How What We Ask Shapes What We Can Imagine: De-Coupling Design and Punishment

Shana Agid[1] (iD)

Abstract

The notion that policing and incarceration are permanent and necessary, if in need of reform or more "humane" design, guides contemporary practices of making in a range of design fields and, increasingly, designers' forays into policy- and government service-making. These projects often take the form of spatial interventions and proposals for new jails, police stations, and, in some cases, the reorganization of the spaces around them. This article examines three projects—Chicago's Polis Station, the New York City Justice Hubs, and the Oakland Power Projects—that contend with the infrastructure of the prison industrial complex, in part by asking people questions about policing and incarceration to envision what to build. Here, I focus on what shaped these questions, and how the questions in turn shaped the possibilities for design that emerged from them, in ways that matter deeply to the imbrication of architecture, design, and punishment.

Keywords

prison industrial complex, racism, policing, jails, design research, abolition

Introduction

In 2015, following the 2014 police killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner (and others) and the uprisings that followed, the architecture firm Studio Gang developed a project that sought to engage "a renewed national conversation on policing reform" by asking "how design can help people imagine changes in police-community relations" (Studio Gang Architects, 2015, p. 5). The resulting proposal, Polis Station, debuted at that year's Chicago Architecture Biennial. In Polis Station, Studio Gang argues that "police stations be reoriented toward their communities and become sites of social connection where officers and neighborhood residents can find many opportunities to interact" (5). Using the May 2015 report issued by U.S. President Barack Obama's Task Force on 21st-Century Policing as a design brief, they sought to turn attention to spatial "possibilities" through reimagining the design of the police station and its relationship to the neighborhood. Studio Gang used interviews, census data, and geographic information system (GIS)-based analysis to identify areas in Chicago, Illinois with open space adjacent to existing police stations, schools, parks, and amenities that could be part of a design proposal. The

[1]Parsons School of Design, The New School, New York City, USA

Corresponding Author:
Shana Agid, Parsons School of Design, The New School, 2 West 13th Street, New York City, NY 10034, USA.
Email: agids@newschool.edu

architects selected the neighborhood of North Lawndale and the 10th District station to be their "case study" (Sisson, 2015; Studio Gang Architects, 2015).

As one component of their research, the design group held "one-on-one conversations with community leaders and public officials with strong ties to their neighborhoods," through which they got connected to more locals "each with a unique perspective on the spaces of policing" (Studio Gang Architects, 2015, p. 14). The firm organized a "community cafe," in which they asked people from neighborhood organizations and religious institutions, local young people, the 10th District police, and city planners and officials to reimagine the police station with them. They framed this process and conversation with three prompts: "What would a police station look like as a mixed-use facility?," "If the community designed a police station, what would it look like?," and "How does the station contribute to police and community relationships?" (p. 15). Through these conversations and other research, Studio Gang "began to speculate on the future of the 10th District and what the community of North Lawndale could look like" (p. 22).

The resulting proposal—a neighborhood-wide spread of police and policing institutions into multiple sites and buildings and the concurrent shifting of social support spaces and resources *into* spaces of policing—demonstrates the net effect of the questions Studio Gang asked and the frame into which answers could fit. The project's goal, to explore the "potential inherent in the physical spaces of policing. . .to rebuild trust that is sorely lacking between police officers and citizens" (Studio Gang Architects, 2015, p. 8), along with the designers' own interest in how design itself could facilitate these relationships, always imagined a *police station* and *policing* at the core of any possible designed outcome. In this way, the questions designers asked, and what could be made from them, presumed the centrality not only of policing to the health of the neighborhood but of the role of constant and ubiquitous *contact* as productive of better relations between police and residents. Indeed, Polis Station seeks to engender "positive interactions" in two ways: the "police station becomes a community center," and "police officers are 'atomized' and become part of the community" (Budds, 2015).

Scholar and activist Angela Y. Davis (2016) argues that not only are structures and systems of punishment, of which policing is one part, not inevitable, but treating them as if they are makes imagining otherwise impossible. In contrast to the Polis Station proposal, refusing the inevitability of carceral systems requires an engagement not only with processes related to "removing the[ir] material institutions or facilities," but with the "ideological and psychic" work of questioning what they are for, and what else might be possible (p. 22).

This article asks how increased discourse in public-interest design about the violence of policing and incarceration and the structures of the carceral state has led to design proposals for *enhanced* spaces to both police and cage people. Designers and other scholars internationally have proposed design as a means to learn about people's experiences in criminal legal systems and to generate "better" experiences and outcomes in them (Grant, 2016; Jewkes, 2018). Debates about the design of prisons, especially, contend with the global reach of the massive expansion of incarceration, exemplified and exported by the United States, and with responses to it (Grant & Jewkes, 2015; Jewkes & Moran, 2015; Johnston, 2006). These include initiatives to create jails and prisons that are "humane," often focused on perceived needs of specific groups of people, and policing systems that are "customer-focused" (Burrington, 2018b; Cairns, 2010; Grant & Hobbs, 2013; Jewkes et al., 2019; Ricci et al., 2017). These "modern" lock-ups (and policing strategies, as we'll see) are often designed to be "normalized" environments, with materials, configurations, and rules drawn from ostensibly non-carceral spaces. However, some researchers have argued that they rely on social and systemic control to manufacture compliance (Hancock & Jewkes, 2011; Reiter et al., 2018). The U.S.-based examples on which I focus, while definitively shaped by the U.S. context, share questions, references, and proposals that echo beyond their locales.

Here, I propose that the continued centering of the notion that policing and incarceration are public services that need to be better designed generates questions that can only expand systems

of control and confinement. It both limits what might be imagined through such projects—whether speculative or state-sponsored—and disregards organizing to abolish carceral structures and build other social systems, often led by the people most impacted by policing, incarceration, and borders. I argue that refusing the carceral and thinking beyond it, instead, can lead to fundamentally different questions and actions, and this foregrounds what those questions allow, or make untenable, in what we build.

To make this argument, I look at three projects led or joined by designers, and in which interviews, workshops, and other "community"-focused processes led to proposals for new systems and infrastructures. The first two projects, "Polis Station," a design studio-generated reimagining of the police station, introduced above, and "Justice Hubs," a city-funded process to design borough-based jails, both framed design as a tool for community-informed research and a means for generating improved proposals for the police station and the jail, respectively. I contrast these with the "Oakland Power Projects" (OPP), developed and led by Critical Resistance, a United States–based organization working to end the prison industrial complex.[1] OPP focused explicitly on identifying and growing resources that would contribute to making policing obsolete in Oakland, California. In these projects, those framing the work—whether designers, city government, local organizers, or others—began with a goal. These goals shaped the kinds of questions asked through each project in various ways: community-based forums or design workshops put these questions at the center of activities, researchers used those questions to guide and interpret data, the questions themselves led to determinations of who else was "expert" and might have information to share in relation to them. These questions, in turn, shaped what would be imagined, proposed, and made.

In what follows, I use two approaches to contextualize and analyze these projects and their significance for intersections of design and systems and spaces of punishment and control. One, I examine publicly available documentation and media coverage of Polis Station and the NYC Justice in Design team's Justice Hubs as a means of assessing the impetus, design process and questions, sociopolitical framework, and proposals as represented and described by designers in public-facing discourse. For Critical Resistance's Oakland Power Projects, on which I also worked as a design researcher and collaborator, I consider these same elements, but through a design-led research lens, building the analysis through reports, tools, and materials made and used in the process of our work together. Two, I contextualize the projects in relation to their broader social and political contexts. I close with three proposals for (re)orienting design work in relation to policing, jails, prisons, and other infrastructures of control and confinement.

The Stakes of Carceral Design

These projects took shape at a time when public conversations about policing and incarceration were shifting in the wake of protests and movements across the United States and globally in 2014 (and again in 2020). As is by now well known, the United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world; in 2020, 2.3 million people were locked up in an array of jails, prisons, detention centers, and other spaces of incarceration (Sawyer & Wagner, 2020) and over 6 million people were under some form of state control (The Sentencing Project, 2020). Racial disparities are consistently stark, with Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people disproportionately incarcerated compared both to numbers of white people inside and to overall population statistics. Women, especially women of color, are the fastest growing group of people in cages, a trend that is now decades-old (Sawyer & Wagner, 2020).

Pathways to jails, prisons, and other detention centers begin most often with police contact, and "racial disparities in prisons . . . can be traced back to policing" (Sawyer, 2020). This reflects the *risk* of regular contact with police—a goal shared, as we'll see, by Polis Station and the Justice Hubs—which increases the likelihood of being arrested or harmed in other ways, for

example, through harassment or physical violence (Herzing, 2015; Rios, 2011; Rivera et al., 2010). These impacts of policing led the American Public Health Association (APHA, 2018) to name law enforcement violence as a public health issue with short- and long-term effects on communities and neighborhoods targeted for intensive policing. Police harm Black people and other people of color at overwhelmingly higher rates than white people, who are less likely to face arrest, injury or death, or to report stress in interactions with police. It also has a disproportionate impacts for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer (LGBTQ) people, people experiencing houselessness, immigrants and migrants, sex workers, and people with mental health concerns (APHA, 2018). As noted above, policing and incarceration practices circulate globally. Police, while commonly understood to be expressly local, share training and strategy across countries' policing and military forces (Seigel, 2018). Since the 1990s, U.S.-honed practices have been exported world-wide by policing consultants (Burrington, 2018a, 2018b). And, incarceration and criminalization do not only affect people inside. Whole families, communities, and neighborhoods are drawn into their effects (Gilmore, 2007; Sawyer & Wagner, 2020), and people who have been in the system face restrictions on access to work, housing, family, and loved ones, and must bear the long-term stigma of conviction. These "afterlives of conviction" amount to a state of extended captivity (Burch, 2019) through restrictions on social life.

Many of the ideas foregrounded in the Polis Station and Justice Hubs proposals, including embedding social services in police and jail facilities and budgets, and creating "special" facilities and disciplinary structures for women and LGBTQ prisoners, have precursors in the now-long history of the contemporary prison industrial complex. But, as lawyer and organizer Rose Braz (2006) has argued, strategies like "gender responsiveness" fail "to challenge the notion of a prison as an institution that can effectively 'address the issues of women'" at all (p. 87), and instead increase the reach of imprisonment and erase other infrastructural and political possibilities. This is part of a broader shift of social services into the criminal legal system (Richie, 2012; Thuma, 2019). Scholars Rebecca Bohrman and Murakawa (2005) have shown that from 1960 to 2000, U.S. government funding and workers for the federal justice system expanded while funding and workers supporting income security declined (p. 110). Similarly, Rashad Shabazz (2015) shows how "political and epistemological shifts in planning and architecture, the emergence of an economy of punishment, and the ideological use of crime-fighting on the part of the state" in the latter part of the 20th century (p. 56) literally and ideologically embedded carceral practices in Chicago's Robert Taylor Houses. Designed in the 1950s and 1960s to house mostly Black Chicagoans in still-racially segregated parts of the city, Chicago's public housing became a "'hub' or network for relationships between carceral techniques and housing" (p. 57), drawing in police, prisons, surveillance technology, and more in the name of producing "safety" for residents.

As designers move increasingly into policy and government service-making, especially in relation to recent calls from multiple sectors for "reform," what and how designers are seeing, imagining, and proposing to *make* in relation to these and related systems matters.

Polis Station and Justice Hubs

Chicago, Illinois and New York City, New York are known for the scale and violence of their policing and incarceration infrastructures, as well as organized opposition to them. Chicago's Cook County Jail and New York City's Rikers Island Jail Complex are two of the largest jails in the U.S., with between roughly 8,500 and 9,500 residents locked up on any given day in the years when the projects discussed here were being shaped (Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, 2018; Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform, 2017). In both cities, how and how many people are locked up is impossible to consider separately from the contemporary and historical functions of policing, especially as it

targets Black, Brown, and other marginalized people. It is not surprising, then, that these contested sites and functions became the focus of independent designers, in Chicago, and for designer-led city planning, in New York, in the wake of national and local reckoning with policing and incarceration.

Polis Station and New York City's Justice Hubs emerged as design-led reform projects in 2015 and 2017, respectively. They share ideological framings and origin stories, practices of inquiry and "community" engagement, and types of designed outcomes, and emerged in this particular moment of mainstreamed responses to histories and effects of policing and incarceration. While in different cities and focused on different but related infrastructures, both are led by calls for reform that presume the ongoing necessity, and "improvement," of carceral institutions.

Origins and Framing

Polis Station, Studio Gang's proposal for a redesigned Chicago police station and neighborhood policing model, began as a query. The firm asked how they could use design knowledge, resources, and platforms to "imagine changes in police-community relations" (Studio Gang Architects, 2015, p. 5) following high-profile police killings in Missouri and New York, and global protests against them, in 2014. While this work was not commissioned by the city of Chicago, they worked closely with city officials, and based their overarching framework on recommendations stemming from the national Task Force on 21st-Century Policing, also produced in response to these incidents.[2] The project debuted at the 2015 Chicago Architecture Biennial with the simultaneous exhibition of the Polis Station design, a panel discussion on police reform, and the opening of a basketball half-court at the police station in North Lawndale, a prototype for the Polis Station concept.

Not long after, in New York, City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito echoed burgeoning local organizing to #CLOSErikers[3] in her 2016 State of the City address. She created the Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform, which recommended the closure of Rikers Island in their final report, "A More Just New York City." The Commission included designers who conducted research with people impacted by the jail system, including from communities of color recognized in the report as having experienced extensive harm there. The report proposed an ongoing role for designers in creating a "twenty-first century justice system" that "all New Yorkers can be proud of" (Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform, 2017, p. 3). Commission Chair, Hon. Jonathan Lippman, wrote, "We must replace our current model of mass incarceration with something that is more effective and more humane—state-of-the-art facilities located closer to where the courts are operated in civic centers in each borough" (Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform, 2017, p. 4). Building on (contested) assessments that Rikers' problems are in large part due to aging facilities and a "penal colony" approach in which jails are distant from neighborhoods, the city created the Justice in Design team to research and envision the new jails.

Both projects frame key foundations of their research processes and their resulting design plans around the idea of building proximity to "build trust." In Polis Station, designers proposed the police station itself, as well as other "physical spaces" of policing, as sites where trust might be increased by creating more contact between police and residents. In doing so, Studio Gang's design framing echoed a refrain familiar to the discourse on police reform: policing is "broken" because there is not enough trust between police and the people they police. The Justice Hub proposal builds specifically on this idea. The Commission proposes that "forging stronger bonds" between enforcement agencies like courts, police, prosecutors, and probation and "local residents" has been a cornerstone of "criminal justice reform," suggesting this strategy to spur

the changes for which they are calling at the NYC Department of Correction (Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform, 2017, p. 75). The authors argue that a jail that is woven into the fabric of a place will become a (trusted) site for public services, increasing the legitimacy of jails and related systems. The Justice in Design team (2017) calls this a "first step toward a healthier, more effective criminal justice system that can extend beyond jail buildings to individuals and communities" (p. 10). This shared framing, which I interrogate below, raises critical questions about what is being "designed in" to spaces of incarceration, policing, and surveillance from the outset of designers' work in relation to them.

Processes and Questions

The Justice in Design team outlines two roles for design in reform work. They argue that "design can foster a more positive sense of wellbeing that helps break the cycle of degradation and isolation, which breeds a negative culture inside jail," and that it can work through "continued inclusive discussion," which has "the power to bring to light new opportunities to redefine the criminal justice system" (Justice in Design Team, 2017, p. 138). The team frames design in terms of *outcomes*, specifically (re)designed spaces for incarceration, and *process*, especially a "community" based process, for sharing knowledge and generating ideas about jails. This is consistent with Studio Gang's dual deployment of design to create both events for "community" input and the Polis Station itself, while also re-designing the North Lawndale neighborhood.

The Justice in Design group—designers, planners, and architects, together with scholars and professionals in urbanism, prison and jail re-entry services, psychology, and criminology—held design workshops around New York City to learn about people's experiences of jails and about "the impact that decentralized, borough-based jails could have on the wellbeing of people living and working in them and on surrounding communities" (Justice in Design Team, 2017, p. 49). Participants included people with a range of relationships to the criminal legal system, who "responded to questions designed to elicit how they interpreted the idea of community, how they perceived the experience and environment of jails, and how the experience of jail could be improved" (p. 12).

Like Polis Station, a project the Justice in Design report cites as an important precedent, the Justice Hubs were informed by a design process shaped to include "community" input, where that input was also framed through specific questions. As noted in the introduction, the Studio Gang "community cafés" focused on three questions, all of which held the police station as a constant. Similarly, the Justice in Design process was shaped by the Commission's overall questions:

> How can we create jail designs that are more healthy, rehabilitative, and respectful?; What impact does jail have on the community, and how can a decentralized jail system improve these negative effects?; What social services and programming can be included to help people re-enter communities?; What site elements are important to include in the design of community-based jails?; What types of neighborhood services can be offered to complement a community?" (Justice in Design Team, 2017, p. 6)

All but one of these have a jail at their center.

In both Chicago and New York, design processes used "inclusive discussion" and workshops with people involved in the systems being redesigned, guided by questions that framed both the limits and the aims of the design work at hand, which shaped the architectural, urban planning, service, and economic design proposals that resulted. In both cases, they reimagined neighborhoods as community-based hubs for policing and jails, with the social fabric increasingly interwoven with architectures of control and confinement, framed as local resources.

Proposals and Outcomes

The Polis Station proposal envisions a redesigned police station embedded in an expanded police-centered community development plan. It includes, in part, residency incentive programs that facilitate "police officers (specifically) and others with key service jobs" living where they work through financial assistance to renovate homes that "do not currently contribute to the vibrancy of the neighborhood" (Studio Gang Architects, 2015, p. 22); creating shared amenities, including parks, sports fields, and courts, and other spaces where police and residents might interact outside situations of conflict; making police stations into information hubs, offering free wi-fi and local event information; and generating ties between police academies and local educational institutions. The core of the design is making the station itself into a "community center," with the outward-facing side including services like day care and a law library, while the "secure side" faces the back, out of sight. The Polis Station proposes to "form a network of dispersed recreational, educational, entrepreneurial, and green spaces" with the aim of "creating a safer community with the Polis Station at its heart" (p. 45).

Described in similar terms, the New York City Justice Hubs are defined as "facilities that create healthy, normative environments and support rehabilitation for incarcerated or detained individuals, while simultaneously providing neighborhoods with new public amenities" (Justice in Design Team, 2017, p. 9). The Hubs, proposed for four of New York's five boroughs, would include a range of "on-site programs such as job training centers, community courts, a police department, and probation offices," bringing multiple uses into one site. And by incorporating publicly-accessible retail, gallery, and community center spaces into the jail buildings directly or into the "Hub" concept through nearby store-fronts, the proposal frames Justice Hubs as "public sites of civic unity" through which people with a range of relationships to the jail and the neighborhood might come together (p. 9). Like Polis Station, the Justice Hubs proposal extends far beyond the design of a building. It is a city-wide spread of jails and policing institutions into multiple sites, and the concurrent integration of social support and recreational spaces into the jail. The Justice Hubs are proposed to be a model of, and vehicle for, neighborhood development and community investment, "[b]y rethinking the idea of what a jail can be" (p. 10).

Designers' engagements in these examples demonstrate their roles—alongside others—in imagining and creating spaces and systems for control and confinement. The proposal that design is "a useful tool to support positive change" (Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform, 2017, p. 134), is an argument that as a practice of inquiry, discovery, participation, and the production of "modern" or "state of the art" outcomes, design can help solve problems of violence or harm in what are codified as otherwise necessary infrastructures of policing and incarceration. Based on this logic, the Polis Station and Justice Hub proposals demonstrate the net effect of the questions asked, the knowledge sought, and frameworks that center spaces for policing and jailing. Both exponentially expand the role of police stations and jails while also reinforcing policing and jailing as sites of everyday interaction. They do this by designing the delivery of long-needed and under-funded services in the neighborhoods where these projects sit directly into those expanded carceral spaces. And while both projects emphasize an aim to create more opportunities for contact as a means of building trust between residents and the people and spaces of the criminal legal system, in the context of conversations about police-community relations, "trust" really means unfettered access and manufactured consent (Gilmore & Gilmore, 2016; Vitale & Jefferson, 2016). Contemporary mainstream concerns expressed about police violence and the prevalence and conditions of incarceration may make for an ostensibly different context now from the era Shabazz (2015) studied (1960s–90s), but framing design processes through questions that center the police station and the jail reproduces the (Black) neighborhood as a securitized hub. In these examples, design is tied inextricably to punishment through the deep imbrication of the functions of policing and incarceration further into the fabric of public life.

Oakland Power Projects

In contrast, the Oakland Power Projects sought to imagine and seed systems and structures that support people and communities and which are not based on confinement and control. I participated in this work through long-term design research with members of the anti-policing working group of the Oakland chapter of Critical Resistance (CR). My design work with CR was not, however, focused on designing specific outcomes or external-facing processes, like the community-based events in the projects discussed above. Rather, "design" in this organizationally-driven research took shape through the questions, ideas, and emergent needs of CR members' work, and primarily involved creating internal systems to move that work forward and materials to share-out work in progress as well as resources made through the organizing.[4]

Origins and Framing

Central to CR's political mission and goals is the understanding—contrary to many reform movements and the examples of the Polis Station and Justice Hubs projects—that these systems are not broken, but, rather, are working exactly as intended to control and silence those "most likely to pose a threat to the power structure" (Herzing, quoted in Cineas, 2020). This fundamental difference in framing leads to different approaches and to different questions.

The Oakland Power Projects began as an inquiry with coalition partners into what work CR Oakland could do next to follow a significant and successful two-year campaign with the Stop the Injunctions Coalition (STIC) to end gang injunctions in Oakland. Gang injunctions are a civil law enforcement policy that heavily impacts former prisoners and people of color in the city by imposing curfews and limiting movement and associations in specific neighborhoods.[5] CR members' inquiry began with the observation that even as they successfully stopped the impacts of one major policing initiative, the city rolled out an array of new, but familiar, policing policies. CR members talked with STIC allies to ask what could reduce the reach and impact of policing on the lives of Oaklanders, especially people of color, migrants, and others most targeted for enforcement. These conversations, along with the experiences, analysis, and goals of members of the CR Oakland anti-policing workgroup, informed the 2015 launch of the Oakland Power Projects (OPP). OPP aims to "help Oakland residents invest in practices, relationships, and resources that build community power and wellbeing" (Critical Resistance & Healthworker Cohort, 2018). In this sense, it is perhaps helpful to differentiate that OPP was not a "designed" outcome, but a project that CR members—including me—made.

Processes and Questions

OPP is organized through a multi-step process that starts by holding interviews with residents about their experiences with the city, their experiences with police, and their ideas for creating well-being. We asked: Do you live in Oakland? How long have you lived in Oakland? Where do you like to spend time? Why? Do you feel safe there? Why? Where do you feel most safe? When and why? Have you ever called the cops? Why did you call? What made you feel like they were the best option? What happened as a result of the call? Did that solve the problem? Can you think of something that might have? What do you wish would have happened? What would have prevented you from calling the cops in the first place? Developed from knowledge generated through CR members' experiences and previous campaigns, and honed over the course of multiple meetings and test interviews, these questions are intended to raise up ideas about what people *like* and *desire* in their city, how ideas of "safety" and "policing" are or are not connected; what people's expectations are of police, and how else those expectations might be met. These

questions explicitly reflect CR's aims to reduce the scope and impact of policing. Questions about experience with policing seek to understand why and how people come to call the cops, and what happens next—whether their needs were met, or not—and why. The questions also seek to create conversation outside systems of policing altogether, by starting with questions about how people find or create well-being in their neighborhoods and the city at large. Through both sets of questions, this part of the OPP process endeavors to gather information and start conversations about what kinds of needs people have and what kinds of resources or systems they would like to make or have access to.

Through listening to the interviews together and reflecting on themes, concerns, and proposals that arise in them, the group maps out common threads and chooses an idea to develop. Members bring together interviewees who raised the idea, along with others knowledgeable about the subject(s), into a collective process for figuring out what to build and identifying people with whom to organize and carry it out. As CR's long-term goal is to make policing obsolete, the OPP structure focuses on generating projects that sustain Oakland residents' wellbeing through creating options for meeting critical needs and access to resources while also reducing contact with and reliance on policing.

Proposals and Outcomes

Using this process, CR organizers identified and began to shape a first project: developing capacities to decouple medical and mental health care from policing. CR members gathered interviewees and health care workers to learn more about the overlaps between health care and policing, to design tools and learning opportunities that could shift or interrupt them, and organize the means to begin that work. The health care worker cohort that developed to form the core of the first Power Project worked with CR members to design a series of "Know Your Options" workshops that engage options for getting medical and mental health attention when and where it's needed while decreasing police contact and developing tools and resources (in the form of alternative first aid kits). The OPP Health Worker Cohort has run dozens of workshops since that time with local organizations, neighborhood groups, and other health workers in Oakland and the surrounding area.

This work, grounded in ongoing anti-policing and anti-incarceration organizing in California's Bay Area, also led to other coalitional efforts: connecting with a campaign in San Francisco to stop a new jail; joining public health workers addressing the health impacts of policing and the impacts of COVID-19 on people in jails, prisons, and detention centers; and the ongoing development of materials and tools aiming to disentangle possibilities for developing community wellbeing from the prison industrial complex, including posters that introduce short-term abolitionist steps to reduce the reach of policing and incarceration.[6] All of these outgrowths build on the always-emergent work of Critical Resistance, the Oakland Power Projects, and abolitionist political frameworks, working to envision and generate a multitude of "alternatives" to the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) (Davis, 2011, p. 46).[7]

Having framed design as a way to learn what a better jail or police station would look like and as a means for reimagining relationships between policing, incarceration, and the people impacted by those systems, Studio Gang and the Justice in Design team put the inevitability of policing and incarceration at the center of their work. Critical Resistance began their inquiry somewhere else entirely. Their project started with an understanding of what Mabel O. Wilson (2017) has characterized as the concretization of the racial (and racist) logics of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries into historical and contemporary spaces and buildings, including the prison (and the police station). In rejecting reform as a framework for both inquiry and making, Critical Resistance takes up the question of what might be learned, imagined, and built through processes of community-based inquiry and making toward other ends. In this way, the Oakland Power Projects insists that

people can and do care for each other in ways that surpass, ameliorate, and help to navigate what state and other systems do to and/or for them, and seek to begin making new systems for sustaining well-being with people, in a range of ways.

What We Ask: Decoupling Design and Punishment

Even as events and mainstream news coverage over the past decade-plus have brought the violence of the PIC front and center, it is not new.[8] Neither are organized responses to it. Alongside efforts to reform these systems, movements to abolish them and to address the conditions they produce have generated other understandings of the PIC and what might be built, made, and done in relation to it. At the time both Polis Station and the Justice Hubs were being developed, others in Chicago and in New York City were asking different questions, too.

In Chicago, just after the launch of Polis Station, organizers from the #LetUsBreathe Collective protested a "Blue Lives Matter" law proposed for the city, as well as the detention and a torture of city residents by Chicago police at Homan Square, a Chicago PD "black sight" just a mile and half from the 10th District station on which Studio Gang focused (Ackerman & Stafford, 2015; Chang, 2016; Clifton, 2016). This followed on the work of a city-wide campaign to pass reparations for survivors of Chicago Police Department torture of Black Chicagoans at the hands of Police Commander Jon Burge and his "midnight crew" from 1972–1991 (Kaba et al., 2021). In 2015, after five years of organizing and building on two-decades of struggle, the city passed an ordinance for reparations for the torture survivors and their families. Their campaign began with another question: "What would constitute adequate reparation for the harm done?" (CTJM, n.d.).[9] The reparations demand emphasizes both the histories and ongoing effects of policing on the people it targets, articulating a rejection of policing as an infrastructure for producing safety, and tying justice for survivors to resources directed to Black communities and others impacted by policing. In addition, in the years following Polis Station's debut, over 85 community organizations fought a proposed $95 million new police and fire training center together, under the banner #nocopacademy. In 2018, they asked people in the neighborhood for which the academy is slated what they would like to see there. Residents wanted "public resources devoted to services that do not involve the Chicago Police Department, such as education and youth programs" (No Cop Academy, 2018). These campaigns, along with other coalition efforts throughout Chicago in these years, sought to call out and to end long term and ongoing violence caused by policing and the simultaneous investment by the city in *more* policing instead of non-carceral public resources, especially in Black, Brown, and marginalized communities.

In New York City, the organizing landscape surrounding the city's embrace of the call to close Rikers Island is complex (Kurti & Shanahan, 2019; Shanahan & Norton, 2017). The Justice Hubs proposal was rejected by local community boards both due to community opposition to a jail in their neighborhoods and to community-based organizing to oppose new jails anywhere. However, it was then passed by the City Council in the name of "ending mass incarceration," as representatives from those neighborhoods embraced the idea of the proposed local jails' benefits (Haag, 2019). While the Hubs were opposed by one coalition, No New Jails NYC, another, the #CLOSErikers coalition, embraced them, focusing specifically on the plan to shutter Rikers. The No New Jails coalition framed its opposition in broader abolitionist terms, arguing that no matter how designed, no cage is humane (Mohapatra, 2019). These organizers suggested that the $10 billion for the Hubs could instead build resources and counteract the harms of both Rikers and the intense policing of Black and Brown people that landed so many there to begin with. The No New Jails campaign builds on a long-standing question asked by organizers in New York City in response to both policing and jail expansion: What does investment in a neighborhood and in services for New Yorkers really look like? Community in Unity (CIU), a coalition of people and

organizations in the city who successfully fought a 2000-bed jail in the South Bronx in 2008 (Williams, 2008), put it this way:

> Money for the jail could . . . go toward developing better and smaller schools, creating community-based preventive health programs or a promotoras de salud (community-based peer health promoters) program, cooperative businesses, and other initiatives that confront the economic and health problems that our community faces. (Allicea et al., 2007)

The narratives, experiences, and questions that framed and built these movements are both historical contexts for the Polis Station and Justice Hub proposals, and they were unfolding contemporaneously with them. But these projects neither acknowledge them directly nor engage the complicating understandings of Chicago's policing problem or New York City's jail problem that these struggles offer. This is not to presume that designers were unaware of them, or purposefully sought not to talk with people in them. Rather, the goals of the processes that led to each design proposal restricted the kinds of questions that could be asked, or considered useful, to arrive at the outcome desired—an outcome that reimagined the police station and the jail, respectively, as improved and expanded public goods. The questions asked by organizers in the struggles framed above could only lead to other outcomes, to the *unmaking* of the very systems and infrastructures Studio Gang and the Justice in Design team sought to *remake*.

Conclusion

While Studio Gang and the Justice in Design team affirm a role *for* design in reforming incarceration and policing, other designers are organizing *against* participation in making or maintaining systems of control and confinement. For example, following the 2020 uprisings against anti-Black racist police violence, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) adopted Architects/Designers/Planners for Social Responsibility's (ADPSR) long-fought-for amendment to the AIA Code of Ethics, barring members from designing spaces for execution and solitary confinement (ADPSR, n.d.). While not calling for a ban on designing lock-ups completely, ADPSR's recent discussion names this as a long-term strategy to inhibit jail and prison construction, as solitary confinement is a common feature of spaces of incarceration in the United States.[10] There are, also, many analogues to the questions of framing and orientation I raise here across design fields and scholarship, from technology designers mobilizing against tech for immigration surveillance and war (Costanza-Chock, 2020; Tech Workers Coalition, 2018), to critical analyses of the social construction of space and in/accessibility (Hendren, 2020), data and regimes of white supremacy (including the carceral) (Benjamin, 2019), the designed material violence of borders (Khosravi & Keshavarz, 2020), and more.

The operating theory behind the move of design into the realm of public systems, services, and policies is that while everything has been designed, many of these things have not been designed "well," or with the people they affect in mind or involved. In this public-services work, some argue that hearing a range of people's "blue sky" ambitions is a critical step, but that because designers' jobs are to make something happen, only the most pragmatic or "designable" ideas can actually be put forward (Dorst, 2015). Others argue that pragmatism can lead to interventions that solidify harmful practices and structures by failing to take into account the deeply structural nature of a problem (Calderón Salazar & Gutiérrez Borrero, 2017; Greenbaum, 1991). How might designers, and policy-makers and others who are engaging designers in their work, bring histories of what Wilson (2017) has called "carceral architectures," and their contemporary manifestations, forward to undo and unmake common sense proposals around the PIC? To this end, I offer three proposals for abolitionist design, which I hope will be useful to those who work toward the abolition of the PIC *and* to those who do not (yet).

1) **Find out who else is doing this work. If the work is not based in your communities (even if it is!), listen, get invited.**

   The model of working with clients and from a brief shapes design practices and assumptions designers make about what roles we can play. But, organizing to address the harm and violence of the PIC (and other, similar, systems) is happening everywhere. This raises key questions about how designers position ourselves as part of people's larger and ongoing efforts toward collective self-determination, including where and with whom we do this work, and how we learn about it. Before you begin naming the goals and questions that will ground your design research or proposals, make connections with people doing the work already and listen closely. If they share information or concerns that complicate your plans, or are not interested in joining you or inviting you into their work, pause and be open to re-thinking your plans. Ask what work is needed, and if or how you might contribute to it.

2) **Approach non-reformist reform as a design principle.**

   In the realm of abolitionist politics, abolition is understood as both a goal and an everyday strategy. The tension between working in the present moment and sustaining a long-term vision is imagined in practice as working for "non-reformist reforms," or abolitionist steps that chip away at the PIC, while not further securing its future through "reforms" (or the "designable idea") that sustain its legitimacy. For example, rather than designing and implementing training programs for police in response to violence, create systems that limit police presence and contact as a means for reducing incidents of police causing harm. In your work, ask what systems perpetuate the "problem" you are seeking to engage; research their histories, and their social and political contexts; make a list of conditions or relations your work should not replicate or extend, and use this as a checklist against which to assess your ideas, prototypes, and proposals.[11] This may require working slowly at times.

3) **Refuse the brief: Make nothing that expands the life or scope of the PIC.**

   When we make the questions we follow into a design process, or out of process and into form, we are also making arguments for how things might be. Our perspectives and positions—how we frame the question "what do we want?"—shape what we ask and the possibilities we can imagine. Designers have to be willing to let what falls outside the brief negate the brief. Abolitionist design means making the space to hear no and to say no to designing anything that expands the life or scope of carceral systems and spaces. It also means asking what else might be done, what coalitions we might join, what work we can do or are doing where we are, and what steps would chip away at these systems' harms and legitimacy while addressing immediate needs and building relationships and resources that can sustain other ways of being. It means working with people to say: Here are some of the things that could be, that have been, that people are making already, making anyway.

Critically approaching the ways we make the questions that ground our making practices is one way to make space for the possibility of designing *against* infrastructures of harm by designing other ways of doing, being, and organizing human and non-human actors toward something like life. In the process of shaping questions, testing understandings, and imagining ways of framing the problems at hand, we create openings for these other ways of knowing to make their way in, to interrupt the common sense with which designers and others may be working. This can set other ways of knowing and making in motion.

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ORCID iD

Shana Agid https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1125-7621

Notes

1. Critical Resistance (CR) describes the PIC as "the overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and political problems."
2. In Minneapolis, Minnesota where Minneapolis Policeman Derek Chauvin killed George Floyd in May 2020, one of several police and racially-motivated murders that seeded ongoing uprisings that summer internationally, the MPD had instituted nearly every recommendation from the Obama task force, which did not limit or change the violence enacted by police, and, most notably, did not stop Chauvin from killing George Floyd.
3. The #CLOSErikers campaign website states that the campaign "was formed in 2016 to break political gridlock and achieve solutions guided by directly impacted communities." See more at https://jlusa.org/campaign/closerikers/
4. I am a long-time member of CR, and while I did not live in Oakland at the time of this research, I have lived there before, and knew some of the people—though not all—in the working group. I both know well and deeply believe in the political objective of the organization, abolition of the prison industrial complex, as well as its working processes (e.g., the organization makes all decisions by consensus, works through collective practice and values being accountable to what we commit to doing). This did not mean, in any way, that the work was without complexity or conflict, but did create a ground for knowing and learning together. For a closer discussion of the relational work of this design research, please see Shana Agid, "'…it's your project, but it's not necessarily your work…': Infrastructuring, Situatedness, and Designing Relational Practice," Participatory Design Conference Proceedings, ACM International, 2016.
5. For more on STIC see, https://stoptheinjunction.wordpress.com/ and "City as borderland: Gentrification and the policing of Black and Latinx geographies in Oakland" (Ramírez, 2020).
6. As of the date of publication, these can be accessed at www.criticalresistance.org.
7. Davis argues that this is not a one-for-one exchange, trading "prison like substitutes for the prison," but requires "envision[ing] a continuum of alternatives to imprisonment. . ." This ethos is embodied in One Million Experiments (www.millionexperiments.com), a website built by Project Nia and Interrupting Criminalization to collect and share abolitionist experiments.
8. Recently, public attention to policing in the United States and beyond has heightened since the 2014 police killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, the 2020 police killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, along with so many other Black and Brown people, and pushed forward arguments for "reform." Similarly, an increasingly mainstream conversation about the magnitude, role, and disproportionate impact on people of color of incarceration in the United States has resulted in a public call for the reconsideration of legal and policy structures that have helped to build the particular vastness of

this contemporary system. Mobilizations of the Black Lives Matter movement and aligned organizing in response to police killing and other manifestations of the violence of policing have also produced both changes in public discourse and policy attention from a range of actors, as multiple organizations, writers, and cultural producers—with differing arguments and political orientations—have worked to investigate and reveal the underpinnings and effects of jails, prisons, and other sites of incarceration. This has all deeply shaped the landscapes of the projects under discussion here.

9. The reparations won include not only a public apology from the city, but ongoing education on police torture in Chicago Public Schools; free college education for survivors and their families—recognizing the generational trauma of police violence; financial compensation to survivors and priority access to job placement and other support services; a public memorial—being designed through the same organizing coalition that won the reparations; and a new counseling center for survivors of police violence, what would become the Chicago Torture Justice Center. Readers can see more, and more detail about the Chicago Torture Justice Memorials at https://chicagotorture.org.

10. It is worth noting, then, that the Justice in Design team cite the proposed ADPSR ethics code as a guide for their work designing the Justice Hubs, as setting parameters for the design of "humane" jails, highlighting the tensions between different understandings of what design can and should do.

11. Critical Resistance has a list like this called "Seven Easy Steps," accessible here: http://criticalresis-tance.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/CR-Abolitionist-Toolkit-online.pdf (pp. 55–57).

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Author Biography

Shana Agid is an artist/writer, designer, teacher, and scholar-activist whose work focuses on relationships of power and difference in visual, social, and political cultures. Her collaborative design practice focuses on exploring possibilities for self-determined services and systems through teaching and design research. His writing on design, politics, and pedagogy has been published in journals including *Design Studies* and *Design and Culture* and in edited books focusing on practice-led research and design ethics. She is an associate professor of Arts, Media, and Communication at Parsons School of Design in New York, US and holds an MFA in Printmaking and Book Arts and MA in Visual and Critical Studies from California College of the Arts (CCA) and a PhD in Design from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT).