary measures and penal codes. Societies like the U.S., Germany and France have shifted rationality of government towards being "of all and of each". This has meant that now we are in a state of governmentality that it is carried out through a "totalizing" and "individualizing" approach.

Last but not the least, in the present terrain (1970-2050), the disciplinary machine of the nation-state occupies an expansive territory. It is not only centered on an executive, legislative and military branch as the impenetrable pillars of power and is not only concerned with the acquisition of more territory (realized as an imperial power, war machine) but it is concerned with an amorphous dimension to its boundaries. Its internal borders are delineated, but they are no longer always legible.

Therefore, sometimes we may not notice the punitive antics of this colossal architectural nightmare because the privileges and embellishments that this capitalist social order may offer to fulfill humans’ desires may blind us, yet everyone and anyone can be caught in the matrix of domination deeply rooted in this social-political-technological-urban fabric, system, matrix. Then the *invisible punishing machine* is just that. It is an intangible colossal space, a kind of mega superstructure, which can be seen, exposed and experienced in pieces, through maps and schemes. Or it can emerge from its colossal architectural scale in the body through stigmas, marks, identifications, and classifications. In this sense it is an individualizing and totalizing machine composed of a network that replicates under distinct differences, though these are hard to decipher, because there are millions of subsections replicating all around us. In every institution, town, city, county and state we are now bound to norms, rules, laws and policies. This exercise and mighty power is what it is in all of us and each of us.
SUMMER TRIP: The Genesis of an Idea

In the summer of 2010 in my trip to California and coming back to MIT, MA. I had a very interesting revelation. As I mentioned in my introduction, I didn't really know what it all meant, but intuitively I knew this was important. Now that I am almost finishing this written thesis, I want to introduce you briefly to each of these spaces and briefly share with you an update about what I am doing or I am learning about them in the context of this colossal architectural nightmare.
In my journey I had to use different identification cards in order to enter from one place to the next one. Without them, I don't know what would have done.

Source: Author
The Journey
My trip started in Cambridge Massachusetts on June 20th of 2010. I took the train, and halfway to the city of Toledo, in Upstate New York, the Immigration Naturalization Service (INS) stopped the train. We were probably held for about 30 minutes. I arrived at the city of Toledo in early morning, and then I transferred to a bus. After 2 hours we arrived at Detroit. I stayed there for about 10 days. I attended the USA Social Forum and spent time with all kinds of wonderful people. I left Detroit in the early afternoon of June 29th and at the airport I had to go through another INS checkpoint. I arrived at the San Francisco Airport later that evening. During my vacation, I visited friends and family regularly, and my brother every other weekend. Every time I visited him I had to show my identification card and go through a metal detector twice (once as I entered the facility and once as I left.) I was also invited to survey Alcatraz Island. I also needed to show my California ID. On August 8th, I was back to school in Massachusetts but as often in my trip I had to use my student ID to enter in most of the secured places.

The following 4 spaces are the 4 encounters that I witnessed during the summer and are the manifestation of this colossal architectural nightmare:
Roxbury - Boston, MA / via Detroit, MI
During the USA Social Forum 2010 in Detroit MI, I met the Boston Workers Alliance – a group of workers, and prison-activists from Roxbury – who live and work in one of the oldest neighborhoods of Boston. Roxbury has had a long civic history of unrest and work against slavery, racism, poverty/joblessness and housing inequality. But in their efforts to change their lives today, members of this organization in 2005 put forward the campaign to Reform the CORI law of Massachusetts. Generally, the campaign is to stop the discrimination against workers with criminal records and help them obtain decent jobs to improve their lives. One of their initiatives is to Ban the Box, which is the colloquial term to remove the criminal record check box in job applications. Also this campaign is to help stop the indiscriminate use of the CORI to assess employability. So far, they were able to modify the law in 2010 in the state of Massachusetts but they have a long way to enforce the modifications Statewide and change them nationally.

60 In 2005 the CORI Reform Committee was form. http://bostonworkersalliance.org/?page_id=1118
61 CORI law is the Criminal Offender Record Information that is administered by the CHSB, which was renamed to the Department of Criminal Justice Information Services (DCJIS) and agency of the Department of Public Health from the Homeland Security Department. In MA: http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=ropsagencylanding&L=3&L=Home&L1=Public+Safety+Agencies&L2=Department+of+Criminal+Justice+Information+Services+%28DCJIS%29&aid=Eeops
62 In 2010 the CORI law in the state of Massachusetts changed. Source: http://www.masslegalservices.org/node/34468
Similar to the Boston Workers Alliance who is doing work to Ban the Box, is the organization *All of Us or None*. They are located in the cities of San Francisco and Oakland in the San Francisco Bay Area - CA. The organization also consists of workers and prison-activists who are strongly committed to change the system. Interestingly I witnessed when these two organizations met for the first time at the USA Social Forum. I was truly overwhelmed by the encounter because this meant that groups from the East Coast and the West Coast were organizing against the injustices that for decades have been affecting communities all over the country. It was a surprising sign of hope.
Figure 47 – Digital Collage. 2010 | Roxbury in the city of Boston, MA – Source: Author

Figure 48 – Digital Collage. 2010 – Source: Author
California State Prison
the places my brother is forced to call his home.
After my brother was placed in solitary confinement at the
CSP-Corcoran he was transferred to the California State
Prison of Sacramento CSP-SAC. As of today he is still
living in this place and surviving the effects of isolation.
While in custody at Corcoran he wrote me a letter about 2
months before he was transferred to Sacramento in 2008. I
have used this letter twice, one for the “You and Me” project
in 2008 and lately for a live action I did for the exhibition
Home for the Holidays on January 7th and 8th 2011 at the
Lost Coast Culture Machine in Fort Bragg, CA (See figure
52). At this exhibition, under the alias of the Counter
Narrative Society, I did two consecutive days of One-on-
One Guided Conversations with The Weight I Carry with 
Me63.

For these conversations, I used the Sensible Housing Unit,
and a variety of visual materials to share my stories with
participants.

Here is a couple of photographs that chronicles my journey
during that winter.

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63 ... when the invisible punishing machine is everywhere... The Weight I Carry with Me. This is a long-term project and an aspect is to organize one-on-one guided conversations with the material weight to shed light about the effects of invisible punishments and torture. So far, I had conversations with various individuals in informal and formal locations in Cambridge MA, and Fort Bragg, CA. From these conversations, I have learned that as participants share their personal stories and philosophical views, they also exchange information, coping mechanisms, ideas for remedies and an understanding of historical traumas, state violence, human cruelty, and the injustices that are woven into the social and spatial fabric of the USA. For more information about this work visit this link: http://thecounternarrativesociety.org/home/the-weight-carry-with-me/ephemeral-encounters-and-actions/one-on-one-conversations/
From the city of San Francisco was 4 hrs round trip to visit my brother at CSP-SAC - Source: Author

He is in A7-224 and his CDC#: K34346 - Source: Author
Figure 51 – Digital Google Maps, 2010 | CSP – SAC | Bunks A – Source: Author
Figure 52 – Installation and objects including an audio file of Jose’s letter recorded with the Voice by Joel Dean Stockdill, 2010. – Source: Author

Figure 53 – Left and Above: Pages from the Booklet I designed for the exhibition portion of the long-term project The Weight I Carry Me. It was presented on January 2011 for the exhibition Home for the Holidays at the Lost Coast Culture Machine – Source: Author
Prisoner Hunger Strike – July 2011

Something amazing happened in the month of July. Prisoners from the Pelican Bay Prison (Super Maximum Security) initiated a Hunger Strike in collaboration with state and national organizations to demand basic human rights and expose the detrimental effects of solitary confinement. It lasted for 3 weeks and it may continue depending on the negotiations. This is a historic moment for this country because not since the Attica Rebellion 1971, have prisoners and their communities been able to reach this level of national and international attention. I mention this because it is going to be remembered for decades to come. Many believe that this is leading to something big.

Website:
http://prisonerhungerstrikesolidarity.wordpress.com/
Online news:

The Real News – July 15, 2011
Ongoing Hunger Strike at Pelican Bay Prison
Source: http://youtu.be/WqeziRRKtRk

Democracy Now – July 15, 2011
Protests Grow in Solidarity With California Prisoners As Hunger Strikes Enters Third Week
Source: http://youtu.be/nbf8WXO5aMM

Incarcerated in California:

Hispanics/Latinos – 38%
Blacks – 29%
Whites – 27%
Other – 6%

Source: CDCR Quarterly 2007 Facts and Figures
Alcatraz Island – CA
In addition, historical sites are a way we learn about the law and the government too. For example, in the Alcatraz Island, park rangers oversee and teach multiple historical facets. They offer a myriad of ways to learn about the harsh life behind prison bars and for those who had administered this Federal Prison, Military Prison and Harbor.

Interestingly, when I visited the island last summer it made me wonder what is the hidden story behind the rigid brutal architecture. Who were the people that once suffered the pain of this cavernous place? I don’t think we will ever know, but we can try to ask those individuals who had survived incarceration in maximum-security prisons. I think that’s something for the future.

In the meantime, I will be presenting a multimedia performance / installation on this site. It is going to be in the hospital of the prison. I am going to be unpacking The Weight I Carry with Me⁶⁴ which is my long-term art project I have been developing and adapting in various sites and situations. For this facet of the project, which will take place

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⁶⁴ See pg. 162-163
between the 21-23 of October; I am going to present a multifaceted performance, which I am tentatively calling "I thought I've seen Humans... Unpacking an Intangible Weight". The title is in part inspired by the Harun Faroki film-essay "I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts" 2000. This work is an interesting depiction and conceptual work about how security technology interferes and interfaces in the everyday life of prisoners, relatives, their captors and us as the viewers. While the work presents interesting questions about the invisible punishing machine as a surveillance apparatus, I think my work will bring up an interesting insight that his piece misses. By naming the individuals who are incarcerated as convicts he leaves little transformative room for the viewer to have any agency. For example, the word convict in "I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts" is already an object of desire to latch on to. In my proposed work the title "I Thought I've Seen Humans"... suggest that prisoners are perceived as sub-humans in our society but I am challenging that notion. Therefore, "I Thought I've Seen Humans"... is a way to dig deep into my psychology and unpack an intangible weight.

In addition, "I thought I've seen Humans" places my body as a kind of trans-human/post-human that by chance has witnessed the invisible punishing machine and now is transposed into the hospital because it is a wounded witness that has a chance to share her intangible story.

In combination with sound, video and a light material weight I am going to try to construct an insightful performance para-fiction with my stories and body, the metaphysical qualities of the hospital and the rigid materiality that was used in the construction of this place. One goal will be to hint at how the hospital in its construction and design is a place where humans are held and live.

Second, when I say, "I have seen humans", I am deliberately questioning: who are we now? For example, could the wounded witness tell her stories about what happens to us when someone is in a hospital? How do we listen to that person as opposed to if the same person was in a courtroom?
Figure 55 – Digital Google Image. 2010 | Hospital Cell/Room, Alcatraz Island – Source: Author

Figure 56 – Digital Photograph. 2010 | Hospital Cell/Room, Alcatraz Island – Source: Author
The Sublime Neoliberal State at MIT.

In my search for the invisible punishing machine, it is interesting to see that the academic world is so thoroughly meshed with the corporate and the governmental. And many of these educational institutions have a sublime role in the punitive enterprise. For example, MIT and Stanford have built their wealth and prestige based on the partnership with government agencies and officials during the Cold War (Leslie 1993). Under the auspices of the Pentagon and the National Science Endowment, much of their research has focused on the development of security technology, which is been used for war and law enforcement efforts. For example, during the Cold War, MIT was one of the few universities that provided substantial scientific research in communication, surveillance and informational analysis. MIT in 2002 has received a considerable amount of money to launch the Institute for Soldier Nanotechnologies. Here is an article published on May 2004 on Forbes.com:

"As the casualty count rises in Iraq, the safety of our soldiers is paramount in the minds of defense researchers. Nowhere is that more evident than at the Institute for Soldier Nanotechnologies, established at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2002 with a
five-year, $50 million grant from the U.S. Army. The ISN
is a unique undertaking. It pulls together 44 MIT faculty
and more than 100 students and postdoctoral
researchers to interact with the Army and industrial
partners. The ISN officially opened its doors last May,
and I expect that this new incubator will bring important
lifesaving improvements to military science. It’s all part of
the Army’s Objective Force Warrior (OFW) program,
which recognizes that despite developments in weapons,
tanks and planes, a soldier’s uniform essentially hasn’t
changed in the last 100 years.

The OFW’s goal is “to create a lightweight,
overwhelmingly lethal, fully integrated individual combat
system.” What does that mean? Well, for starters, the
average soldier today can carry up to 130 pounds on a
march. Some call it the “Christmas tree” effect, where the
Army keeps adding new things to the soldier’s load.
Ideally, all of those items could be lightened, combined or
integrated.” – Josh Wolfe.

In reflecting on the nation’s international and domestic
undertakings in the recent decade, there is a serious push
by the right and conservative left parties to stay in the
business of war and policing. In an interview with Michael
Moore in the documentary South of the Borders, George
Bush explicitly made a remark that military expenditure was
necessary. It keeps the economy afloat. For example, at
the time the Institute for Soldiers Nanotechnologies was
formed, officials from the Bush administration were already
preparing for the preemptive war against Iraq.

formed the meaning and mission of postwar American science. MIT
emerged from the war as the country’s largest university defense con-
tactor, consolidated its lead in the postwar years, and has never been
seriously challenged since. Stanford, a benchmark in World War II,
learned from MIT’s experiences and used postwar defense con-
tacts to propel itself from a respected regional university into a sci-
ence and engineering all-star. By 1967 Stanford had climbed to third
on the defense contracting list34 and to the top of the national rank-
ings in electrical engineering.

Figure 58 – Digital Collage. 2010 | Maki Building at MIT – Source: Author
Another project that caught my attention was The Urban Internet of Things. Early in November 2010 Carlo Ratti, director of the SENSEable City Lab at MIT, presented a sexy visualization of an array of projects. The project states, “As more people move to cities, it is becoming increasingly challenging to design infrastructures that efficiently support the many changing needs of its inhabitants. New modalities will need to be developed to deliver services such as transportation, healthcare, education or public safety in a timely manner for more people in urban areas that are growing both in size and complexity. Cities are now being blanketed by systems and networks driven by digital data in real-time.”

In this vision, the city plan, human activities and information technology are merging. This is similar to the dominant design of the last century, characterized by the High Modernist urban plans where human life was reduced to work, living and playing on the grids. Today in the 21st Century, this new kind of vision alludes to another authoritarian mega design. In this one, the high modernist space, the urban society and the cyberspace are becoming a three-dimensional space, functioning as both subliminal and mortifying nebulous mega spaces where the question of “Security, Territory and Population” are reinvented, deified and contested at colossal scales. There is no doubt that this country has always been involved in the investment of its military power but what is going to be the biggest challenge is how these capital gains for those involved in the military-industrial-complex and the prison-industrial complex are going to take shape in the decade to come.

Figure 59 - Source: SENSEable City Lab. MIT (image from wikicity project)


67 Michel Foucault.
Figure 60 - My ID card, which I carried in my wallet provided me access to ACT's graduate studios and various facilities of the university. It is a security-computerized system that doesn't depend on security guards, but it does alert the police of any abnormality 24/7. I probably used my card more than 20 times on any 24-hour day. I used it to go to the bathroom, classrooms, and elevators and to enter after business hours, and so on. I can only use my ID for as long as I am a student paying for my tuition. As alumnae, I may have privileges to fewer secure areas of MIT. – Source: Author
MIT 150 Year

It is interesting to think about how my school has survived so many decades and has also been one of the leading universities in the world to train top scientists and scholars. In fact, on a video that addresses the MIT community in early Fall 2010, President Susan Hopkins delivered an astounding speech in regards to the history and importance of the Institute to our nation. The speech was short and embodied the strength and long lasting commitment to scholarship. However, it was unanticipated to me that in between the lines of her inspirational words there was also something menacing, which I have not heard before with so much certitude and assurance. As I paid close attention to her speech, I realized how important this school is in promoting and training us as another kind of civil agent for the Global Enterprise. The following pictures are excerpts from a short video I made in response to her speech. It is entitled “What she said, what I did” and is a video intervention on her speech. It highlights some of those alarming words about how MIT is another important instrument of governmentality.
Another New Order

Rant by the CNS – Nov. 2010

By 2001, the USA was on a treacherous path. The Homeland Security Act was unanimously passed by Congress. It was the third militaristic plan in the history of this country to unify all sorts of public safety institutions. This meant that in every way the country was constructing a moralistic-cybernetic-prison-militaristic-academic-urban-industrial complex. But how did it get to be this way?

At the national level, in 1960, Dwight D. Eisenhower, was the first to address the nation and warned us of the existence of the military-industrial-complex. He saw that if we were not careful and judicious, this was going to lead to the downfall our democracy. By the 1980’s, Gilles Deleuze identified how the ‘disciplinary society’ (Foucault) coupled with the ‘urban revolution’ (Lefebvre) of the previous decades was being replaced by the ‘society of control’. In the same decade Angela Davis noted in one of her speeches on the ‘prison industrial complex’ and explained how the juridical system was entrusted to a corporate and militaristic system. Donna Harraway warned us of the ‘informatics and matrix of domination’. She and others saw that cyber-technology is another form of control if we aren’t equipped to know them. The following decade in the 90’s, Stuart M. Leslie also warned us of the academic-military-complex of the Cold War. He shows how the Pentagon and universities like MIT and Stanford and many others around the country merge to become a mighty, inseparable friend of the state and Defense Department. Post-911, by the end of 2010, the USA has invested trillions of dollars in scientific research and military security technology.

At the micro-political level of life in the USA, in the 70’s, social theorists like Ervin Goffman identified how ‘total institutions’ (Prisons, schools and the like) have a direct effect on the personal identity of individuals. From the 70’s and onward, the War on Drugs and Tough on Crime policies of law enforcement hit home. Thousand of individuals, particularly the poor and undocumented have been under attack. By the 90’s, David Garland and many others scholars are finding that the height of mass imprisonments has reached a detrimental stage in society. By 2010 this social issue is forecasted to not change any time soon. The continuing persecution of millions of individuals will continue to stagger. In one of his controversial essays Loic Wacquant, says that the prisons and ghettos/inner cities and borders are becoming a matrix of domination for the sole purpose to control the surplus population.
CONCLUSIONS
About the Process

Initially writing this thesis was a dreadful process because I didn’t know how to simplify all my thoughts and experiences with defining and explaining the invisible punishing machine. Yet in the process it has been an amazing experience and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to invest this much time in a complex subject. But, I also recognized that this initial proposition is extensive and far from conclusive. There are many fluid and bumping areas, which in the future I hope to connect in some way or another through writing and/or artistic works. But at the moment, one interesting thought that has come to light from all of this existential, artistic and intellectual unpacking is how I have learned so much about what I was looking for in my residency as a graduate at the ACT program. In the process I have discovered some valuable gems that I would like to address.

One of the gems is finding a voice that is imperfect for the academic standard but it is voice nonetheless which makes me feel very damn good. Learning to communicate through prose and a visual/experiential language is hard, but it also brings a lot of joy in me. Then, in this context, what is an artistic research when there are no defined standards that are bound? (Well except that we needed to write a thesis book in some academic fashion.)

Bounding together a thesis statement academically and artistically has been a challenging process: spiritually, scientifically. Many colleagues have taken an analytical approach for their thesis book; others have developed a conceptual work or those like myself have decided to combine them; I feel very good about the outcome.

What I like about this process is how in articulating a linguistic proposition, I am able to look back in this thesis book and realized how much one can carry in ones being (conscience, memory, and cognitive self). Literally, I am amazed of myself about how many ideas, stories and feelings I have embodied. What it is interesting is how I learned to systematize the process of inquiry from my cognitive self. I have made several breakthroughs about my unconscious knowledge and the way that knowledge is embodied in both material and immaterial ways. The process has helped me identify and explore the incongruence of the analytical, the fictional, the real and the poetic writing process, which has been always a challenge for me.
Lastly, what happens to the *invisible punishing machine*? Can it be abolished, subverted, changed, and reformed?

Well, I guess, it depends on how the *invisible punishing machine* is defined. If the question is how this peculiar machine is in part the prison/judicial/military system, I think it can be said that mostly it has been an expansive and costly human experiment. The invention of the prison cell in particular I would say is an institution that deserves our attention because it has a direct cause and effect on our society. How prisons are built and managed is an important factor, because it demonstrates that at a human scale, the system is a failure. When people like me have had to resort to paying thousands of dollars to attend a school so I can figure out how the machine has affected me, it is important to recognize that beyond the monetary value, there is a valuable insight. The valuable insight being that my single story that had an impact in my consciousness, can help those in similar situations and those who don't know anyone who is incarcerated.

If the question is about how humans segment spaces and the social body hierarchically, we will need to ask how can we form societies that don't depend on the enslavement of humans.

If the *invisible punishing machine* refers to the existing matrix of information that has been laid across urban society, we will need to ask ourselves how can it be understood and infiltrated.
Few Paradoxical and Interrogative Remedies for the Near Future
2

100 Ways to Abolish the Machine®
But also in the Meantime I

HOPE THAT EVEN within the crevices of this infringed democratic establishment, we find instances of absolute mass liberation...
Otherwise, I am going to continue to improve the Racial Pre-Filing Vest\(^68\) to avoid detection...

\(^68\) The racial Pre_Filing Vest is a protective performable vest made out of recyclable fabric that contains essential information for individuals who are, on a yearly, weekly or even daily basis, a target of "racial profiling". The vest is a type of protective synthetic body extension that serves as a portable civic information center and community empowerment tool. As an information center, the Racial Pre_Filing Vest introduces users to their constitutional rights, to the meaning and brief history of "racial profiling", and most importantly, includes a cautionary guide as to how to avoid being unduly targeted under the current United States' law enforcement and juridical system for reasons related to race, ethnicity or physical appearance. The interactive piece also has a state of the art "invisible racial deterrent device" that block(s) digital devices capable of identifying people by their race, class, age or "erasing" them by their ethnic group. Source: http://thecounternarrativesociety.org/home/the-weight-i-carry-with-me/?material-weight/racial-pre_filing-vest/
...And to unpack The Weight I Carry with Me

...Fieldwork, Survival Kits, Conversation Pieces, Installations, Ephemeral Encounters and Actions to transform the weight I carry from witnessing and studying the invisible punishing machine...

With the Counter Narrative Society I am developing a multifaceted long-term dialogical fieldwork called ...when the invisible punishing machine is everywhere...The Weight I Carry with Me. It consists of organizing nomadic encounters and creating para-fictional actions as paradoxical remedies to intimately interrogate how invisible punishment, alienation and social-urban control in the terrain of the USA has affected my family, my friends, me and the community at large who have suffered the invisible effects of state control, incarceration and inequality. In other words, it is a kind of counter narrative that seeks to transform the weight I carry from studying and witnessing the invisible punishing machine that resides deep inside and all around me.

Documentation and media about this project included in CD. Also available at this source: http://thecounternarrativesociety.org/home/the-weight-i-carry-with-me/
that feels like a colossal architectural nightmare.
What are your conclusions?

You can email them to me at the:

Artistic Research Unit
Counter Narrative Society (CNS)
info@thecounternarrativesociety.org
You can write your insightful ideas here in these pages. –
Thank You
Acknowledgements

My deepest thanks goes to each one of you for believing in this work, the hours you spent talking to me, for the company and advise.

Joshua Short
Miriam Alfaro
Jose Negrete
Ute Meta Bauer
Grey Gundaker
Praba Pilar
Beth Coleman
Mark Almanza
Marguerite Davenport
Katherine Connell
Mary Ann Brooks
Flora Compay
Gina Badger
John Hulsey
Narda Alvarado
Genevieve Munsey
Scott Berzofsky
Ian Wojtowicz
Sarah Witt
Krzysztof Wodiczko
Joan Jonas
Antoni Muntadas
Pelin Tan
Nitin Sawhney
Angel Nevarrez
Gediminas Urbonas
Wendy Jacobs
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THE MECHANICAL, BIOLOGIZING AND CYBERNETIC VISIONS OF SOCIETY:


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## TABLE OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 1</td>
<td>OBJECTS OF MY FIRST BUNDLE: SENSIBLE HOUSING UNIT WITH BROCHURE; MY BROTHER'S SHIRT; TRAVEL LOG; ADJUSTABLE STRAP WITH SAFE PINS / OCTOBER 2010 - SOURCE: AUTHOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 2</td>
<td>MAKING MY BUNDLE IN MY STUDIO/OFFICE / OCTOBER 2010 - SOURCE: AUTHOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 3</td>
<td>UNPACKING MY FIRST BUNDLE IN THE ACT VENUS LAB, E14-140 / OCTOBER 2010 - SOURCE: AUTHOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 4</td>
<td>UNPACKING THE SHU (SENSIBLE HOUSING UNIT) AND AUDIENCES HEARING A 10 MINUTES SUMMER STORY AT THE ACT VENUS LAB, E14-140 / OCTOBER 2010 - SOURCE: AUTHOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 5</td>
<td>CLOCKWISE THE SPACES INCLUDED IN THE TRAVEL LOG: ALCATRAZ ISLAND, MIT, ROXBURY, CSP-SAC / DIGITAL DESIGN / OCTOBER 2010 - SOURCE: AUTHOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 6</td>
<td>WOUNDED WITNESS, 2009 / CLOSE-UP OF PROJECTED IMAGE ON WALL AND CHAIR ON THE GROUND / INSTALLATION AND DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH - SOURCE: AUTHOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 7</td>
<td>SKETCH OF MY INITIAL IDEAS / FALL 2009 - SOURCE: AUTHOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 8</td>
<td>CALIFORNIA STATE PRISON-CORCORAN, 2007 / DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH - SOURCE: AUTHOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 9</td>
<td>PG. 48. THE INMATE / PUBLIC ACTION IN SAN FRANCISCO FEB. 2007 - SOURCE: AUTHOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 10</td>
<td>THE INMATE, 2007 / PUBLIC ACTION / SAN FRANCISCO, CA - SOURCE: AUTHOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 11</td>
<td>THE INMATE, 2007 / UNION SQUARE / SAN FRANCISCO, CA - SOURCE: AUTHOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 12</td>
<td>THE INMATE, 2007 / ON THE 14 MUNI BUSES / SAN FRANCISCO, CA - SOURCE: AUTHOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 14</td>
<td>PLAIN HUMAN, WEAR ORANGE FOR A DAY: PRISONER AWARENESS CAMPAIGN, MARCH 11 2008 / ACTION IN FRONT OF THE SAN FRANCISCO CITY HALL, CA - SOURCE: AUTHOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 15</td>
<td>YOU AND ME, 2008 / INSTALLATION DETAILS / SAN FRANCISCO, CA - SOURCE: AUTHOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 16</td>
<td>YOU AND ME, 2008 / WRITING MY LETTER / SAN FRANCISCO, CA - SOURCE: AUTHOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 17</td>
<td>YOU AND ME, 2008 / ETCHING JOSE'S LETTER ON THE WALL / SAN FRANCISCO, CA - SOURCE: AUTHOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 18</td>
<td>CALIFORNIA STATE PRISON, SACRAMENTO / AERIAL VIEW 2010 - SOURCE: CCR ONLINE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 19</td>
<td>MIT / GOOGLE AERIAL VIEW 2011 - SOURCE: AUTHOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 20</td>
<td>MIT MAIN CAMPUS / PHOTOGRAPH - SOURCE: <a href="HTTP://ERICSSCHMIDL.COM">HTTP://ERICSSCHMIDL.COM</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 25</td>
<td>PHOTOGRAPH FROM SKETCHES 2009-2011 - SOURCE: ARTIST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 26</td>
<td>PHOTOGRAPH FROM SKETCHES 2009-2011 - SOURCE: ARTIST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 28</td>
<td>LA POCHA NOSTRA. EX-CENTRIS - SOURCE: ONLINE PHOTO © MANUEL VASON, 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 29</td>
<td>ADRIAN PIPER, FUNK LESSONS, 1983 / 00:15:17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HTTP://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=XNDGHWPUMDC

FIGURE 30 | BOOK COVER | DIGITAL COPY FROM DAMILA AYO'S WEBSITE | SOURCE: RENT-A-NEGRO.COM 83
FIGURE 31 – DETAIL OF MY WALL IN MY STUDIO IN THE CUBE AT MIT ACT / SPRING 2010 – SOURCE: AUTHOR 84
FIGURE 32 | ACROSS | THE PANEL I USED FOR THE EXPERIMENT INDECENT ACT 1 IN 2010 | SOURCE: ARTIST 86
FIGURE 33 | DETAIL FROM THE OBJECTS I USED FOR THE EXPERIMENT INDECENT ACT 1 IN 2010 | SOURCE: AUTHOR 88
FIGURE 34 – DETAIL OF THE PANEL I USED FOR THE EXPERIMENT INDECENT ACT 2 IN THE SPRING 2010 – SOURCE: AUTHOR 89
FIGURE 35 – MY TEMPORARY ENTRANCE TO MY STUDIO WITH A QUOTE BY DR. M L KING JR. / SPRING 2011 / MIT ACT – SOURCE: AUTHOR 90
FIGURE 36 – DJ-DUO SKINNE NATION PREPARING FOR A 10 MINUTE PRESENTATION. MAY 2010 – SOURCE: AUTHOR 108
FIGURE 40 – ILLUSTRATION OF MOUNT VERNON – SOURCES: ONLINE MONTICELLO ESTATE & GARDENS 127
FIGURE 42 – THE JAIL, PHILADA. / MALCOM DELT. ET SC. BY MALCOLM, JAMES PELLER, 1767-1815. – SOURCE:


FIGURE 44 – DIGITAL COLLAGE. 2010 | IN MY JOURNEY I HAD TO USE DIFFERENT IDENTIFICATIONS CARDS IN ORDER TO ENTER FROM ONE PLACE TO THE NEXT ONE. WITHOUT THEM, I DON'T KNOW WHAT WOULD HAVE DONE. – SOURCE: AUTHOR 136
FIGURE 46 – DIGITAL PHOTO. 2010 – SOURCE: ONLINE HTTP://BOSTONWORKERSALLIANCE.ORG/ 140
FIGURE 47 – DIGITAL COLLAGE. 2010 | ROXBURY IN THE CITY OF BOSTON, MA – SOURCE: AUTHOR 141
FIGURE 48 – DIGITAL COLLAGE. 2010 – SOURCE: AUTHOR 141
FIGURE 49 – DIGITAL COLLAGE. 2010 | FROM THE CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO WAS 4HRS ROUND TRIP TO VISIT MY BROTHER AT CSP-CORCORAN – SOURCE: AUTHOR 144
FIGURE 51 – DIGITAL GOOGLE MAPS, 2010 | CSP – SAC | BUNKS A – SOURCE: AUTHOR 145
FIGURE 52 – INSTALLATION AND OBJECTS INCLUDING AN AUDIO FILE OF JOSE’S LETTER RECORDED WITH THE VOICE BY JOEL DEAN STOCKDILL. 2010. – SOURCE: AUTHOR 146
FIGURE 54 – DIGITAL COLLAGE. 2010 | VISITING ALCATRAZ ISLAND – SOURCE: AUTHOR 150
FIGURE 55 – DIGITAL GOOGLE IMAGE. 2010 | HOSPITAL CELL/ROOM, ALCATRAZ ISLAND – SOURCE: AUTHOR 152
FIGURE 56 – DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH. 2010 | HOSPITAL CELL/ROOM, ALCATRAZ ISLAND – SOURCE: AUTHOR 152
FIGURE 57 – DIGITAL COLLAGE. 2010 | FROM HOME TO MIT ON BICYCLE WAS A 12 MINUTES RIDE – SOURCE: AUTHOR 154
FIGURE 58 – DIGITAL COLLAGE. 2010 | MAKI BUILDING AT MIT – SOURCE: AUTHOR 155
FIGURE 59 – SOURCE: SENSEABLE CITY LAB. MIT (IMAGE FROM WIKICITY PROJECT) 156
FIGURE 60 – MY ID CARD, WHICH I CARRIED IN MY WALLET PROVIDED ME ACCESS TO ACT'S GRADUATE STUDIOS AND VARIOUS FACILITIES OF THE UNIVERSITY. IT IS A SECURITY-COMPUTERIZED SYSTEM THAT DOESN'T DEPEND OF SECURITY GUARDS, BUT IT DOES ALERTS THE POLICE OF ANY ABNORMALITY 24/7. I PROBABLY USED MY CARD MORE THAN 20 TIMES ON ANY 24 HOURS DAY. I USED IT TO GO TO THE BATHROOM, CLASSROOMS, AND ELEVATORS AND TO ENTER AFTER BUSINESS HOURS, AND SO ON. I CAN ONLY USE MY ID FOR AS LONG AS I AM A STUDENT PAYING FOR MY TUITION. AS ALUMNAAE, I MAY HAVE PRIVILEGES TO A FEWER Secure AREAS OF MIT. – SOURCE: AUTHOR 157
FIGURE 61 – WHAT SHE SAID! WHAT I DID! VIDEO CLIPS FROM VIDEO-INTERVENTION | NOV. 2010 © CNS – SOURCE: AUTHOR 158
FIGURE 62 – REHEARSALS FOR FUTURE ACTIONS: PREPARING MY BUNDLE. 2011 | SOURCE: AUTHOR 170
FIGURE 63 – REHEARSALS FOR FUTURE ACTIONS: THE INTERVIEW AND SIT-IN. 2011 | SOURCE: AUTHOR 171
FIGURE 64 – PART 2 - THE SIT-IN. 2011 | VIDEO: (00:02:08) | HTTP://YOUTUBE/AJJF0R52YYE – SOURCE: AUTHOR 171