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In the System: Art, Prison, and the Performance of Social Welfare

By

Nina Billone Prieur

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Performance Studies

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Women, Gender, and Sexuality

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Shannon Jackson, Chair

Professor Angela Y. Davis

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Professor Rebecca McLennan

Fall 2010

In the System: Art, Prison, and the Performance of Social Welfare

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by Nina Billone Prieur

Abstract

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by
Nina Billone Prieur

Doctor of Philosophy in Performance Studies

Designated Emphasis in Women, Gender, and Sexuality

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Shannon Jackson, Chair

Over the past three decades, the state of California has launched the largest prison construction project in history. The United States has followed California's lead by massively expanding its penal system and radically dismantling its welfare system. The country currently incarcerates not only more people, but also a greater percentage of its population than any other nation in the world. During this same period, increasing numbers of artists have intervened in the spaces between the U.S. prison and welfare systems. San Francisco has served as a crucible for these endeavors, which constitute a defining feature of the emerging field of community-based performance. This dissertation responds to this political and cultural conjunction by considering how and to what effect artists in San Francisco and across California have engaged the shifting penal-welfare nexus throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

From between the fields of theater and performance studies and critical prison studies, I develop the concept of penal-welfare performance. The penal-welfare lens reveals how the prison and welfare systems constitute interconnecting forces within the bureaucratic field. These mechanisms lock large sections of the population out of stabilizing social institutions, a dynamic that geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore aptly describes as mass infrastructural abandonment. This fracturing of communities both effects and is effected by racialized, classed, gendered, and sexualized operations of dehumanization, operations that threaten survival on symbolic and material registers. I demonstrate how penal-welfare performance—as an object of study and a conceptual framework—may redirect the discourses and bureaucratic structures buttressing the prison industrial complex.

Moving from community-based theaters that aim to rehabilitate the incarcerated to activist performances that aim to mobilize the public, I examine the limitations and the possibilities of performance's transformative promise. I argue that by staging their negotiations within networks of power, artists in and around the penal system advance an ethic and aesthetic of interdependency that unsettles the boundaries between prison and society, aesthetics and politics, subject and world. From different locations within and around the prison system, the arts practices in this dissertation highlight how power saturates every aspect of the social world. From the Arts-in-Corrections program (which is fully institutionalized within the California Department of Corrections), to the Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women (which

occupies a liminal space both within and beyond the county jail system), to the Prison Project at Intersection for the Arts (which operates outside of criminal justice bureaucracies), each of the arts practices I study imagines and re-imagines creative ways of speaking to, against, and through power.

For Dwight
In loving memory

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While writing is invariably a solitary act, I have been fortunate to develop this dissertation in collaboration with a diverse group of artists, activists, and scholars both inside and outside prison walls. I hope this manuscript can broaden and extend the conversations I have had with artists in San Francisco and across the state of California, artists who have come to serve as an ever-expanding team of experts for this project. In these brief acknowledgements sections, we tend to group contributors into such categories as “mentors,” “colleagues,” “friends,” and “family.” I find, however, that the members of the Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women defy such categorization as they have come both to fulfill and to transcend each of these roles in my life. I am especially grateful to Rhodessa Jones, Angela Wilson, Felicia Scaggs, Gina Dawson, and Fe Bongolan for opening their hearts and homes to me—and also for teaching me the power of a high-heeled shoe. The participants in the California Arts-in-Corrections program and the Prison Project at Intersection for the Arts also received me with considerable generosity. Bill Cleveland dedicated every Friday morning for three months to talking with me about his work and Judith Tannenbaum gave me an open invitation to her home for meals, conversations, and archival digging. In addition, Susan Hill, Ellen Davidson, Steve Emrick, Jim Carlson, Larry Brewster, Laurie Brooks, and the AIC artists serving time at New Folsom Prison graciously made the time to talk with me about their work and to think with me about this project’s central questions and concerns. For the past several years, Deborah Cullinan, Rebeka Rodriguez, Sean San Jose, Kevin Chen, and Erika Chong Shuch at Intersection for the Arts have welcomed me into their processes not only as a researcher, but also as a colleague and peer. They have helped me to see the culmination of this dissertation as a beginning, and I look forward to future conversations and collaborations.

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Carrie Gaiser Casey, Emine Fisek, Beth Hoffman, Jennifer Johung, Khai Nguyen, Kelly Rafferty, April Sizemore-Barber, Monica Stufft, and Brandon Woolf have waded through the trenches with me. Juana Rodriguez and the participants in the DEWGS dissertation seminar carefully read drafts of my dissertation and pushed me to enhance and complicate my arguments and methodologies. David Kessler at the Bancroft Library has been a great help to me as I learned the ins and outs of archival research, and Beth Berry and David Henkin in the History Department came to my aid in the final hour. In addition, the Berkeley Fellowship for Graduate Study, the Jacob Javits Fellowship, and the Mellon Discovery Fellowship provided me with the resources to pursue long-term and in-depth field research.

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Chapter 1 Institutional Turns

Performance artist Rhodessa Jones founded the Medea Project in 1992, a theater company of and for incarcerated women. The project developed from a weekly aerobics class that Jones had spent several years teaching to women incarcerated in the San Francisco County Jail. Reflecting on her first experiences working in the system, Jones recalls struggling to define her role within the larger context of the institution. She remembers how, in between and even in the midst of the routines she had been hired to lead, she was compelled to reach out to the women in her class by sharing her life stories with them and also by inviting them to share their stories with her and with one another:

I'd talk about my granddaughter, and my own relationships with men, and about being a hippie, and they were fascinated that I was telling them all this stuff. One woman came up to me and said, "Why are you telling us your business?" I said that I'm interested in creating bridges that'll take us all out of this prison, and this woman said, "Then you're not the police?" I said, "No, I'm an artist." And she said, "What's that?" That has been what I've been trying to answer ever since. What is an artist in that situation?¹

Throughout this dissertation, I enter into conversation with Rhodessa Jones and her student, as well as with a wide array of artists, activists, and thinkers from both inside and outside of prison walls to ask: what has been, what is, and, indeed, what can be the role of the arts in that situation? What is the relationship between art and the police, between performance and power? How have artists across different historical and cultural contexts worked in—and in resistance to—the penal system?

I focus primarily on arts practices in and around the California prison system, which in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries held iconic status for its draconian policies; in the 1940s and 1950s served as a national model of rehabilitation and reform; in the 1960s and 1970s became a hub for radical prison organizing and activism; and in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s has come to lead the nation in the turn toward mass incarceration. Over the past thirty years, as California has undertaken the largest prison building project in history, the United States has followed its lead by massively expanding the penal system and radically dismantling the welfare system, a dynamic that geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore aptly characterizes as mass infrastructural abandonment.² During this same period, increasing numbers of artists like Rhodessa Jones have begun working in the interstices of the U.S. prison and welfare systems, a body of work that I term *penal-welfare performance*. Because California has served as a crucible for these activities, as well, I respond to this political and cultural conjunction by considering how artists in California and across the country have engaged the shifting penal-welfare nexus over the past 150 years.

¹ Rhodessa Jones quoted in Sam Hurwitt, "On The Inside Looking Out," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 29, 2006.

² Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 7.

I develop the concept of *penal-welfare performance* as a lens through which to view the complex cultural, social, and political work that artists have performed in and around the prison system. The concept builds upon social theorist David Garland's understanding of penal welfarism, a term that calls attention to the permeability of prison walls by situating the prison not as a disconnected institution at the edges of society, but rather as a site of contradictory relationships and struggles that are enmeshed with a wide array of social structures and cultural practices.³ While penal-welfare performance draws from Garland's analytical framework, it also expands upon his understanding of cultural politics. Garland considers the relationship between punishment and culture by moving beyond what he terms the "power perspective."⁴ A performance lens helps to show how studies of the prison system would benefit most not from moving beyond power, but rather from probing more deeply into its very fabric. Were Garland to have granted greater attention to cultural politics, for example, he might have dedicated more than three sentences of *Punishment and Modern Society* (a 300-page book that focuses on the relationship between punishment and culture) to the roles that "literature, drama, and phantasy" play in punishment practices and processes of criminalization.⁵ If, as Garland suggests, "such effects generally elude the measuring tools of social science," then prison studies might benefit more from moving not "beyond the power perspective,"⁶ but rather, beyond the science perspective.⁷ This approach would allow us to reframe Garland's central questions: in addition to asking, "Who are the decision makers [and] the strategists who influence penal policy?"⁸ we might also ask, how does the prison—which Garland so aptly defines as "a basic metaphor of our cultural imagination"—work to produce and to police those very actors?

While my analysis of penal-welfare performance in multi-disciplinary (drawing from feminist and queer theory, critical race theory, American cultural and legal history, anthropology, sociology, and political theory), this study is situated primarily between the fields of critical prison studies and theater and performance studies. While critical prison studies offers incisive critiques of the racialized, classed, sexualized, and gendered dynamics of the prison throughout the institution's history, scholars in the field have paid little attention to the role of the arts. By the same token, whereas the fields of theater and performance studies (and the subfield of community-based performance, more specifically) do attend to arts practices in and around prisons and other social institutions, they pay little attention to that history. As a result, scholars and practitioners tend to operate under the assumption that arts programming in and around the prison system is an entirely contemporary phenomenon. This is the first study of prison arts programming from the Progressive Era to the present day. It demonstrates how the arts have functioned as integral components of the prison system's multiple reformations throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I hope to offer more, however, than a corrective history; my

³ For further discussion, see David Garland, *Punishment and Welfare: A History of Penal Strategies* (Brookfield, VT: Gower, 1985).

⁴ David Garland, *Punishment and Modern Society: A Study in Social Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 157.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 260.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 260 and 157.

⁷ Avery Gordon offers a strong critique of how the social sciences are haunted by cultural forces that they do not have the tools to adequately address. See *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

⁸ Garland, *Punishment and Modern Society*, 260.

goal is to provide prison scholars with some more tools for understanding the role of culture and also to provide scholars of theater and performance studies with some more tools for analyzing the relationship between aesthetic, social, and political practices.

I argue that from the character-building programs of Progressive Era prison reform, to the protest performances of the radical prison movement, to contemporary community-based endeavors, artists working in and around the prison system have confronted both the limitations and the opportunities posed by performance's transformative promise—or what we might also understand as its *correctional* mandate. Whether inside and outside artists have set out to transform “criminals” into upstanding “citizens,” to “humanize” an otherwise “inhumane” system, or to radically alter social, political, and economic structures, they have tended to work toward these goals not necessarily by resisting authority from a presumed position outside of power, but rather by developing creative ways of moving within systems of power. Through complex processes of institutional negotiation, these arts practices not only *engage*, but also *stage* an ethic and an aesthetic of interdependency.⁹

Performance Ethnography and the Ethics of Interdependency

In addition to archival research, I have entered into long-term field research with numerous prison arts programs, stretching the limits of participant observation by partnering with my interlocutors not only as an ethnographer, but also as a collaborating artist and organizer. In so doing, I have worked to develop performance-based methodologies for studying and productively critiquing community-based arts practices. Much like Rhodessa Jones has struggled to define her artist's role both for herself and others, so, too, have I struggled to define my role as a researcher. “Are you the police?” I have been asked both explicitly and implicitly by the artists and activists with whom I have worked. Members of one organization that I began working with early in the process asked me not to include them in this study because they did not want to be represented by anyone from outside of their organization. Even though they welcomed me into their community as an artistic partner, they expressed discomfort with my participation as a researcher. They articulated their concerns through a cautionary tale about another graduate student who had conducted a study with them a few years prior. In the course of several interviews, he asked about a murder that had occurred in their neighborhood during the 1970s. Soon after these interviews, when indictments came down from the federal government, they realized that this young researcher had likely not been a student at all, but rather an undercover operative for the FBI. “Not that we're saying you're FBI,” they told me, “But you understand.” Throughout my research and writing process, I have worked to understand my role as someone who both is and is not the police.

While the leaders of this community-based arts organization spoke explicitly about the problematic power differential between scholars and practitioners by referencing the divisions between community outsiders and community insiders, their allusion to the FBI spoke implicitly to the ways in which our relationship was racialized and classed not only on individual, but also on systemic levels. In relation to this urban community-based arts organization primarily of and

⁹ This concept of interdependency draws directly from Shannon Jackson's recent work on systemic aesthetics. Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: The Infrastructural Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, forthcoming December 2010).

for people of color, I was not only marked by my privileged position as a university-affiliated researcher, but also (like so many other researchers in my position) by my white skin and middle class background. With their story, they highlighted how I—as both an individual and a member of a larger academic community—risked participating in an imperialist power/knowledge project that would position me as an authority over them and their work. By likening my role as a researcher to that of an FBI agent, they challenged me to grapple with the implications of producing knowledge that might display, dissect, and objectify them and their communities for the consumptive pleasure of an academic elite. When I visited the California Arts-in-Corrections program at New Folsom Prison, the men in the group further highlighted these concerns about the politics of scholarly representation when they asked, “What do you mean by *research*? That word makes it sound like we’re going to be your lab rats or something.”

Medea Project ensemble member Angela Wilson outlines some of these fraught power dynamics when she explains that community-based artists both within and beyond the prison system often feel a sense of betrayal after reading academic writing about their work:

They [researchers] are in our very intimate circle, and they got invited and they were in people’s homes; they ate our food; they sat in the circle. How the fuck are you going to sit in the circle and then say some shit like that? Of course there’s going to be critique. Not everything is perfect. We fall short in some ways. That has to be said... But, ultimately, the truth is that [the process] works, and I’ve never really gotten that from anything I’ve read.¹⁰

Wilson flags a central concern not only about the politics of field-based research methods, but more specifically about how those methods tend to be applied to the fields of arts in corrections (and community-based art, more generally). While practitioners tend to express a desire for more critical writing and hence increased visibility and legitimacy for their work, they also tend to express considerable skepticism about the function the researcher should perform in relation to that work. When positioned as an authoritative judge of a project’s success or failure, for example, the scholar is placed in a parasitic relationship to the work. Furthermore, in an art form so deeply invested in the realm of the popular, the presence of an elite outsider who evaluates a performance practice with theoretical language that can only be accessed by other elite outsiders fundamentally contradicts the core principles of community-based work. These tensions are exacerbated in the context of prison arts practices where researchers tend to be middle or upper class, highly educated, white, and free to come and go from the prison or the surrounding community at will and where incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people tend to be part of racially marginalized and economically, politically, and culturally disenfranchised communities whose movements are highly restricted.

Within this larger context, artists like Angela Wilson of the Medea Project, the participants in the California Arts-in-Corrections program at New Folsom Prison, and the leaders of the community-based arts organization that have asked to remain anonymous, have encouraged me not merely to examine their work, but also to examine my own positionality in relation to it. I continue to ask, answer, and ask again: For whom do I write this dissertation?

¹⁰ Angela Wilson, interview by author, February 15, 2008.

What are my intentions with this project? What might be this project's unintended effects? What is my responsibility to the people about, for, and with whom I seek to write? And how has my writing process been both enabled and constrained by the multiple systems of power with which it intersects?

Performance theorist David Román's concept of "critical generosity" has guided me in developing my responses to these questions. "Criticism is inevitably about power," Román explains. "That seems inescapable. But it is how we use or abuse that power that structures our relationships with artists."¹¹ Rather than writing about various objects of study from the presumed autonomy of the ivory tower, I have worked to form intimate and reciprocal relationships with the artists I seek to represent. In other words, instead of writing *on* artists, I aim to write *with* them.¹² In this context, I view my scholarly intervention as an act of translation between multiple fields of practice and study, an act that ideally invites rather than forecloses continued conversation among a diverse group of interlocutors.

My dialogic approach to field-based research has been largely inspired by critical approaches to performance ethnography. Much like Rhodessa Jones has worked to break down prison walls by creating bridges between herself and her students, so, too, have I worked to approach performance-based ethnographic research as a bridge-building methodology that may engage complex interdependencies not only between self and other, but also between theory and practice, the intellectual and the embodied, the personal and the political. Dwight Conquergood explains that this kind of performance-based approach may challenge ethnography's imperialist legacies by "bring[ing] together different voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs so that they can have a conversation with one another." For Conquergood, "the aim of dialogical performance is to bring self and other together so that they can question, debate, and challenge one another."¹³ Following Conquergood, I have found that this critically generous, socially engaged approach to scholarship is most productive when it is characterized by deep, sustained, and at times difficult conversation and collaboration.

While it is crucial to unsettle the hierarchical power dynamics that structure ethnographic encounters, it is also necessary to distinguish critical generosity from surface-level celebration. This distinction is especially important given community-based performance's marginalized reputation not only in the art world, but also in the academy. While artists in the field tend to react negatively to the critic's perceived role as the arbiter of a work's value, scholars across the humanities and social sciences tend to react negatively to what often comes across as an overly celebratory and critically lacking trend within community-based performance scholarship. Just as community-based artists must contend with their marginal position within the art world (a group of well-meaning amateurs getting together at a local community center as opposed to professional actors performing Hamlet with the Royal Shakespeare Company), so, too, must community-based performance scholars contend with their marginal position within the academy (an artist describing what was really neat about one of her or her friend's projects as opposed to a scholar

¹¹ Sonja, Kuflinec, Tim Miller, Bill Rauch, and David Román, "Critical Relations: The Artist and Scholar in Conversation," *Theater* 33.3 (2003): 125.

¹² Trinh, Minh-ha T., *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1989), 15-20.

¹³ Dwight Conquergood, "Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 5.2 (1985): 9.

engaging in sophisticated theoretical critique). My hope is that cultivating an interdependent, critically generous approach to research may enhance, rather than detract from this study's rigor. After talking with me about my ideas and reading drafts of my writing, a diverse group of artists, activists, and thinkers from inside and outside of prison walls have pushed me to complicate my analyses by considering the complex and often times conflicting dynamics that may have otherwise been concealed by my drive to produce tightly crafted arguments.

One topic that I hope to continue discussing involves "rehabilitation," a concept that I initially considered to be a marginal aspect of this study, but that my interlocutors have since encouraged me to view as integral. Our continuing conversations about the relationship between "rehabilitation" and "corrections" have compelled me to think more critically about the transformative promise not only of prison arts practices, but also of performance, more generally. Artists in and around the prison system tend to articulate the power of their work in and through the language of "rehabilitation," a discourse that has both shaped and been shaped by prison reform movements throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Whereas the contemporary prison industrial complex no longer approaches "rehabilitation" as a central component of its operations, the discourse continues to circulate within the prison and welfare systems and, in particular, to legitimize many of the arts programs that intersect with those interlocking systems. The stated mission of the Medea Project, for example, is to use "art to *transform* a population in-need."¹⁴ Rachel Marie-Crane Williams connects the Medea Project's language to the "rehabilitative" goals of prison arts programs across the country when she notes that this general field of practice cultivates environments in which "self-esteem is built, emotions are dealt with, past histories of abuse and addiction are overcome, and the future is approached with a productive plan based on positive actions and attitudes."¹⁵ Even though both the Medea Project and Williams gesture toward the potential for prison arts practices to enact social transformation, their "rehabilitative" rhetoric may be limited by its individual and individualizing focus.

When I first began researching arts practices in and around the prison system, I was quick to interpret this "rehabilitative" rhetoric solely in terms of its complicity with the prison's disciplinary regimes. As Michel Foucault persuasively shows, the discourses of "rehabilitation" and "reform" have, throughout the history of modern imprisonment, contributed to "general tactics of subjection."¹⁶ The penal system's simultaneous promise and failure to "rehabilitate" prisoners, Foucault argues, has been central to the institution's continued maintenance. From this perspective, prison arts programs that uphold a "rehabilitative" mission may be understood to perpetuate the prison's punitive operations. Theater practitioner and scholar James Thompson articulates a similar concern when he warns, "It is vital that prisoners are the subjects of the [artistic] process and not the objects of it. . . . This is especially a concern with arts projects that combine with therapeutic interventions that have as a stated aim the desire to *change* the prisoner. It is also of concern because the whole prison system is something that is done to people." Thompson follows up by cautioning: "It is wrong to assume that art is somehow automatically a force for good in the prison system. The discipline and control that are often needed can just as

¹⁴ Cultural Odyssey, <<http://www.culturalodyssey.org/v2/aboutus/>> (accessed April 16, 2010). Emphasis mine.

¹⁵ Rachel Marie-Crane Williams, ed. *Teaching the Arts Behind Bars* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003), 7.

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 272.

easily be turned to make the art form part of the punishing agenda of the institution.”¹⁷ While these critiques continue to inform my understanding of penal-welfare performance’s “correctional” operations, my conversations and experiences with artists and activists both inside and outside of the prison system have encouraged me to pay closer attention to the complex ways in which the discourses and practices of “rehabilitation” and “transformation” have been mobilized by multiple social actors across different historical and social contexts.

Prisoners and former prisoners who have participated in similarly positioned arts programs tend to utilize the discourse of “rehabilitation” to mark a connection between individual and social change. Prison writer and teacher Jimmy Santiago Baca, for example, emphasizes the power that comes with a sense of social belonging, explaining that poetry gave him the language “to keep the chaos of prison at bay and prevent it from devouring me; it was a resource that allowed me to confront and understand my past, even to wring from it some compelling truths, and it opened the way toward a future that was based not on fear or bitterness or apathy but on compassionate involvement and a belief that I belonged.”¹⁸ Kenneth Hartman adds to Baca’s sentiments when he describes his experiences in the California Arts-in-Corrections program and his coming to writing as integral not only to personal transformation, but also to a potential social transformation both within and beyond prison walls:

The revelation finally comes to me: What is happening around me is wrong. The way the staff is allowing the violence and disorder, the way some of them encourage it, is wrong. The way my fellow prisoners have been hypnotized by racial politics, by the mad pursuit of drugs, by their allegiance to this code of conduct that demands violence, and by our complete failure to stand up and take back our dignity—it is all wrong... My only alternative is to change this world by transforming the meaning of the code’s strictures. Turn it inside out. Take what has become a way to justify the demonstrably wrong and reformulate it as the basis for a radically transformative experience.¹⁹

For both Baca and Hartman, the process of individual awakening is inextricably linked to a commitment to social restructuring. Art-making, they explain, offers them a vehicle for envisioning and crafting a world in which the prison’s disciplinary regimes may be turned *inside out*.

Throughout this dissertation, I pay careful attention to how inside and outside artists mobilize the concept of “rehabilitation” to articulate a complex relationship between individual and social bodies. My collaborations and continued conversations with these artists and activists have encouraged me to think more deeply about how and to what effect prison arts practices may engage the interdependencies between prison and society, aesthetics and politics, individuals and institutions. From their different locations within and around the prison and welfare systems, the arts practices that I strive to represent in this project work to bridge multiple boundaries by navigating numerous systemic constraints; following their lead, I, too, work to imagine and re-

¹⁷ James Thompson, “Doubtful Principles in Arts in Prisons,” in *Teaching the Arts Behind Bars*, ed. Rachel Marie-Crane Williams (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003), 50. Emphasis mine.

¹⁸ Jimmy Santiago Baca, *A Place to Stand: The Making of a Poet* (New York: Grove Press, 2001), 5.

¹⁹ Kenneth Hartman, *Mother California: A Story of Redemption Behind Bars* (New York: Atlas & Co., 2009), 169.

imagine creative ways of moving within systems of power—be those systems social, aesthetic, or academic.

Penal-Welfare Performance and the Cultural Politics of the Prison Industrial Complex

Massive walls. High towers. Steel Bars. Bare cells. While the majority of Americans have never seen a prison, its architecture is, nonetheless, embedded in the popular imagination. This monolithic structure symbolically registers not only as a spectacular display of centralized and consolidated state power, but also as a permanent and inevitable fixture of modern society. The institution, as Angela Davis argues, has “become a key ingredient of our common sense. It is there, all around us. We do not question whether it should exist. It has become so much a part of our lives that it requires a great feat of the imagination to envision life beyond the prison.”²⁰ As it is viewed in terms of its permanence and inevitability, the prison tends to be accepted as the necessary underpinning of an otherwise free society.

Not only does the prison rely on the presumed fixity and inevitability of its stone walls and barbed wire fences, but also on its presumed marginality within U.S. culture and politics. The penal system thus secures its power through a combination of hypervisibility and invisibility; its spectacular presence in the public imagination is matched by its general absence from mainstream view. Confined to rural areas and inner cities, contemporary prisons and jails confine populations consisting primarily of poor people of color; simultaneously concealed from public view and concealing marginalized populations, penal institutions appear to function both literally and figuratively on the borderlands, the outskirts of the social order.²¹

In recent years, a growing body of scholarly and popular discourse has challenged the boundaries delimiting the prison from the rest of the social sphere. The majority of these arguments focuses on a quantitative analysis that emphasizes the mass expansion the U.S. prison system has undergone over the past three decades.²² The numbers certainly are significant: between 1987 and 2007, the U.S. prison population increased by 300% (from 585,084 to 1,586,127); currently, more than 1 in 100 adults are incarcerated in U.S. prisons and jails; as of January 2008, the nation’s adult prison population reached 2,319,258 (1,597,127 in state or federal prison and 723,131 in local jails);²³ when those on probation and parole are taken into account, that number jumps to over 7.2 million, a figure that still fails to account for the rising numbers of people held in Immigration and Naturalization detention facilities or in U.S. prisons that are located outside national borders.²⁴ The United States currently incarcerates not only

²⁰ Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 18-19.

²¹ Angela Davis and Gina Dent probe the concept of the prison as a border, deriving their analysis from prisoners around the world who tend to mark a distinction not between one nation and another, but rather between the “free world” and the world of the prison: between the mainstream and the marginal, the citizen and the criminal. Angela Y. Davis and Gina Dent, “The Prison As Border: A Conversation on Gender, Globalization and Punishment,” *Signs* 26.4 (Summer, 2001): 1236-7.

²² See Rebecca McLennan “The New Penal State: Globalization, History, and American Criminal Justice,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 22.3 (2001): 404-419.

²³ *One in One Hundred: Behind Bars in America* (Washington DC: The Pew Center on the States, 2008), 5.

²⁴ “Facts About Prisons and Prisoners,” Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, December 2007 (Washington DC: The Sentencing Project, 2007), 1. See also Erica R. Meiners, *Right to Be Hostile: Schools, Prisons, and the Making of Public Enemies* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 2.

more people, but also a greater percentage of its population than any other nation in the world.²⁵ California has led the national trend toward mass incarceration. In the 112 years between 1852 and 1964, the state built 12 prisons, but in just the 23 years between 1984 and 2007, the state completed 23 new prisons (at a cost of \$280-\$350 million apiece), with plans for numerous other institutions currently underway.²⁶ As is the case across the country, California's penal institutions have been built independently of the crime rate, which peaked in 1980 and has declined (albeit unevenly) ever since. Despite a decreasing crime rate, the California prison population has grown almost 500% (between 1982 and 2000), with these figures matching national trends.²⁷

Scholars and activists in the growing field of critical prison studies push beyond the quantitative data to develop a qualitative analysis. Rather than assuming that the problem is one of expansion only, critical prison scholars examine structural transformations within the prison and society at large. How, they ask, has the contemporary prison both shaped and been shaped by recent transformations within the political economy and the popular imaginary?²⁸ We may probe these questions by bringing the prison and welfare systems into focus as interconnecting forces, which serve as what Pierre Bourdieu terms the right hand and left hand of the contemporary bureaucratic field.²⁹ Within this context, "welfare" comes to reference far more than its current colloquial association with cash assistance for poor families. Instead, the term encompasses what Linda Gordon describes as "all of a government's contributions to its citizens' well-being." These contributions consist of such public services as "paved parks; tree maintenance; policing; firefighting; public water; sewerage and sewage treatment; garbage collection; food and drug regulation pollution regulation; building inspection; and driver testing and licensing." Even if we were to limit our focus to government programs that provide cash assistance to citizens, we would still need to recognize how the following constitute central components of welfare provisions: "home mortgage tax deductions, business expense deductions, medical expense deductions, farm subsidies, corporate subsidies, government college scholarships and loans, capital gains tax limits, Social Security old-age pensions, and Medicare."³⁰

²⁵ *One in One Hundred: Behind Bars in America 2008* (Washington DC: The Pew Center on the States, 2008), 5.

²⁶ Since 1984, California also built 13 smaller (500-bed) community corrections facilities, 5 prison camps, and 5 mother-prisoner centers. Gilmore, 7. In 2007, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger proposed allocating \$10.9 billion to fund further prison construction, and in 2010 he outlined a plan for privatizing the prison system to make this ever-expanding construction project more cost-effective for the state—a plan I discuss further in the epilogue. For details on Schwarzenegger's 2007 Comprehensive Prison Reform Proposal, see <<http://gov.ca.gov/index.php?/fact-sheet/4966/>> (accessed April 20, 2010). For details on his 2010 proposal to privatize the system, see Jennifer Steinhauer, "Schwarzenegger Seeks Shift from Prisons to Schools," *The New York Times*, January 6, 2010 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/07/us/07calif.html>> (accessed Apr 15, 2010).

²⁷ Gilmore, 7.

²⁸ See bibliography for full citations on Angela Y. Davis, Mike Davis, Gina Dent, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, David Garland, Joy Joames, Dylan Rodríguez, Cassandra Shaylor, Andrea Smith, Julia Sudbury, and Loïc Wacquant. See also Critical Resistance <<http://www.criticalresistance.org/>>, Justice Now <<http://www.jnow.org/>>, and INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence <<http://www.incite-national.org/>>.

²⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market*, trans. Richard Nice (New York: New Press, 1999), 1-2.

³⁰ Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 2.

The penal-welfare perspective illuminates how the mass expansion of the prison system and retrenchment of social welfare provisions have come to function as central components of neoliberal restructuring. Neoliberalism tends to be understood as a political and economic theory that, as David Harvey explains, “proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.”³¹ Neoliberalism thus tends to be defined predominantly in terms of “deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision.”³² More careful attention to the phenomenon of mass incarceration may shed new light on neoliberalism’s economic, political, and cultural registers. Mass incarceration, which is no longer a practice specific to the United States, offers what Loïc Wacquant describes as “a technique for the invizibilization of the social ‘problems’ that the state, as the bureaucratic lever of collective will, no longer can or cares to treat at its roots.”³³ From this perspective, the development of the prison industrial complex in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries may be seen not as a deviation from neoliberal restructuring, but rather as one of neoliberalism’s key ingredients.

Whereas analyses of the *penal-welfare* nexus tend to be distinguished from the contemporary theory and praxis on the *prison industrial complex*, I find it most productive to integrate these two analytic frames. Unlike Loïc Wacquant, for instance, who interprets the prison industrial complex as a kind of conspiracy theory,³⁴ I view it as an incisive systemic critique that situates the prison as a hub within the political economy and the popular imaginary.³⁵ The concept of the prison industrial complex reveals how, under late modern capitalism, a different prison system has emerged from the one characterized by the reformist agenda of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This framework reveals how, as processes of globalization have surplused land, labor, and capital within U.S. inner cities and rural areas, the prison—in partnership with a wide array of public and private interests—has come to manage the excesses produced by the market economy in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.³⁶ This analogy between the military industrial complex and the prison system tends to be informed by three main arguments: 1. The big prison/little town conjunction (prison construction stimulates depressed economies); 2. The prison/business conjunction (the privatization of prisons and prison-related services generates profits for investors and suppliers); and 3. The prison/labor conjunction (prisons provide corporations with a third world labor supply within the first world).³⁷ Narrowly focusing on each of these relationships, however, may obscure the potency of the contemporary global prison industry’s cultural, social, and political role. The penal-welfare lens brings into focus how the prison industrial complex has come to

³¹ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2.

³² *Ibid.*, 3.

³³ Loïc Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), xxii.

³⁴ Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor*, xx.

³⁵ In her analysis of the prison industrial complex, Ruth Wilson Gilmore playfully asks and answers: “Conspiracy? Not likely. Systemic? Without a doubt.” Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 24.

³⁶ Gilmore expands on this argument throughout *Golden Gulag*.

³⁷ For further discussion, see Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis* (London: Verso, 1999), 211-244.

manage the uneven development characteristic of globalization by both producing and policing a growing population of classed, gendered, sexualized, and racialized (non)subjects.

The statistics on the contemporary U.S. prison system reveal far more about the culture, politics, and economics of neoliberal restructuring when they are examined in terms of race, class, and gender. For example, whereas the U.S. incarcerates 1 in 106 white men over 18, it incarcerates 1 in 15 African American men over 18 and as many as 1 in 9 African American men between the ages of 20 and 34. While 1 in 355 white women between the ages of 35 and 39 are incarcerated, 1 in 100 African American women of the same age group are behind bars.³⁸ The statistics in California mirror those throughout the nation. While the state's penal institutions have been built in or near small towns or rural areas, the majority of prisoners come from inner cities. More than 67% of California prisoners are African American and Latino, 25% are not U.S. citizens, and even though over 50% were steadily employed before being arrested, about 80% were represented by public defenders. Ruth Wilson Gilmore sums up the situation by noting: "In short, as a class, convicts are deindustrialized cities' working or workless poor."³⁹ These figures illuminate how the mass expansion of the prison both perpetuates and is perpetuated by systemic racism—an operation of power that Gilmore succinctly defines as "the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death."⁴⁰

Further attention to contemporary racialized and gendered regimes of punishment helps to expose how the simultaneous development of the prison industrial complex and retrenchment of the welfare state has ushered in distinctly new forms of subjectivation. Wendy Brown, for example, draws from Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France to show how neoliberalism is emerging as a form of governmentality, "a mode of governance—encompassing but not limited to the state, and one that produces subjects, forms of citizenship and behavior, and a new organization of the social."⁴¹ As such, neoliberalism constitutes far more than the "bundle of economic policies" to which it is usually reduced; rather, it is a "constructivist project" that shifts "the regulatory competence of the state onto 'responsible,' 'rational' individuals [with the aim of] encourag[ing] individuals to give their lives a specific entrepreneurial form."⁴² Attention to the contemporary prison industrial complex reveals how political restructuring over the past three decades has in no way involved the dismantling of "big government."⁴³ On the contrary, neoliberalism has emerged as a "technique of governing" that "convenes a 'free' subject" who "bears full responsibility for the consequences of his or her action no matter how severe the constraints on this action—for example, lack of skills, education, and child care in a period of

³⁸ Furthermore, 1 in 36 Latinos and 1 in 297 Latinas over 18 are incarcerated in the United States. *One in One Hundred*, Pew Center on the States, 6.

³⁹ Gilmore, 7.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴¹ Wendy Brown, "Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy," *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 37.

⁴² Thomas Lemke, "'The Birth of Bio-Politics': Michel Foucault's Lectures at the Collège de France on Neo-liberal Governmentality," *Economy and Society* 30.2 (May 2001): 202, cited in Brown, "Neoliberalism," 40.

⁴³ For further discussion, see Rebecca Bohrman and Naomi Murakawa, "Remaking Big Government: Immigration and Crime Control in the United States," *Global Lockdown: Race, Gender, and the Prison-Industrial Complex*, ed. Julia Sudbury (New York: Routledge, 2005), 109-126.

high unemployment and limited welfare benefits.”⁴⁴ Therefore, the freedom or *independence* of the neoliberal subject is achieved through an orchestrated disavowal of the state sanctioned and extralegal structures that collaborate to construct that very subject. The penal-welfare lens thus reveals the contemporary prison industrial complex to be a neoliberal phenomenon that participates in the transformation not only of the prison and welfare systems, but also of subjectivity more generally.

Penal-welfare performance illuminates how neoliberal subjectivity is constituted by the corresponding discourses of “dependency” and “criminality.” The contemporary discourse of “criminal dependency,” as Jill McCorkel notes, conceals the social and cultural forces behind incarceration. The following statement by a senior prison counselor at a women’s state prison encapsulates this ideological framework:

Punishment, but I prefer to say “accountability,” teaches people that there are consequences for their actions. This works for rational thinkers who weigh the costs and benefits before doing a crime but it also works for those who’ve spent their lives dependent on others telling them what to do. It’s possible for someone to be *criminally dependent*...most of them in here are. They need to understand that they are responsible for their actions and that their actions and their actions alone will determine what happens to them. It’s really a basic empowerment principle.⁴⁵

This prison counselor parrots Wendy Brown’s description of neoliberal governmentality almost word for word. Here, terms like “self-reliance,” “self-respect,” and “self-esteem” are buttressed by an ideology that links “dependency” not just to pathology (addiction to drugs, to sex and to welfare, for example), but, more specifically, to “criminality.”⁴⁶ Ironically, the individualizing language that posits *independence* as empowering actually serves to obscure the workings of power.

The discourse of “criminal dependency,” as it is inextricably linked to the construction of a “culture of poverty,” enacts violence by disavowing the fundamental *interdependency* of all human beings and social structures. As Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon have shown, contemporary “dependency” discourse has both enabled and been enabled by the construction of “the welfare queen”—the lazy, black, unemployed, crack addicted, single mother who depends on the state to give her a free ride.⁴⁷ While this figure captured the most public attention during the welfare reform debates of the 1980s and 1990s, she continues to haunt the background of U.S. culture and politics.⁴⁸ Because “the welfare queen” is cast as what Dorothy Roberts terms

⁴⁴ Brown, “Neoliberalism,” 42-43.

⁴⁵ Anonymous prison counselor quoted in Jill McCorkel, “Criminally Dependent?: Gender, Punishment, and the Rhetoric of Welfare Reform,” *Social Politics* 11.3 (Fall 2004): 405.

⁴⁶ Lynne Haney, “Introduction: Gender, Welfare, and States of Punishment,” *Social Politics* 11.3 (Fall 2004): 347.

⁴⁷ Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, “‘Dependency’ Demystified: Inscriptions of Power in a Keyword of the Welfare State,” *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender* (1994): 4-31; “A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State,” *Signs* 19.2 (Winter 1994).

⁴⁸ The specter of “the welfare queen,” for example, continues to spur the conservative “tea party” movement’s fight against Obama’s “socialist agenda.”

the “root of greater black pathology,” she is also criminalized as the “bearer of incurable immorality”; not only is she made into a “criminal,” but she is also held responsible for breeding “criminality.”⁴⁹ After all, it is her “crack baby” who grows up to be the “gangland super-predator” or “street terrorist” that continues to permeate the popular imagination.⁵⁰ Ultimately, this neoliberal construction of the “state-made” woman serves to uphold the counter-image of the “self-made” man.⁵¹

Throughout this dissertation, I focus on how artists in and around the prison system work to turn the ideologies of “personal responsibility” and “criminal dependency” *inside out* by advancing an ethic and aesthetic of interdependency. In so doing, I explore how penal-welfare performance—when it is positioned as both a theory and a practice—may help to redirect the neoliberal discourses and bureaucratic structures that buttress the prison industrial complex.

In Dependence: Toward a Community-Based Theory of Performance

I situate my analysis of penal-welfare performance primarily within the growing field of community-based performance. Even though artists have been engaging their communities throughout history, it was only in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries that they began to unite under the term *community-based performance* and its corresponding ethos of institutional enmeshment. Scholars and practitioners tend to explain that community-based performance emerged in the 1970s and 1980s just as the radical popular performance experiments of the 1960s died off. The historical narrative—crystallized as a progression from the theory of Bertolt Brecht to that of Augusto Boal—posits that, in the 1970s and 1980s, artists who had engaged in the independent radical arts experiments of the 1960s became increasingly disillusioned with the top-down model in which professional artists would present works *to* the people, and they began shifting their focus from product to process as they developed democratic methods of creating art *of, by, and for* the people.⁵² William Cleveland flags the institutional component of this historical narrative when he explains that, beginning in the 1970s, “professional artists began to look to society’s forgotten corners for a new constituency.”⁵³

⁴⁹ Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Random House, 1997), 8.

⁵⁰ The ideology of the “street terrorist” is reflected in the California penal code. In 1988, six years before passing Proposition 184 (the “three strikes and you’re out” law) California passed the Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention (STEP) Act. The STEP Act instituted harsher penalties and mandatory incarceration for anyone associated with a street gang. See Penal Code Section 186.20-186.33 <<http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/cgi-bin/displaycode?section=pen&group=00001-01000&file=186.20-186.33>> (accessed April 17, 2010).

⁵¹ Wahneema Lubiano, “Black Ladies, Welfare Queens and State Minstrels: Ideological War by Narrative Means,” in *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), 351.

⁵² While contemporary scholars and practitioners of community-based performance acknowledge how the field has been informed by a longer history of socially-engaged arts practices (their commitment to making art “of, by and for the people” drawing directly from the discourses and practices of the Harlem Renaissance, for example), they also tend to situate the field as a distinctly late twentieth and early twenty-first century phenomenon. For examples of how this history tends to be narrated, see Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2005); and Sonja Kuflinec, *Staging America: Cornerstone and Community-Based Theater* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003).

⁵³ William Cleveland, *Art in Other Places: Artists at Work in America’s Community and Social Institutions* (Amherst, Mass: Arts Extension Service Press, 2000), 49.

Focusing on arts practices in and around the prison system draws attention to how these “forgotten corners” are often linked through a series of social institutions such as schools, hospitals, shelters, and prisons.⁵⁴ Overall, critics and practitioners tend to either laud or lament artists’ contemporary engagement with the welfare state. In either case, this “institutional turn” in activist performance has come to signal a movement away from cultural rebellion and toward social maintenance, away from fighting against the system and toward working within it.⁵⁵

This “institutional turn” in art-making has generated considerable debate among practitioners and scholars about both the political and aesthetic implications of socially enmeshed arts practices.⁵⁶ Sara Brady addresses these concerns in her controversial essay on the “failed radicality” of *Steelbound*, a community-based performance collaboration between Touchstone and Cornerstone theaters that celebrated the history of steelmaking in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.⁵⁷ While scholars and artists have focused on how Brady’s essay raises questions about the ethics of field-based research, they have paid less attention to the aesthetic and political valences of “radicality” not only within Brady’s analysis, but also within the field of community-based performance, more generally.⁵⁸ Brady argues that community-based art is plagued by ambivalence between a desire for radicality (resistance to the establishment) and a competing conservatism (partnership with the establishment).⁵⁹ She concludes that *Steelbound*’s dependence on private corporations and governmental funding agencies precluded any possibility for radicality. For Brady, the choice to stage the production within Bethlehem Steel’s recently closed iron foundry “meant that the play would become passive rather than aggressive, an elegy rather than a protest.”⁶⁰ How, Brady asks, could community-based performance simultaneously claim to perform cultural maintenance and also to advocate for social change?

⁵⁴ Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts*, 72.

⁵⁵ While I use the concept of an “institutional turn” to mark this historical narrative, I place the term in quotations to highlight its discursive function. The following chapters work to trouble this conceptual framework first by mapping community-based performance onto a longer history of art, prison, and social welfare in the United States and second by using that history to complicate the contours of the contemporary community arts field.

⁵⁶For instance, many artists, activists, and scholars of theater and performance mourn the loss of the arts collectives of the 1960s and 1970s, which continue to be seen as *independent* from the corrupting influences of the establishment. They often remark that formerly radical groups such as the San Francisco Mime Troupe have sold out by accepting money from the establishment (understood in terms of both public and private sources of funding). For example, both Eugène van Erven and Arthur Sainer narrate late twentieth century activist performance history in terms of a sad maturation from a romantic and uncompromising adolescence to an encumbered and self-interested adulthood. According to both authors, contemporary community-based artists’ explicit *dependence* on the system signals a shift from “authenticity” to “inauthenticity,” from a provocative rebelliousness to a conservative and compliant acceptance of the status quo. For further discussion, see Arthur Sainer, *The New Radical Theatre Notebook* (New York: Avon Books, 1997) and Eugène van Erven, *Radical Popular Theatre* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

⁵⁷ Sara Brady, “Welded to the Ladle: Steelbound and Non-Radicality in Community Based Theatre.” *TDR: The Drama Review* 44.3 (2000): 51-69.

⁵⁸ For example, Sonja Kuflinec provides a strong critique of Brady’s fieldwork methods, yet she does not critique Brady’s definition of “radicality,” Kuflinec, *Staging America*, 17-19. Jan Cohen-Cruz does address the limitations of Brady’s definition of “radicality” in “The Problem Democracy Is Supposed to Solve: The Politics of Community-Based Performance,” in *The Sage Handbook of Performance Studies*, ed. D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 431-432.

⁵⁹ Brady, 52.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

The numerous artists who responded to Brady's critique emphasized that it was radical to bring "together opposing groups in a unified expression of their shared history"⁶¹ to develop "intimate ties to members of the community"⁶² and to welcome "a true diversity of voices."⁶³ Insisting that "it was politically radical to include the voices of labor and management in the same work of art,"⁶⁴ Artistic Director of Cornerstone Theater Bill Rauch, contends:

What's really conservative in this situation is a particular academic point of view about what is permitted to be defined as radical... I appreciate Brady's point that shorthand language can blur the complexity of reality, and in fact we in Cornerstone talk about this constantly. Press release buzz words about "celebration," "healing," and "closure" are dangerous; equally vague and dangerous are buzz words Brady employs, including "protest," "community-based," and "social change." All these phrases express important concepts about the work but are sometimes used to mask more complex realities.⁶⁵

Whereas Rauch concurs that words like "celebration," "healing," and "closure" are dangerous, I question why they have come to sound so suspect, so sentimental... so not radical.

To answer this question, it is necessary to interrogate how the framework of performative efficacy may simultaneously enable and limit the academic and the artistic discourses around community-based arts practices. The concept of efficacy has come to dominate not only the fields of activist and community-based performance, but also performance theory and the discipline of performance studies more generally. According to performance theorist Jon McKenzie, "while performance's efficacy to reaffirm existing structures and console or heal people has consistently been recognized, it is its transgressive or resistant potential that has come to dominate the study of cultural performance. It has long been its cutting edge."⁶⁶ Even though McKenzie notes a split between the "transgressive efficacy" of ritualized theater (or theatricalized ritual) and the "resistant efficacy" of postmodern performance art, his conceptual framework perpetuates this same division between the conservative and the radical, the healing and the transgressive.⁶⁷ Neither of these conceptions of efficacy accounts for the complex institutional negotiations performed by penal-welfare performance and by community-based arts practices more broadly situated.

Shannon Jackson marks the limitations of the efficacy frame by showing how it is linked to Richard Schechner's gendered notion of the "dramatic," which positions the core of drama within the "imagination of the adolescent boy." Women's ritual performances, Schechner argues, lack the "intensity, brutality, aggression and storylike structure of man's ceremonies. In a word,

⁶¹ Bill George, "Letters, Etc: Touchstone—How Radical Is Radical?" *TDR: The Drama Review* 45.3 (2001): 9.

⁶² Cora Hook, "Letters, Etc," 15.

⁶³ Bill Rauch, "Letters, Etc," 19.

⁶⁴ Bill Rauch in Kuflinec et al., "Critical Relations," 128.

⁶⁵ Rauch "Letters, Etc." 18.

⁶⁶ McKenzie, 30.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

women's ceremonies are less dramatic."⁶⁸ Stephen Bottoms extends Jackson's argument by noting that the "efficacy-entertainment" dyad circulates (sometimes implicitly and sometimes explicitly) as an "efficacy-effeminacy" binary, which casts theater as performance's impotent and artificial other.⁶⁹ Both Jackson and Bottoms illustrate how the primary discursive strategies within the cultural turn in performance studies attempt to legitimate popular performance by casting its "radicality" in terms of a (hetero)masculinist vision of rebellion and resistance. From this perspective, we may better understand why contemporary community-based performance's emphasis on such concepts as "healing" and "closure" would appear to be diametrically opposed to the drama of "radicality." For Brady, *Steelbound* fails as a radical performance because it is "passive" rather than "aggressive," a feminized "elegy" rather than a masculinized "protest." By performing cultural "maintenance" rather than explicit cultural "rebellion," community-based performance seems to profoundly *lack* what McKenzie refers to as performance studies' "cutting edge."⁷⁰

When *Steelbound* gathered former laborers, managers, friends and family together onto the site of the Bethlehem Steel Plant, which up until that moment had been closed to the public, they did not enact a revolutionary drama about the dismantling of the power structure. However, they did foreground the infrastructural abandonment that accompanied the closing of the plant, the town's central employer. They also provided a population ravaged by deindustrialization with a forum to "create in a new way."⁷¹ They did not fight the establishment from a presumed independent position outside of power, but by explicitly partnering with multiple social institutions, they staged their complex positionality *within* systems of power, calling attention to the material structures that bind them and emphasizing not only the networks of support, but also the labor required to maintain both individual and social bodies.

By focusing attention on the politics and the aesthetics of community-based performance's institutional enmeshment, penal-welfare performance helps to move the field beyond the limitations of the efficacy paradigm. In so doing, this framework may illuminate how Schechner's adolescent conception of the "dramatic" corresponds to what Wendy Brown describes as (neo)liberalism's adolescent conception of freedom. Brown challenges notions of radicalism that reinforce the development of (neo)liberalism's conservative self-interested subjects by envisioning a radical re-conception of freedom that "requires inventive and careful use of power rather than rebellion against authority." Brown's freedom, in contrast to the drama of Schechner's radicalism, "is sober, exhausting, and without parents."⁷²

In recent years, scholars and practitioners of community-based performance have attempted to transcend the limitations of *either/or* paradigms (conservatism or radicalism, partnership or rebellion, social work or culture work) by turning instead to a *both/and* model.

⁶⁸ Richard Schechner, *Environmental Theater* (New York: Applause, 1994) 99-100 cited in Jackson, *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 169. For more on this, see Jackson, *Professing Performance*, 162-175.

⁶⁹ Stephen Bottoms, "The Efficacy/Effeminacy Braid: Unpicking the Performance Studies/Theatre Studies Dichotomy," *Theatre Topics* 13.2 (2003): 173-187.

⁷⁰ McKenzie, 30.

⁷¹ McKenna "Letters, Etc.," 8.

⁷² Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 25.

According to Jan Cohen-Cruz, the hyphenated field of community-based performance demands an interdisciplinary conceptual framework that accounts for both politics and aesthetics, efficacy and entertainment.⁷³ While the *both/and* approach succeeds in making room for both cultural and social analytical frames, it does not destabilize the frames themselves. Is there another way to think through the field besides placing one category before another (politics rather than aesthetics) or applying a hyphen (politics and aesthetics)—holding the terms together while simultaneously holding them apart?

In the 1990s, feminist critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw developed the concept of “intersectionality” as a means of moving beyond the limitations of an additive model of thinking.⁷⁴ Crenshaw argued that the conceptual tools offered by race theory and feminist theory were insufficient for understanding the social positioning of women of color. Women of color, she argued, are not simply both black and women; rather, they are constituted by multiple, intersecting sites of identity. Crenshaw showed how women of color’s ill fit within the existing theory necessitated a transformation in conceptual categories. I propose that scholars and practitioners of community-based performance would benefit by following Crenshaw’s lead and thinking intersectionally through the field. Such a conceptual reorientation would allow for a more complex understanding of the relationship between those activities typically associated with “social work” and those typically associated with “culture work.”

Shannon Jackson’s writing on the infrastructural politics of performance enacts just this kind of intersectional analysis by theorizing performance’s “radical contextuality.” Jackson shows how the contingency of the performance form may expose the infrastructures that both support and are supported by diverse individual and social bodies. She argues that all social institutions—even and especially those tied to governmental operations—are founded upon a fundamental recognition of human *interdependency*; yet it is just this kind of intersubjective relationship that neoliberal society violently disavows. Freedom, for Jackson, entails every subject’s responsibility to maintain the systems of support needed to maintain that subject. She makes her argument by examining performance art and popular performance practices that highlight the complex interdependencies between subjects and the systems of power that simultaneously constrain and support them.⁷⁵

My analysis of penal-welfare performance follows Shannon Jackson and Wendy Brown by considering how, in an era when “neoliberal subjects are controlled *through* their freedom,”⁷⁶ a freedom that is characterized by independence from constraint, the “radicalism” of community-based performance may be located in the form’s explicit “reminder of our interdependency with the operations of the public, the economic, and the social.”⁷⁷ My contention is that penal-welfare performance may radicalize “dependency” by challenging neoliberal constructions of aesthetic,

⁷³ Jan Cohen-Cruz, “A Hyphenated Field: Community-Based Theatre in the U.S.A.,” *New Theatre Quarterly* 16.4 (2000): 364-78.

⁷⁴ Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller and Kendall Thomas (New York: New Press, 1995), 103-126.

⁷⁵ Shannon Jackson, *Social Works*.

⁷⁶ Brown, “Neoliberalism,” 44.

⁷⁷ Jackson, “Touchable Stories,” 47.

subjective, and institutional autonomy. In the process, this arts practice and analytical framework may open up the possibility for a community-based theory of identity, agency, and freedom.

Patterned Movements

Even though the artistic and scholarly field of community-based performance has only begun to consolidate in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, artists have been engaging their communities throughout history. More specifically, prison artists have been creating work since the birth of the institution in the early nineteenth century. Despite a growing field of scholarship on prison history and criticism, however, the existing literature overlooks a key aspect of the prison's cultural history by making little to no mention of the arts.⁷⁸ Estelle Freedman offers a typical treatment of the subject. Her book on the history of U.S. women's reformatories includes one paragraph mentioning that in the early twentieth century these institutions engaged incarcerated women in arts programming. These few sentences are accompanied by a photograph of female inmates lined up on stage dressed as armed police officers and dancing with their batons. There is no discussion of this event beyond a brief caption that reads: "Keystone Cops, inmate performance, Massachusetts Reformatory for Women, ca. 1920. For an evening's entertainment, prisoners dressed as male police, offering comic relief from the usual gender and social roles (Courtesy of Massachusetts Correctional Institution, Framingham)."⁷⁹ For what purpose was this production presented? Who performed in it? Who directed it? Who funded it? Who sat in the audience? And why?

Whereas histories of the prison leave these questions unanswered, studies of prison art follow a general trend in community-based performance scholarship by focusing on contemporary practice only.⁸⁰ While the growing body of texts and online forums on the subject bring together a diverse array of contemporary global prison arts practices (with a focus on the U.S. and the U.K.), their historical treatment of the topic is cursory at best. "It is probable that soon after the first prison was built, the first unrecorded moment of prison/theatre/art occurred,"

⁷⁸ David Oshinsky does offer some information on the musical traditions developed at Parchman Farm in *Worse Than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

⁷⁹ Estelle Freedman, *Their Sisters' Keepers: Women's Prison Reform in America, 1830-1930* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1984), photo insert between pgs 118 and 119.

⁸⁰ Over the past two decades, a body of writing on performance in and around the prison system has begun to emerge alongside the developing field of community-based performance. A handful of recent books establish the contours of this growing field: William Cleveland's *Art in Other Places* (1992); James Thompson's anthology *Prison Theatre* (1997); Judith Tannenbaum's *Disguised as a Poem* (2000); Jean Trounstein's *Shakespeare Behind Bars* (2001); Rena Fraden's *Imagining Medea* (2001); Rachel Marie-Crane Williams' anthology *Teaching the Arts behind Bars* (2003); Michael Balfour's anthology *Theatre in Prison* (2004); Laurence Tocci's *The Proscenium Cage* (2007); Krista Brune's *Creating Behind the Razor Wire* (2008); and Judith Tannenbaum and Spoon Jackson's *By Heart* (2010). See bibliography for complete citations. In addition to these books, Linda Frye Burnham and Steven Durland's online journal the *Community Arts Network* (www.communityarts.net) continues to compile a growing database of writing on arts activity in and around the prison system and the Prison Arts Coalition, a recently established online community (theprisonartscoalition.wordpress.com), provides a space for artists, activists, and scholars to engage in a national conversation. In the fall of 2007, the Mural Arts Program in Philadelphia sponsored the first arts in corrections conference. This gathering in turn compelled a group of artists to reconvene at the ten-year anniversary of Critical Resistance in Oakland, CA in the fall of 2008. At that event, the artists established the Prison Arts Coalition to enable continued dialogue and exchange.

writes Michael Balfour in his anthology on prison theater.⁸¹ In the brief paragraphs that follow, he notes only that in the late 1800s plains Indians held in U.S. army forts made drawings and that during World War II those incarcerated in concentration camps and ghettos made theater and art. Similarly, Rachel Marie-Crane Williams explains in her anthology on prison art that “prisoners have occupied themselves by making art since the notion of incarceration began,” but rather than following up on this statement, she builds her study on the premise that prison arts programming is an entirely contemporary phenomenon.⁸²

The interdisciplinary field of performance studies is uniquely positioned to respond to the gaps in the existing literature on both prison art and prison history. By combining historical research with meta-historical critique, a performance-based approach, as Jackson notes, attends to how “reiterated practices give an institution the semblance of fixity,” in other words, “how verbs prop up the perceived stability of nouns.” By emphasizing processes of production and creative acts of making, a performance perspective compels the historian of the prison to ask: what verbs prop up the fortress that is the modern penitentiary? What “patterned movements, made and remembered by bodies” uphold its stone walls and steel bars?⁸³ The following chapter examines the consequences of the historical blindspots within the fields of prison studies and community-based performance studies by focusing on the establishment of California’s first state penitentiary in 1852 and the significant role the arts have played in the prison’s multiple reformations throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Through the case study of San Quentin, I consider how, at various historical moments and in different social contexts, artists inside and outside prison walls have mobilized shifting discourses of “rehabilitation” and “reform” to enact such contradictory processes as conformism and activism, discipline and critique, individual healing and social restructuring.

Chapter three moves into the late twentieth century by examining how and to what effect arts practices came to be professionalized within California’s expanding correctional system. Through the case study of California Arts-in-Corrections, I consider how neoliberal restructuring in the late twentieth century ironically spawned the burgeoning fields of arts in corrections and community-based performance. The development and decline of Arts-in-Corrections, once the largest institutional arts program in the world, reveals how and why a body of artists and arts organizations responded to the mass expansion of the prison and rollback of the welfare systems in California and across the nation. I derive my analysis from archival research and interviews with Arts-in-Corrections administrators and artists to illuminate how the growth of the prison industrial complex has enabled the development of arts practices that simultaneously resist and reinforce neoliberal governmentality.

The second half of the dissertation moves from the inside to the outside of prison walls by focusing on two contemporary penal-welfare performance projects: the Medea Project, a performance company that occupies a liminal position both within and beyond the prison system, and the Prison Project at Intersection for the Arts, a performance project that operates primarily outside of criminal justice bureaucracies. Chapter four draws from a year of collaborative ethnographic research with the Medea Project to explore how this theater company maneuvers

⁸¹ Michael Balfour, ed, *Theatre in Prison: Theory and Practice* (Bristol UK: Intellect Books, 2004), 1.

⁸² Williams, 19.

⁸³ Shannon Jackson, *Lines of Activity: Performance, Historiography and Hull House Domesticity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 25.

within and beyond the criminal justice system. Unlike Arts-in-Corrections, which was fully institutionalized within the government bureaucracy, the Medea Project's more flexible relationship with the San Francisco county jail system affords participating artists a unique set of opportunities and constraints. The company's insider/outsider status enables an approach to community-based performance that founder and director Rhodessa Jones terms "easy intimacy." Focusing on *My Life in the Concrete Jungle*, the group's seventh production, the chapter demonstrates how "easy intimacy" functions as an open and fraught process of ethical enmeshment that helps to rebuild the gendered and racialized care networks which have been fractured by the prison industrial complex.

Chapter five examines how the Prison Project's expansive model of aesthetic and social engagement gestured toward the simultaneous impossibility and radical potentiality of an abolitionist aesthetic. I explore how Prison Project participants worked to expose and transform the *infrastructures of feeling*⁸⁴ undergirding the expanding prison industrial complex. In the process, however, they pushed and pulled against the related infrastructures of feeling that both enable and constrain contemporary practices of art-making and social justice organizing. I consider how the Prison Project's greatest potential lay in how it activated a diverse group of artists, activists, and community partners in an extended dialogical process that kept the tensions between art and activism, as well as those between the prison and the public sphere, open to rigorous questioning and debate. Through this performative practice, the Prison Project demonstrates how one small neighborhood arts organization might work in partnership with a wide array of individuals and institutions to reach across and toward an abolitionist horizon.⁸⁵

Each of the case studies discussed in this dissertation sheds light on how penal-welfare performance—as both an arts practice and a conceptual lens—may complicate dominant conceptions of radicalism. Through an ethic and aesthetic of *interdependency*, the performance culture at San Quentin prison, the California Arts-in-Corrections program, the Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women, and the Prison Project at Intersection for the Arts help to unsettle the tendency of scholars and practitioners of theater and performance studies to equate radical artistic, social, and political action with a limited and potentially limiting model of rebellion and resistance. By illuminating their complex institutional negotiations within intersecting systems of power, these performance practices contribute to an art of systemic avowal⁸⁶ that has the potential to destabilize the neoliberal discourses and bureaucratic structures that not only uphold the prison industrial complex, but that also reinforce the infrastructures of feeling underlying the intersections of art-making and social justice organizing.

⁸⁴ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Preface to *Prison/Culture*, ed. Sharon E. Bliss, Kevin B. Chen, Steve Dickison, Mark Dean Johnson, Rebeka Rodriguez (San Francisco: City Light Foundation, 2009), 1.

⁸⁵ Erica Meiners develops the concept of a "horizon of abolition" in *Right to Be Hostile*, 165-186.

⁸⁶ Here, I draw from Shannon Jackson's attention to arts practices that have "induced infrastructural avowal." Jackson argues that these practices situate "'heteronomy' as both a socio-political but also an aesthetic-formal question of the openness to contingency, to external rule, to avowing support, to experiments in not being privately self-governing." For further discussion, see *Social Works: The Infrastructural Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, forthcoming December 2010).

Chapter 2

Performing Reform: Refiguring Rehabilitation at San Quentin Prison

“On November 19, 1957, a group of worried actors were preparing to face their audience. The actors were members of the company of the San Francisco Actors’ Workshop. The audience consisted of fourteen hundred convicts at the San Quentin penitentiary.” So begins Martin Esslin’s *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Esslin continues that Director Herbert Blau and his actors were understandably nervous as they were about to present Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* to “one of the toughest audiences in the world.” Not only were these actors preparing to share a literary work that had been criticized by audiences across the United States and Europe for its esoteric inaccessibility, but they were also about to bring the first play to the prisoners at San Quentin in over forty years. “The curtain parted,” Esslin tells us. “The play began. And what had bewildered the sophisticated audiences of Paris, London, and New York was immediately grasped by an audience of convicts.”¹ The men of San Quentin, he concludes, received this avant-garde work with such enthusiasm and appreciation precisely because they had not been tainted by prior knowledge or experience of theater and art.²

Today, a half-century later, *Godot* at San Quentin continues to circulate within the cultural imagination and particularly to pique the interest of scholars and practitioners of theater and performance. In line with Esslin’s narrative, the production is remembered as an isolated event, an historical anomaly that facilitated an unlikely exchange between “high” culture and “low” culture, as well as between those on the outside and those on the inside of prison walls. The performance is not only seen as a rarity, but also as a catalyst for the development of prison arts programming throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. As Herbert Blau recalls in a recent interview, “A lot of work has been done over the last generation in prisons, factories, Indian reservations, wherever, but there was no such active tradition at the time, and the production of *Godot* at San Quentin became a prototype.”³ Blau goes on to explain that no play had ever before been performed at San Quentin or any maximum-security prison in the United States.⁴ Throughout my research process, I have found that the history of arts programming in and around the prison system is, in fact, replete with such narratives casting outside artists as pioneers who venture bravely into the untapped world of the prison. This chapter illuminates some of the blindspots created by such narrative constructions. Closer attention to the cultural history of San Quentin prison reveals that the 1957 production of *Waiting for Godot*, while historically significant, was but one act in a long and lively history of art-making at San Quentin and penal institutions across the country, a history that has eluded both scholarly and popular memory. What can this history teach us? And, how might it enhance and complicate contemporary conceptual frameworks within the fields of critical prison studies and theater and performance studies?

¹ Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), xv.

² *Ibid.*, xvii.

³ Herbert Blau, *Sails of the Herring Fleet: Essays on Beckett* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000), 61.

⁴ He continues by referencing a rumor that Sarah Bernhardt had performed at San Quentin at the turn of the century. As I will show later in this chapter, Sarah Bernhardt did in fact perform at San Quentin in 1913, 61.

The case study of San Quentin reveals the integral role that art and performance have played in the prison's multiple reformations throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This chapter attends to the history of art-making at San Quentin in order to probe the relationship between prison performance and the discourses and practices of "rehabilitation" and "reform." I am particularly interested in how, across different historical contexts, these terms have signaled shifting and contested meanings that have simultaneously perpetuated and exceeded the constraints of a Foucaultian conception of disciplinarity. From the new penology of the 1890s and 1910s, to the "penal managerialism"⁵ of the 1920s and 1930s, to the "treatment model"⁶ of the 1940s and 1950s, the arts have served as vehicles for defining and re-defining "rehabilitation" and "reform." I begin by situating the history of San Quentin's arts practices in relation to the work of major historians and theorists of the prison and welfare systems. I seek to complicate reductive conceptions of the prison's disciplinary power by arguing for a performance-based approach that accounts for a nuanced understanding of such historically situated concepts as "rehabilitation" and "reform." The chapter then moves chronologically through the history of theater and performance at San Quentin from the birth of the institution in the mid-nineteenth century, to the discontinuous institutionalization of these practices during the Progressive Era, to the prominent role that they came to play in San Quentin's restructuring in the 1940s. It concludes by returning to the 1957 performance of *Waiting for Godot*. By situating the production within this broader historical context, I seek to complicate our inherited narratives about art's "rehabilitative" promise.

A Note on Theory and Method

Foucault's critique of the prison's disciplinary power has had a major impact not only on the field of prison studies, but also on fields across the humanities and social sciences. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues that the prison was born in conjunction with modernity. As sovereignty shifted to governmentality, discipline emerged as a new form of power, a subtle and diffuse machinery designed to determine not only "what [individuals] do but also... what they are, will be, may be."⁷ In modern society, the prison has come to function as but one part of a carceral continuum aimed at shaping social masses into "docile," self-governing individual bodies.⁸ For Foucault, Jeremy Bentham's late eighteenth century design of the optimum prison exemplifies discipline's "general formulas of domination."⁹ Bentham's Panopticon consists of a central tower with a series of cells along the periphery. Every cell represents a small theater in which "each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible." Within this architecture, the individual comes into being as an object of knowledge; "he is seen, but he does not see."¹⁰ Thus, alongside the factory, hospital, school, military, and a wide array of social

⁵ Rebecca McLennan defines this term in *The Crisis of Imprisonment: Protest, Politics, and the Making of the American Penal State, 1776-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 446.

⁶ Larry E. Sullivan defines this concept in *The Prison Reform Movement: Forlorn Hope* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990), 61. For further discussion, see also Eric Cummins *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 14-18.

⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 18.

⁸ For further discussion, see Foucault, 135-170.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 200.

welfare organizations, the prison contributes to a disciplinary constellation in which social judges both produce and police the boundaries between the normal and the abnormal. Foucault's theoretical framework has led numerous scholars to approach such concepts as "rehabilitation" and "reform" as insidious tools of domination through which individual subjects and social institutions are constituted as cogs in a corrective and coercive machine.

Even though Foucault's analysis of subjectivation (the process by which modern subjects are formed in and through subjection to disciplinary power) has had a significant impact on my thinking, I am cautious of some of the ways in which his work has come to circulate within contemporary academic discourse. It can be tempting, for instance, to conclude from Foucault's analysis that the modern prison is a stable entity that has remained essentially unchanged across the United States and Europe for over two hundred years. It can be even more tempting to analyze this institution in terms of a (rather un-Foucaultian) top-down understanding of power equated primarily with domination.¹¹ From this perspective, the concepts of "rehabilitation" and "reform," as they are understood to be disciplinary tools, may also be interpreted as fixed and stable top-down operations. Further attention to the cultural and historical specificities of the prison may enable a more complex understanding of both the carceral system and the "rehabilitative" promise of prison arts programming.

Even though historians have criticized Foucault for privileging theoretical generalization over historical detail, they tend to follow his lead by focusing primarily on the ideology of elite prison reformers—an approach exemplified by Foucault's attention to Bentham's designed, but rarely built, Panopticon.¹² Like Foucault, historian David Rothman also frames his studies around the ideals of elite reformers; he describes a swinging pendulum throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries between "conscience" (the ideology of reform) and "convenience" (the obstacles to ever fully achieving reform).¹³ Similarly, Larry Sullivan and Estelle Freedman structure their histories around the contradiction between reformers' goals of "rehabilitation" and the prison's practical application as "punishment."¹⁴ While Foucault problematizes this dynamic between "success" and "failure," he, too, focuses his attention on the discourse of prison reform rather than on the actual lived practices of prison life at particular times and places.¹⁵

¹¹ David Garland, for example, summarizes Foucault's analysis in these very terms when he cautions against reducing the prison to issues of "power": "Foucault gives the impression that the aims of power—the norms which the disciplines impose—are always those of conformity, obedience, and behavior control. By extension, power in the wider 'disciplinary society' appears to be concerned solely with this kind of domination, albeit in ways which make bodies useful as well as docile." David Garland, *Punishment and Modern Society: A Study in Social Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 169. While I find Foucault's theory of power to be far more complex than Garland suggests, I am wary of how Foucault's theories have come to circulate according to this kind of reductive logic.

¹² For more of the historical flaws in Foucault's analysis, see Garland, *Punishment and Modern Society*, 134.

¹³ For further discussion, see David Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co, 1971) and *Conscience and Convenience: The Asylum and Its Alternatives in Progressive America* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2nd Ed., 2002).

¹⁴ Sullivan, *The Prison Reform Movement*; Estelle B. Freedman, *Their Sisters' Keepers: Women's Prison Reform in America, 1830-1930* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981).

¹⁵ Foucault explains: "If the law is supposed to define offenses, if the function of the penal apparatus is to reduce them and if the prison is the instrument of this repression, then failure has to be admitted... but perhaps one should reverse the problem and ask oneself what is served by the failure of the prison; what is the use of these different phenomena that are continually being criticized; the maintenance of delinquency, the encouragement of recidivism,

Several studies have emerged in recent years that challenge this dominant “creed-to-deed” approach to prison history and criticism.¹⁶ David Garland, for instance, seeks to trouble a more reductive reading of Foucault by attending to how the prison has functioned as a perpetually shifting site of negotiation between multiple interests, beliefs, values, functions, and practices.¹⁷ Following Garland, Rebecca McLennan attends to how the ideals of elite reformers were shaped in relation to complex struggles between diverse social actors. The prison, she argues, “was at once much more than a ‘laboratory’ of progressive prison reform and much less than a ‘total institution’ in which all-powerful administrators exercised perfect power over their wards. It was a *social* institution in which convicts, wardens, guards, clergy, bureaucrats, and reformers engaged in ongoing struggles to influence and change the rules, routines, and ideology of imprisonment.”¹⁸ Mary Ellen Curtin also emphasizes the micro-performances of prison life in her study of the convict lease system in the American South. Curtin attends to the strategies of resistance that prisoners enacted even amidst the most oppressive conditions; within this brutal system, black male and female prisoners (who constituted the vast majority of the incarcerated population in the post-Civil War South) drew from practices they had developed during slavery to forge relationships, strengthen family ties, and bargain for their freedom.¹⁹

By unsettling the “creed-to-deed” approach to prison studies, scholars like Garland, McLennan, and Curtin gesture toward a performance-based analysis. Performance, in this context, may provide a lens through which to view how discourses and embodied practices (creeds and deeds) meet, revise, and propel each other. Shannon Jackson’s understanding of “reformance” further complicates the relationship between creeds and deeds, between the ideology and the lived practice of the prison.²⁰ Jackson interweaves “reform” and “performance” to examine how members of the Settlement Movement worked to simultaneously restore and resist “correct” behavior. Like prison history, many of the histories of Progressive Era reform movements also focus on how elite bureaucrats attempted to impose their ideals of social order upon the urban masses. Through the concept of “reformance,” Jackson shifts the terms of the conversation to emphasize “the messy and paradoxical” interactions between settlers and community members. “Reformance,” then, accounts for the push-and-pull between subjection and subjectivity produced by repeated daily, embodied interactions. Rather than relying on a facile understanding of agency or resistance, “reformance” draws in part from theories of performativity to examine how repeated acts may exceed the conditions of their constraint. This conceptual framework frees us up from having to choose whether “reform” is either a positive or a negative force and instead allows us to attend to both the dangers and the opportunities posed

the transformation of the occasional offender into a habitual delinquent, the organization of a closed milieu of delinquency,” 272.

¹⁶ Rebecca McLennan outlines the contours of the “creed and deed” approach in “Punishment’s ‘Square Deal’: Prisoners and their Keepers in 1920s New York,” *Journal of Urban History* 29.5 (July 2003): 598.

¹⁷ Garland, *Punishment and Modern Society*, 19.

¹⁸ McLennan, “Punishment’s Square Deal,” 599. McLennan’s account of American prison history guides my analysis throughout this chapter. For further information, see also *The Crisis of Imprisonment*.

¹⁹ Mary Ellen Curtin, *Black Prisoners and Their World, Alabama, 1865-1900* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000).

²⁰ For further discussion, see Shannon Jackson, *Lines of Activity Performance, Historiography and Hull House Domesticity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 8-18.

by practices that acknowledge and engage the constructed nature of the social world.²¹ Jackson's "reformance" reminds us that while art and performance may be utilized as disciplinary tools of behavior modification, they may also "create alternative spheres of identification that encourage interactions that other deliberative spheres constrain or censor."²²

It is within this framework of reciprocal action and interaction that I seek to situate the history of arts programming in and around San Quentin and the U.S. prison system more generally. I strive to show how the arts, rather than merely being implemented from above by a group of all-powerful outsiders, have entered and exited the prison in response to struggles between diverse subjects who have simultaneously shaped and been shaped by those very struggles. In so doing, I wish to show how, at various historical moments and in different social contexts, artists and audiences differentially positioned between the inside and outside of prison walls have mobilized shifting discourses and practices of "rehabilitation" and "reform" in order to stage complex, and at times competing, dynamics between conformism and activism, discipline and protest, individual healing and social restructuring.

Birth of the Prison

Throughout the nineteenth century, California prisoners utilized artistic expression to create daily rituals of community building and collective release within an otherwise brutal prison regime. Because such rituals were informal prisoner-generated practices, they tend to have circumvented the radar of prison history, as well as much of the official and popular discourse of the period, however brief glimpses of these practices do appear within the historical record. A century before the members of the San Francisco Actor's Workshop first entered San Quentin, for instance, writer and philosopher Prentice Mulford contributed a series of columns to San Francisco's *The Daily Morning Chronicle* about his visits to the young state's newly established penal institution. In one of those articles, Mulford provides a detailed account of a day-in-the-life of a San Quentin prisoner, an account that opens a small window into how the arts came to operate in the context of this one nineteenth-century prison:

When, in charge of a Sheriff or his deputy, you are taken to the State Prison, it may be difficult at first to distinguish you from your attendant officer: but when your broadcloth and linen come off, and you are taken to a tank and made to wash yourself all over, for the first time perhaps in many years, and are put in a suit of dingy striped gray and black, and crowned with an old slouch of a hat, you are no longer the same man; you are then born a convict. 'Convict' will then stamp itself on your face and in your very gait and manner.²³

Mulford's description of San Quentin life reflects Foucault's assertion that the prison was born in conjunction not only with a new political order, but also a new political subject: the "convict," the "delinquent," or the "criminal." Mulford describes how subjects were interpellated into this identity not only through a body of scientific studies and legislative orders, but also through

²¹ Ibid., 14.

²² Ibid., 17.

²³ Prentice Mulford, "Rambling Letters, No. 6," *The Daily Morning Chronicle*, July 29, 1869, 1.

daily repeated acts that became sedimented in the body—acts constituted in part by wearing striped uniforms, donning shaved heads, maintaining silence, and marching in lockstep (a practice in which the incarcerated were required to move together in a hunched and limping human chain). Such micro-performances were integral to the practices of penal reform as they came to be implemented in the Auburn style of incarceration that spread across the United States throughout the nineteenth century. The Auburn model of confinement represented a distinct mix of deeds and creeds that California’s San Quentin prison would only come to partially adopt.

As Beaumont and Tocqueville have shown, the modern prison emerged as a fundamental, if not paradigmatic, institution of democracy.²⁴ The penitentiary was a distinctly American invention that, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries played an integral role in the consolidation of the United States and the corresponding developments of democracy and industrial capitalism. Immediately upon achieving independence in 1776, the new nation began experimenting with penitentiary houses in search of a republican system of justice that would be distinct from Britain’s emphasis on the public spectacle of torture. As the first cellular prisons were established in the Northeastern United States during the 1820s, incarceration grew to become the preferred model of democratic discipline.

When the word “penitentiary” shifted from adjective to noun (from a small wooden “penitentiary house” in the 1780s and 1790s to a large stone “penitentiary” in the 1820s and 1830s), the word “criminal” also shifted from an adjective to a noun (from a series of “criminal acts” to a distinct class of “criminals”). According to Rebecca McLennan, whereas the notion of “a penitentiary” or “a criminal” would have been inconceivable in 1800, by just 1840 such concepts had become prevalent.²⁵ McLennan points out how the ideology of “criminality” took hold in response to a fundamental contradiction between the American ideals of liberty and equality on the one hand, and the realities of Americans’ daily lives on the other. During the Jacksonian era, as the Northern states shifted from a rural agrarian economy to an increasingly industrial urban environment, changing social relations came to heighten a distrust of the poor. This period marked a social crisis in which, as David Rothman explains, “The poor not only lost their former status as neighbors in a stable community, but also their position in a hierarchical order. As a result, they became suspicious and culpable characters, albeit persons whose condition might be elevated and improved through a rehabilitative and corrective program.”²⁶ The penitentiary thus emerged alongside the almshouse, orphan asylums, insane asylums and other social welfare institutions in response to the formation of a class of people who were imagined to be simultaneously dangerous to and dependent on the social order.

During this period, two dominant architectures of incarceration emerged: the Pennsylvania model of solitary confinement (as exemplified by the Eastern State Penitentiary) and the Auburn model of congregate labor (as exemplified by the New York State prison at

²⁴ Alexis de Tocqueville’s began his research process for *Democracy in America* by visiting and writing about America’s prisons. After nine months of research in 1831, he and Gustave de Beaumont wrote up their assessment of America’s new system of democratic justice in *The U.S. Penitentiary System and its Application in France*. For further information, see Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J.P. Mayer, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

²⁵ Rebecca McLennan, “Citizens and Criminals: The Rise of the American Carceral State (1890-1935),” Diss. Columbia University (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1999), 17.

²⁶ Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, 156.

Auburn). Quaker reformers were strong advocates of the Pennsylvania model, which offered a program of moral reform wherein the individual criminal would remain isolated in a cell throughout the duration of his incarceration.²⁷ The Pennsylvania model dictated that each prisoner—in perpetual silence and with only a Bible to occupy his mind—would have the opportunity to commune with God, confront his soul, and transform his wayward character.²⁸ The Auburn model also emphasized isolation, silence, and moral reform, however, while convicts were to spend their nights alone in their cells, they were to spend their days at silent congregate labor in private factories on prison grounds. This system of contract prison labor offered a compromise that was understood not only to instill a work ethic in the criminal classes, but also to manage the cost of incarceration. While the Pennsylvania model became increasingly popular across Europe, it was the Auburn model that, amidst burgeoning industrialization, urbanization, and trans-Atlantic capitalism, spread across the U.S. frontier.²⁹

Soon after gold was discovered in 1848, the new state of California faced the challenge of establishing a justice system that could adequately respond to the unique character of the “wild West.” When the population of San Francisco rose from 2,000 in February of 1849 to 30,000 by the end of that same year,³⁰ the city and surrounding areas struggled to contend with what an 1851 legislative report described as an infestation of “hordes of the most desperate scoundrels, accomplished in every art of villainy, and bonded together in a brotherhood of crime.” The report continued by lamenting the vast influx of convicts from penal colonies and outlaws from around the world that had been drawn to the area “by the lust of plunder.”³¹ Shortly after having been admitted into the union, California’s practice of vigilante justice came under critique, and by just 1851 the new state began to draw up plans for the formation of a penitentiary. San Quentin’s first prisoners—the majority of whom were classified as foreign-born—were quickly put to hard labor under the control of contractors James Madison Estell and General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo. Crowded onto the hull of a ship by night, these men labored by day building the stone structure on Point San Quentin that would later come to confine them. The ship, which was

²⁷ Even though women were incarcerated during the nineteenth century (albeit in far smaller numbers than men), I use the masculine pronoun here because the “convict” was imagined to have once been a free man. Because incarceration was conceived as the deprivation of rights, it was not perceived to be an effective mode of discipline for women or for slaves who continued to be punished primarily by husbands, fathers, and slave owners. For further discussion, see Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 45.

²⁸ In practice, the Pennsylvania model of solitary confinement quickly proved to be a cruel and unusual form of punishment that drove prisoners insane within a period of weeks. Today, prisoners kept in isolation in California’s Secure Housing Units and in other kinds of solitary confinement across the country experience what has been termed “SHU Syndrome.” Symptoms include “visual and auditory hallucinations, hypersensitivity to noise and touch, insomnia and paranoia, uncontrollable feelings of rage and fear, distortions of time and perception, increased risk of suicide,” and the full battery of symptoms associated with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Whereas Quaker activists were instrumental in developing the Pennsylvania model, they are currently some of the country’s strongest opponents of solitary confinement. For more on this, see the American Friends Service Committee <<http://afsc.org/resource/solitary-confinement-facts>> (accessed Jun 10, 2010).

²⁹ Shelley Bookspan offers a more detailed, but still concise, summary of the Pennsylvania and Auburn models of incarceration in *A Germ of Goodness: The California State Prison System, 1851-1944* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), xi-xiv.

³⁰ Bookspan, 1.

³¹ John Hoyle Papers, 1907-1913, Box 4, Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

designed to hold 40 people and which in actuality held about 150, also confined a handful of women who were placed in the domestic and sexual service of guards and prisoners alike.³²

While Kenneth Lamott is unique among prison historians for his careful attention to the conditions of incarcerated women, his treatment of their conditions mirrors a dominant pattern in prison history by constructing whimsical images of wily female outlaws and entrepreneurial prostitutes to cover up, or at least gloss over, what appears to have been a daily systematic pattern of rape. After describing each of the five women who were held on the brig during San Quentin's first year in operation, Lamott playfully reflects that, "although it was at about this time that John Gray, the lieutenant of the guard, began to slip into the pleasant habit of visiting the women's cabin for relaxation, we do not know if it was Agnes Read or Perquita Saledano or Carmine Nuñez or Lilly C. Smith or Dolores Martinez who first seduced him from the stern path of his duty."³³ He continues by analyzing prisoner testimony and other records of the period that document how San Quentin's female prisoners engaged in regular sexual intercourse with prisoners as well as with guards. While Lamott concludes that "the deplorable moral characters of these young women" suggests that they eagerly took part in this "free sexual intercourse," it is crucial to question how anyone forced into bondage could enter into such a "free" exchange.³⁴ Despite the limitations of Lamott's analysis, his research does reveal how, in addition to providing the labor for the institution's cooking and laundry, San Quentin's women throughout most of the nineteenth century were also responsible for sexually servicing prisoners as well as guards. In fact, male prisoners were often rewarded for their productive labor in the institution's fields and brickyards with Sunday afternoon "visits" to the women's quarters.³⁵ While Lamott is correct that we do not know the details of these women's experiences or the survival strategies that they developed within such brutal conditions, we do know that male and female prisoners of the period were forced into divided gendered and sexualized roles: whereas the men were called to perform manual labor, the women were called to perform domestic and sexual labor. Through this lens, we can see how the prison, from its inception, functioned as a gendering apparatus both constructed and enforced the boundaries between social norms.

Whereas California never adopted the Auburn model of solitary cellular incarceration, the state readily adopted its system of contract labor. California turned to this partial realization of the Auburn model in large part because it was the dominant discourse and practice of American punishment available at the time, yet whereas a sense of community responsibility and a commitment to the "reformation" of convicts was integral to incarceration in the Northeast (even if more in terms of creed than actual deed), the concept of "rehabilitation" held little sway in California during this period.³⁶ Instead, the prison was established alongside a series of

³² For further details on the history of San Quentin's contract labor system, see Bookspan, 1-24 and Kenneth Lamott, *Chronicles of San Quentin: The Biography of a Prison* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc, 1961), 3-97. See also interview with Dick Nelson, former Associate Warden, in Scott Paddor and Paul Sorvino, *The Big House: San Quentin*, New York: A&E Home Video, 1999, minutes 4-6.

³³ Lamott, 22

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 23-24. In his 1918 study of San Quentin's early history, James Harold Wilkins constructs a similar narrative to Lamott: "Though sequestered from the world, they had no reason to lament the absence of male admiration, so dear to ladies' hearts." James Harold Wilkins, "The Evolution of a State Prison," in *San Quentin: The Evolution of a State Prison*, ed. Bonnie L. Petry and Michael Burgess (Rockville, MD: Borgo Press, 2005), 41-42.

³⁵ Lamott, 23-24.

³⁶ Bookspan, xviii-xix.

legislative measures intended to protect society from what the first annual report of California's prison inspectors referred to as the "alien and servile races." The report added that "the degraded races have always needed the jailer and executioner, and been conspicuous for improvidence and crime."³⁷ In line with the findings of that first legislative report, Prentice Mulford's 1869 description of San Quentin life in no way reflected a system of individualized correction, but rather painted the picture of a racialized melting pot in which "the whiteness of the American face, the darker hue of the Mexican, the brown tint of the Chinaman and the black of the negro" were blended together into a mass of involuntary laborers who were not held in individual cells, but rather crowded together into shared quarters. This "great nasty worm" of men, Mulford explained, was forced into servitude primarily for Estell's San Francisco Manufacturing Company. Each day, male convicts worked in "the shops or brickyards" while others labored in "the surrounding hills digging clay," supervised at all times by a mounted and armed prisoner trusty.³⁸

Mulford's account gestures to how the practice of contract labor in the nineteenth century California prison (and also arguably across the country) emerged less from an impulse to "correct" the poor urban masses and more from the discourses and practices of chattel slavery that had taken root in the American South.³⁹ In fact, by the 1860s, the equation between the "slave" and the "convict" had become so firmly rooted in the popular imagination that Americans across the country did not question the exceptions to the thirteenth and fourteenth constitutional amendments, which indicated that slavery and involuntary servitude be abolished—except in the case of imprisonment; and that the rights of citizenship be granted to every man born or naturalized within the United States—except in the case of imprisonment.⁴⁰ Because the "convict" was seen to exist beyond the bounds of the social contract, incarceration entailed not only confinement but also civil death, or the deprivation of what were otherwise said to be inalienable rights. The construction of the American "convict" as a civilly dead laborer was thus inextricably linked to the construction of the American "slave" as a member of an inferior alien race. As we have seen, the construction of the "fallen woman" was also linked to that of the "slave" through practices of forced labor that included, but were not limited to, sexual slavery. Attention to the workings of this system of contract prison labor reveals how the California prison (as well as prisons across the country) was shaped not only by reformist ideology, but also by a drive to produce and to police a population of racialized, classed, gendered, and sexualized (non)subjects who were positioned simultaneously within and beyond the boundaries of the nation.⁴¹ Within this carceral system, contract prison labor came to serve throughout the

³⁷ Annual Report of State Prison Inspectors, 1851-52, D575, GP 1:138, California State Archives, cited in Bookspan xviii.

³⁸ Mulford, "Rambling Letters No. 6," 1.

³⁹ Angela Y. Davis offers a powerful analysis of the inextricable ties between both the ideologies and the practices of imprisonment and slavery in the United States. For further discussion, see *Are Prisons Obsolete*, 22-40 and "Racialized Punishment and Prison Abolition" in *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*, ed. Joy James (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 96-107.

⁴⁰ For further discussion of how the penal system's practice of involuntary servitude came to be written into the thirteenth and fourteenth amendments, see McLennan, *Crisis of Imprisonment*, 85-86.

⁴¹ For more on the relationship between slavery and civil death, see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1985). Stormy Odgen also shows how, even though California was established as a "free state," the enslavement of indigenous Californians was legalized both within

nineteenth century as the ideological, financial, and disciplinary backbone of incarceration not only in the Southern states, but also throughout the North and the West.⁴²

Because San Quentin was run primarily to turn a profit for the prison's lessees, and because the California public gave little credence to the Auburn model's "rehabilitative" promise, Vallejo and Estell were relatively free to ignore the penitentiary's purported "reformatory" operations. In their studies of California prison history, Shelley Bookspan and Kenneth Lamott describe a chaotic environment during these years in which brutal corporal punishments, riots, drunkenness (among guards and prisoners alike), and a general sense of mayhem prevailed. After they were moved from the ship, the majority of San Quentin's rapidly expanding prison population was crowded together in The Stones, the prison's original structure, which remained in operation until 1959. The second floor of the building contained forty-eight cells that were designed to hold one prisoner each, but that in practice held more than four at a time; the first floor was an open space (measuring 24 by 146 feet) that was designed to be a dining area, but that quickly came to house more than one hundred prisoners.⁴³ Throughout the nineteenth century, rebellions and escape attempts were common despite (and perhaps also because of) the regular use of the flogging post and other brutal corporal punishments. Estell noted in one of his annual reports to the state legislature that "quite a number [of prisoners were] killed in attempts to suppress revolts, and in efforts to retake those who had escaped." Whereas Estell never provided an exact number, California's prison inspectors reported that far more people were killed under the lease system than would ever be accurately recorded.⁴⁴

In his description of these early years at San Quentin, Prentice Mulford expands upon these historical accounts by demonstrating how, within such a capricious disciplinary environment, prisoners paved partial routes of escape by developing regular performance rituals:

At four we are locked-up, and then from the cells there breaks forth the sound of tamborines, violins, banjos, bones, flutes and nearly everything else which can make a sound when blown through. There is dancing, singing and merriment enough for a dozen negro minstrels in full blast. It is heard but not seen. It is all hidden away in stone walls under lock and key.⁴⁵

and beyond prison walls beginning in 1850. For further discussion, see "The Prison Industrial Complex in Indigenous California," in *Global Lockdown: Race, Gender, and the Prison-Industrial Complex*, ed. Julia Sudbury (New York: Routledge, 2006), 63-64.

⁴² Whereas David Rothman and other prison scholars have tended to argue that prison labor never proved particularly profitable, Rebecca McLennan's recent study proves that it was a highly profitable, deeply entrenched system that was fundamental to the foundations of the American carceral system throughout the nineteenth century. For further discussion, see Rothman, *Discovery of the Asylum*, 104 and McLennan, *Crisis of Imprisonment*, 1-13.

⁴³ The institution's women, who represented about 1% of the overall prison population, were overwhelmingly neglected during this period. It is primarily based on the absence of information in prison registers that we may conclude that San Quentin's women were confined together in a small room above the institution's hospital; they had no matron and were only allowed out of this area for a brief period once a week while the men were in church. Bookspan, 70-74.

⁴⁴ Bookspan, 9.

⁴⁵ Mulford, "Rambling Letters, No. 6."

While practices of art-making were not institutionalized into San Quentin's program during this period, Mulford shows how they came to be incorporated into the prison's daily timetable nonetheless. Without more information, it is difficult to determine how or why these performance rituals were established. They very well may have offered prison administrators effective disciplinary tools by granting prisoners carnivalesque experiences of emotional release that kept them from attempting to physically escape. By the same token, these performances may have served as survival strategies for prisoners who were forced to contend with an exceptionally harsh and violent system. It is possible that the performance rituals of San Quentin's prisoners, like the musical traditions of slaves, created a forum for what James Scott describes as "hidden transcripts"—strategies of resistance through which "offstage dissent to the official transcript of power relations may be voiced."⁴⁶ Whatever their intended or unintended effects, the institution's administrators most likely tolerated these performance rituals—even though they blatantly broke the penitentiary's rule of silence—because they did not detract from the system's primary profit-driven mission. Ironically, it seems to have been precisely because the prison's lessees did not subscribe to the "corrective" ideals of the Auburn system that San Quentin prisoners were able to subvert that system's rules through such daily practices of artistic expression. From within this context, we may understand performance to have first entered the California prison not out of an impulse for "reform," but rather out of a spirit of resistance among the prisoners and a general disregard among prison officials and the public for the principles and practices of "rehabilitation" that dominated the penology of the period.

When the practice of contract prison labor was finally abolished in California in 1882 and in prisons across the United States throughout the 1880s and 1890s—after years of struggle by free laborers, prisoners, and policymakers—the U.S. prison system was thrust into a major crisis. Whereas the relative continuity from slavery to the prison enabled the Southern states to transition rather fluidly into a state-use labor system, the abolition of the lease system in the Northern and Western states thoroughly disrupted the Auburn model's disciplinary, financial, and ideological underpinnings.⁴⁷ As California transitioned into the twentieth century, it followed the rest of the Northern states in radically reinventing its penal system. What could fill the vacuum left in the wake of contract prison labor? One solution, as we shall see, involved the implementation of deeds and creeds that harnessed the prisoners' already existing performance culture.

Making Men, Making Women: Performance and the New Penology

Even though the new penology entered San Quentin in fits and starts, California did begin to implement a series of systemic changes immediately after the abolition of contract labor in the late 1800s. San Quentin's first public New Years Day performance in 1892 marks this transformation in penal policy. This minstrel and vaudeville show was written, designed, directed, and presented by an all-inmate cast for a combined audience of prisoners, prison

⁴⁶ James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), xi.

⁴⁷ For a rich historical account of the South's transition from convict leasing to state-run chain gangs, see Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor: The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South* (London: Verso, 1996), 152-186. See also, David M. Oshinsky, *Worse Than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

officials, and invited members of the surrounding communities. With the permission of Warden W.E. Hale, the prisoners erected a stage in the institution's new library, complete with a drop curtain, flies, and scenery that they made from scraps of cloth from San Quentin's recently constructed state-run jute mill. Because the audience of over 1,300 could not fit in the limited space, the celebration was divided into two morning performances. Each event began with an overture by the prison band, which included an organ, three violins, a cornet, four guitars and a bass viol, all of which had been designed and constructed by the prisoners—skills, which, as Prentice Mulford demonstrated, had long been honed within the prison's walls. For the bulk of the entertainment, about a dozen members of the newly formed San Quentin Minstrel and Vaudeville Company performed a series of musical routines, dances, and original farces (including one entitled "The Stony-Faced Jailer") that were tailored specifically for an exchange between the local culture of the prison and the public audience.

This first New Year's performance not only signaled a major shift within the prison's routine, but it also marked a reconfigured relationship between the prison and the public sphere. A reviewer for the *San Francisco Chronicle* who had been invited to attend the production reflected that "everything possible was done by the officers and the guards" to support the celebration so that the prisoners might, if only for a few hours, "forget their surroundings." While the writer emphasized that this performance was intended to provide a momentary distraction from the horrors of prison life, he also commented that the prisoners implicitly communicated stories to their public witnesses "of patient suffering, of repentance, of sorrow...of fierce rebellion against their fate, of passions curbed only by the strong arm of the law, of bitter hatred and a longing to wreak vengeance upon those whom they blame for their incarceration."⁴⁸ This review suggests that San Quentin's first public New Years performance functioned as more than a means of momentary escape; it provided a forum for prisoners to express both repentance and resistance not only to and for one another, but also in relation to guards, wardens, invited policymakers, representatives from the press, and members of the general public.

San Quentin's annual New Years ritual emerged alongside a series of changes that were intended, as the 1892 Annual Report of the California State Board of Prison Directors notes, to raise the state's prison system to "the high standard attained by those of New York and several other Eastern States."⁴⁹ The board's proposed reforms reflected the new approach to penology that began to take root in California and across the Northern states during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In response to the disciplinary and ideological vacuum left in the wake of the contract prison labor system, prisoners would now be subject to a system of classification, segregation, training, and treatment. Instead of striped uniforms, shaved heads, the silence rule, and lockstep marching, the new penology dictated that male prisoners should now wear military style uniforms, march upright with their heads held high, speak to one another, and take charge of developing the prison's infrastructure;⁵⁰ instead of being crowded into small quarters in wings

⁴⁸ "A Convicts' Concert." *The San Francisco Chronicle*, Jan 2, 1892, 2.

⁴⁹ "Our Prison System," *The San Francisco Chronicle*, Dec 10, 1892, 5.

⁵⁰ For more on the ideals and practices of the new penology, see McLennan, *The Crisis of Imprisonment*, 193-417; Larry Sullivan, *The Prison Reform Movement*, 23-43; and David Rothman, *Conscience and Convenience*, 118-28. Other leading studies on the subject include Paul W. Keve, *Prisons and the American Conscience: A History of U.S.*

of men's prisons, women prisoners were to be sent to separate reformatories in which they would wear dresses, decorate their own rooms, and learn the art of keeping house.⁵¹

These changes in the prison routine ushered in a new political subjectivity for incarcerated men and women—from “civilly dead criminals” to “wards of the state.”⁵² Unlike the Auburn model's “convict” who was responsible for his own “rehabilitation” in and through industriousness in the factory and isolation in his cell, the “ward” (who was also made to sacrifice the rights of citizenship) came to be seen as dependent on and subject to “reformation” by the state. Within this context, the prison's job became to make men by transforming “criminals” into upstanding, appropriately hetero-masculine citizens and to make women by transforming “fallen ladies” into properly domesticated subjects.⁵³ Incarceration was thus re-imagined as a process of re-socialization in which prisoners would not be isolated from one another, but would rather be subject to a program of regimented scheduling, classification, treatment, education, and recreation.

Even though this progressive model of prison reform expanded the prison's mechanisms of disciplinarity, it required a distinctly different concept of “rehabilitation” than that of the nineteenth century prison. As McLennan notes, “By 1919, the silent, semi-autonomous prison described by Tocqueville and Beaumont (and more recently, Michel Foucault) had ceased to exist; the convict's status as juridical alien soon died with it.”⁵⁴ The prisoner's new social and political identity as “ward” not only placed him or her in a new position of dependency on the state, but also matched that move by placing the state in a new position of responsibility for that prisoner. This reconfigured relationship opened up a new field of action and interaction between prisoners and the public sphere, a field that would be filled in part by institutionalized practices of art-making.

Whereas prison historians have paid considerable attention to the classification, educational, and therapeutic programs that constituted twentieth century penal reforms, none have attended to the integral role that theater, dance, music, creative writing, and other forms of creative expression came to play in this changing system. Throughout the early twentieth century, San Quentin's prisoners took advantage of the opportunities presented by the transforming ideological and disciplinary approaches to incarceration in part by building on the prison's existing performance culture to organize opportunities for increased communication with the outside world. The New Years show, for instance, quickly expanded into a five-hour long annual ritual in which hundreds of outside artists and members of the surrounding

Federal Corrections (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991) and Blake McKelvey, *American Prisoners: a Study in American Social History Prior to 1936* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932).

⁵¹ For further discussion of the women's prison reform movement in the Northeast, see Estelle Freedman, *Their Sisters' Keepers* and Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Partial Justice: Women in State Prisons 1800-1935* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985). For a better understanding of women's incarceration experiences in the Western states, see Anne Butler, *Gendered Justice in the American West: Women Prisoners in Men's Penitentiaries* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997) and “Still in Chains: Black Women in Western Prisons 1865-1910.” *Western Quarterly* 20.1 (1989): 18-35.

⁵² McLennan, “Citizens and Criminals,” xii.

⁵³ Freedman, Rafter, and Butler show how the women's prison reform movement tended to focus on “uplifting” white women only. During this period, women of color continued being warehoused with little supervision in small wings within men's prisons.

⁵⁴ McLennan, “Citizens and Criminals,” xii.

community were invited into creative exchanges with the thousands of men and far smaller numbers of women held at San Quentin.⁵⁵ The San Quentin Minstrel and Vaudeville Company also came to perform for the Fourth of July Festivities and to participate in the institution's Thanksgiving Field Day event in which the Olympic Club of San Francisco sponsored prisoner-generated athletic events, parades, acrobatics, clowning, dance routines, comedic sketches and more for combined incarcerated and public audiences. In conjunction with the institutionalization of such performance practices, San Quentin's prisoners utilized the shifting penal discourses of the period to argue for the establishment of prison libraries, schools, newspapers, and literary magazines. Each of these new institutions provided a forum through which prisoners communicated with one another and with the general public about the potential meanings of "rehabilitation" and "reform." In this context, the institutionalization of prison performance served not only as a symptom, but also as a propeller of the shift toward a "ward" model of state responsibility.

Throughout the first forty years of the twentieth century, California struggled to keep apace with the discourses and practices of prison reform that were being generated in the Northeast. When, for example, New Yorkers were developing prison schools and inmate governing councils, Californians continued to debate about whether or not they should adopt the Auburn model's single cell system of incarceration.⁵⁶ While it was not until the 1940s that San Quentin would emerge as what historian Larry Sullivan refers to as the nation's exemplary "treatment era" prison, significant transformations were made within the California prison system throughout the Progressive Era. Most significantly, under the leadership of Warden John Hoyle from 1907 to 1913, San Quentin instituted a series of new activities that Hoyle either supported or, at least, tolerated; under the leadership of Warden James Johnston from 1913 to 1925, those reforms were significantly expanded, especially in the fields of theater and performance. While prisons across the country established arts programs during this period, San Quentin's proximity to the growing city of San Francisco, as well as its connections to California's developing entertainment industry helped to constitute a distinct performance culture in and around this particular institution. No matter what else may have been occurring in the prison during these years, the "modern wardens of San Quentin" as Lamott notes, seem to "have all shown an affinity for show people."⁵⁷

When John Hoyle came into power at San Quentin in 1907, he became known as the prison's first "modern warden."⁵⁸ Hoyle was a strong advocate for parole (a central progressive reform) and the classification of prisoners (which he instituted in part by assigning each inmate

⁵⁵ By 1912, Hoyle had expanded the New Years show to a five hour presentation of "home talent" that was presented for prisoners and public alike. See Helen Dare, "On the Day They Laugh—and 'The World Laughs With Them,'" *San Francisco Chronicle*, Jan 3, 1912, 7. Warden Johnston further expanded the New Years show to include a five hour professional production presented by performers in San Francisco's vaudeville circuit. The first of these productions took place on January 1, 1915. See Helen Dare, "San Quentin Sees First Professional Vaudeville," *San Francisco Chronicle*, Jan 2, 1915, 7. Under Clinton Duffy's administration in the 1940s, the New Years show would be expanded yet again, and in the 1950s would come to host such prominent entertainers as Johnny Cash, who performed as part of this annual "Show of Stars" on multiple occasions in the late 1950s and early 1960s. See *The San Quentin News* 18.1 Jan 9, 1958 and special issue 4.1 January 1, 1960.

⁵⁶ Bookspan, 32.

⁵⁷ Lamott, 192.

⁵⁸ Bookspan, 60.

one of three possible uniforms indicating his potential for re-socialization).⁵⁹ In conjunction with this renewed attention to behavior modification, Hoyle instituted a prison baseball league and an accompanying prisoner written and printed sports newsletter that was distributed to every cell. He also supported what came to be referred to as the “home talent” of the San Quentin Minstrel and Vaudeville Company by hosting regular performances for prisoners and public alike, as well as by inviting outside performers to present their work and to collaborate with prisoners behind prison walls. Despite the attention to individualized disciplinary correction that dominated the rhetoric of the new penology, little public discourse circulated at the time regarding how or why San Quentin’s performance programs might serve such a “corrective” function. Instead, the arts came to figure primarily as public relations tools that advertised the warden’s “humane” nature and his implementation of a kinder and gentler institutional regime.

Given the public nature of prison performance at the time, it is not surprising that much of the backlash against the new penology was framed in terms of anti-theatricality. Several editorials in *The Washington Post*, for example, declared with no lack of irony that San Quentin had come to lead prisons across the country in becoming the nation’s “new pleasure resorts.”⁶⁰ In one 1911 article, the author expressed indignation that at San Quentin, “comedians and tragedians among the prisoners weekly give a theatrical performance” and that “the prison band, consisting of 60 pieces and composed of the inmates, gives concerts.”⁶¹ Another piece written shortly thereafter warned that the development of such activities in prisons across the nation signaled “the entering wedge of reform.” The article concluded by cautioning: “Who can tell where the uplift leads? We do not look to see this reform end with a mere concert.”⁶² Whether they were celebrated or criticized, the institutionalization of arts programming at San Quentin and prisons across the nation came to serve as the face of progressive reform (see plates 2.1-2.3).

This public image of the new San Quentin operated in tension with the persistence of the brutal practices that had shaped the institution’s punitive regimes throughout the nineteenth century. In fact, Warden Hoyle (along with the entire prison board) was ousted from power after just six years in office when a major prisoner-led rebellion instigated a statewide investigation of prison conditions.⁶³ The rhetoric of the new penology presented a dilemma for the daily operations of prison life: as the public came to increasingly support the principle of “rehabilitation” through re-socialization, it came to necessarily denounce the regular practice of serving rancid food and punishing prisoners for even the slightest infractions with the dungeon and straightjacket—a commonly used torture tool that often led to paralysis, loss of limbs, disease, and even death.

Through acts of collective resistance, writing and publishing, and participation in legislative processes, incarcerated and formerly incarcerated men and women mobilized the ideals of the new penology to expose the contradictions between the representations and the realities of prison life. In his 1913 testimony before the legislative committee, for example, Dr. E.E. Duncanson, who served four years at San Quentin for what was reported to be a false charge, explained that, “Every hour of the day, men are tortured at San Quentin until they die, or

⁵⁹ “Few Go Back to Bad Ways,” *Los Angeles Times*, Jul 18, 1911, I16.

⁶⁰ “Our New Pleasure Resorts,” *The Washington Post*, Dec 20, 1911, 6.

⁶¹ “Prison a ‘Paradise,’” *The Washington Post*, Dec 18, 1911, 6.

⁶² “Our New Pleasure Resorts,” 6.

⁶³ A complete set of transcripts from the hearings is available in John Hoyle Papers, Box 5.

die after they are tortured. I have seen deeper scars on men's bodies than fire could burn, caused by ropes with which they had been bound."⁶⁴ Donald Lowrie—who was active in the San Quentin Minstrel and Vaudeville Company throughout his ten years at San Quentin and who struggled, albeit unsuccessfully, throughout his sentence to organize a regular prisoner written magazine—eventually published his memoirs along with a series of newspaper articles in which he advocated for a radical transformation of the prison.⁶⁵ In one of these articles, Lowrie insisted that prisoners and former prisoners did not want to attack any particular person in power, but rather wished to work with the public to restructure the carceral system. Incarcerated people, he claimed, sought to enter into a productive exchange with the public sphere so that “the taxpayers and the conscientious citizens of the community may know what they are responsible for.”⁶⁶ While elite reformers may have used the new penology to focus on the power of individualized behavior modification, prisoners and former prisoners like Lowrie, came to use these same concepts to argue less for “rehabilitating” any one man and more for “reforming” the social and political infrastructure.

In conjunction with prisoner-led organizing, writing, and public testimony, San Quentin's performance culture came to serve as a powerful vehicle for engaging and shaping this developing discourse of public responsibility. Between 1907 and 1913, the San Quentin Minstrel and Vaudeville Company presented multiple performances to public audiences.⁶⁷ These productions in turn led professional companies to request the opportunity to return the favor by performing for San Quentin prisoners.⁶⁸ In response to this emerging culture of artistic exchange, Sarah Bernhardt offered to present a benefit show at San Quentin as part of her final California tour. Amidst the daily practices of torture, such as those described by Duncanson and Lowrie, and just months before Warden Hoyle and the Prison Board were removed from power, Bernhardt came to San Quentin in celebration of George Washington's birthday to perform *Une Nuit de Noël sous la Terreur* (*A Christmas Night Under the Terror*), a play her son had written about the French revolution.

On February 22, 1913, Bernhardt performed on San Quentin's yard for about fifty invited guests and the general population of two thousand male prisoners, as well as the five men on condemned row and the twenty-four incarcerated women who were otherwise segregated from the general prison routine. The event marked the first occasion in which all of San Quentin's prisoners came together in the same place. The audience was seated around a stage that had been designed and built by the prisoners with a proscenium and curtain decorated with materials they

⁶⁴ “Johnston will succeed Hoyle at San Quentin,” *San Francisco Examiner*, Nov. 5, 1913.

⁶⁵ For further information, see the John Hoyle Papers where Lowrie's name appears in the San Quentin Minstrel and Vaudeville Company programs and where he also appears as the editor of a one-time prisoner written and published newspaper.

⁶⁶ “Horrors of Prison Life Told By a Paroled Convict,” *New York Times*, Jun 23, 1912, SM10.

⁶⁷ Numerous handmade programs from the San Quentin Minstrel and Vaudeville Company Performances are stored in the John Hoyle Papers, Box 2. See also: “Burnt Cork: Minstrel Show at San Quentin,” *Los Angeles times*, Jan 2, 1913, 13 and “Prisoners are Actors in Vaudeville Show,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, Jul 6, 1913, 25.

⁶⁸ For example, on October 5, 1911, Warden Hoyle invited a San Francisco theater company to present a play called “The Alias of Jimmy Valentine” for an all-prisoner audience (see plates 2.1-2.2). This story of a reformed safe robber was intended not only to entertain the men (and the handful of women) at San Quentin, but also to instill in them the spirit of reform. “Theater in a Prison,” *Los Angeles times*, October 6, 1911, 13. See also letter of gratitude from prisoners to the warden dated October 7, 1911, John Hoyle Papers, Folder 1.

had gathered from the prison's jute mill, a practice that the San Quentin community had been developing for years in conjunction with their smaller scale performances. Seated in a makeshift orchestra pit, the San Quentin Band opened with the French national anthem. Stories by both the local press and the prisoners recount that when "La Marseillaise" began, the prisoners stood in unison to demonstrate their patriotic alliance with France and the two nations' shared commitments to liberty. Following the prisoners' lead, the fifty or so invited actors, politicians, and members of the military also rose in a demonstration of unity and shared community not only with Bernhardt, but also with San Quentin's incarcerated men and women. After the overture concluded with what was reported to be a stirring rendition of "America," Bernhardt made her grand entrance onto the yard in an automobile, waving to her audience as she was led to the stage. Prisoners received special attention not only for watching, but also for participating in the performance as a well-costumed chorus of French soldiers who drew the actress's carriage onto and off of the stage.⁶⁹

Bernhardt's performance not only gave San Quentin prisoners the opportunity for an artistic exchange with a prominent actress, but it also provided them with an opportunity to advocate for systemic transformations within the public sphere. By characterizing the performance as a brief moment of shared liberty, prisoner and public alike contrasted the event with what they cast as a decidedly undemocratic experience of incarceration. A representative of the prisoner audience told the actress in a public address that was later printed in local newspapers, "Today, for an hour, these stone walls have faded away... we have been, in soul and mind, at perfect liberty...in universal communion with the spirit of human greatness."⁷⁰ In a letter to *The Woman Citizen*, a local suffragist publication, the women at San Quentin drew upon this sentiment to argue that the public needed to take greater responsibility for the conditions with which incarcerated men and women were forced to contend. They began by expressing hope that Bernhardt's performance would enable them to bring even a "small voice to the outside world." Explaining that they were held together day and night in cramped quarters segregated from the rest of the prison, these women contrasted their daily experiences of "degradation, disaster, or despair" with the few moments in the year when they were allowed to join the general population to witness and sometimes to participate in performances like that of the New Years show.⁷¹ These performances, along with the unique experience of watching Sarah Bernhardt, provided them with what they described to be fleeting experiences of freedom. The women continued by describing the horror they experienced upon seeing all of the 2,000 San Quentin prisoners gathered together for the first time on the yard: "what a waste of human life, of human power, of human ambition...what a burden of hopelessness, misery, and despair." They then used this image to advocate for increased prison-related public activism, commenting on "how unnecessary, how unjust, and how cruel much of it was."⁷² San Quentin's women concluded their public statement by expressing hope that Bernhardt's performance might enable them to "be in touch" with the free world and that, in time, their "sisters on the outside" would

⁶⁹ For a detailed account of the performance, see "Bernhardt Cheers San Quentin Prisoners," *San Francisco Call*, Feb 23, 1913, John Hoyle Papers, Box 2.

⁷⁰ "Entrancing Art Gives All An Hour of Liberty," *San Francisco Call*, Feb 23, 1913, John Hoyle Papers, Box 2.

⁷¹ The Women Prisoners of San Quentin, "Sarah Bernhardt at the State Prison: The Women Prisoners' View," specially written for *The Woman Citizen*, Mar. 1, 1913, 1, John Hoyle Papers, Box 2.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 2.

use their “influence and power to take up the broad question of imprisonment of women in our penitentiaries, of the causes and conditions which send them there, which keep them there, and which surround them while there.”⁷³ Like that first public New Years show, Sarah Bernhardt’s performance offered more than the momentary distraction with which it was often credited; it provided an opportunity for greater interaction between those on the inside and those on the outside of prison walls. Through this interaction, prisoners sought to instill in the public a greater sense of social responsibility by appealing to a spirit of shared community and common democratic values.

Through this public response to Bernhardt’s performance, San Quentin’s twenty-four female prisoners established themselves as participants in the women’s prison reform movement that had become active across the country in the nineteenth century and that had been struggling to change California’s prison conditions, albeit unsuccessfully, since at least 1870. During the same year that San Quentin’s women wrote their public response to Bernhardt’s performance, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, in partnership with other groups of clubwomen, were able to successfully argue for a number of reforms at the prison, including the replacement of its abusive matron. It was not until 1927, however, that a separate women’s building would be constructed at San Quentin and not until 1935 that a constitutional amendment would secure a separate institution for women in the state.⁷⁴ Through their engagement with Sarah Bernhardt’s performance, the women of San Quentin help to show how struggles for prison reform were not merely implemented from above, but were rather enacted through processes of exchange, however limited, between those on the inside and those on the outside of the institution.

When James Johnston was brought into San Quentin to replace Warden Hoyle, he further expanded communication between prisoners and the public through increased performance programming. Between 1913 and 1925, Johnston supported the institution of indeterminate sentencing (a policy originally designed to enable prisoners to serve less time than they otherwise might), expanded the prison school, established a monthly prisoner written and published literary magazine, and encouraged the theatrical performances of both inside and outside artists. Johnston was instrumental in supporting a significant expansion in the San Quentin Prison Band. Under his watch, prisoners began performing weekly concerts in the institution’s Garden Beautiful, a grand courtyard on the grounds (see plate 2.4). After the incarcerated musicians wrote to the Oakland Municipal Band to request the donation of songs, the members of the Oakland Band began regularly visiting and performing for and with San Quentin’s musicians. The Oakland Band soon began purchasing the San Quentin prisoners’ original compositions, which they in turn played in their public concerts. By 1917, the San Quentin Band had generated so much public interest that Johnston allowed the men (some of whom were serving life sentences) to march unattended and unsupervised off of prison grounds. In all of these performances, the band members showcased their patriotism and their shared commitment to the nation’s democratic values. Throughout the twentieth century (and especially during wartime) such performances spurred movements toward decarceration by emphasizing

⁷³ Ibid., 6.

⁷⁴ Bookspan, 69-92.

the contradiction between the prisoners' shared sense of democratic citizenship and their enforced condition of civil death.⁷⁵

In *The San Quentin Bulletin*, which came to be distributed to inmates and public subscribers alike, prisoner writers drew upon these performances in an effort to further shape public conceptions of incarceration. While they spoke in and through the terms of the new penology, the articles in *The San Quentin Bulletin* tended not to focus on arts programming as a tool for making “men” out of “criminals,” but rather as a vehicle for radically reshaping the country's approach to discipline and punishment. In one piece about the expansion of the prison band, for example, prisoner #24218 emphasized how the growing musical program enabled prisoners to engage in productive communion with free society, remarking, “Who can say what a wonderful social revolution may be brought about, thru the closer contact of the prisoner-man with the outer world, engendered by the development of these new friendships?”⁷⁶ Not only was music used to enhance the relationships between prisoners and the public, but it was also implemented to strengthen ties among those inside the prison. For instance, in response to a major race riot in 1925 in which African American and Chinese prisoners revolted against institutionalized segregation, Johnston aimed to keep peace in the newly integrated dining hall by having the San Quentin Band play during mealtimes.⁷⁷ During this era, prisoners thus used performance to cast “rehabilitation” as a process of social as well as individual character building.

Whereas the members of the San Quentin Band performed citizenship by enacting a militaristic model of masculinity, San Quentin's theatrical groups drew from such popular performance traditions as minstrelsy, vaudeville, and burlesque to carve out a space for alternative expressions of identity both within the subculture of the prison and also in relationship to their public audiences. Even though Progressive Era prison reforms aimed to mold “deviant” subjects into normative social roles, prison theater from the late 1800s through the 1930s made extensive use of drag performance to both express and experiment with alternative gender, sexual, and even racial identities (see plates 2.5-2.9). In one photograph from a Field Day rehearsal circa 1925, nine performers pose for the camera: on the left, two black men dressed in sport coats, ties, and top hats have their arms around a taller, more muscular black man who is dressed in a headband, miniskirt, and heels; in the center, a man of an indeterminate racial background wearing blackface makeup and a skimpy showgirl costume is draped over the arms of a white man who is also dressed in a matching sport coat and top hat; in the front, a white man with a coat and cane bends down so that another white performer dressed in a bikini bottom, plunging v-neck vest, and heels may rest delicately upon his knee. With one arm stylishly resting on his head and the other on his hip, this performer arches his/her back and extends his/her leg in a pose reminiscent of a pin-up girl (see plate 2.7). This photograph offers a

⁷⁵ For a sampling of articles about the San Quentin Band under Johnston, see F.C., Reg. No. 23658, “Musicians Visit Prison,” *The San Quentin Bulletin* 4.3-4 Dec-Jan, 1916-1917, 10; J.E.G., Reg. No. 24218, “Masters of Harmony Entertain Prisoners,” *The San Quentin Bulletin* 5.2 Dec. 1917; F.D.C., Reg No 23658, “San Quentin Band Leaves Prison: For the First Time in the History of Old San Quentin, a Body of Inmates Visit the Neighboring City of San Rafael,” *The San Quentin Bulletin* 5.8 May 1918; and “Oakland Municipal Band Gives Third Complimentary Concert at San Quentin,” *The San Quentin Bulletin* 7.2, Nov 1919.

⁷⁶ J.E.G., Reg. No. 24218, “Masters of Harmony Entertain Prisoners” *The San Quentin Bulletin* 5.2 Nov 1917, 11.

⁷⁷ Lamott, 199.

glimpse into how San Quentin prisoners used performance both to experiment with transgressive identities and also perhaps to publicly express the non-heteronormative social roles that they played within the larger culture of the prison.

San Quentin's performance rituals continued in conjunction with the discourses and practices of the new penology, albeit in a limited fashion, under the supervision of wardens Frank Smith (1925-1927) and James Holohan (1927-1936). During these years, as McLennan demonstrates, many of the deeds that had been established as part of the new penology became attached to a different set of creeds. Rather than focusing on restoring men to citizenship and women to the domestic sphere, the "penal managerialism" of the 1920s and 1930s instead emphasized how educational, arts, and leisure programs could serve as "carrots" amidst a battery of "sticks" that could be implemented as custodial tools designed primarily to encourage greater obedience and order within the prison.⁷⁸ Even these disciplinary carrots were eradicated at San Quentin from 1936 to 1940 under the stick-heavy leadership of Warden Court Smith. Smith's regular implementation of the dungeon, mass floggings, and other brutal corporal punishments eventually led to a major scandal that ended up removing both him and the Board of Prison Directors from power.⁷⁹ In response, the new board appointed Clinton Duffy who ushered in the "era of treatment" at San Quentin from 1940 to 1951 with prisons across the country gradually following suit.⁸⁰ Signaling the state's new emphasis on "curing" criminality (and the presumed classed, racialized, and sexualized "deviance" that went along with it), California established a Department of Corrections in 1944; the American Prison Association matched this move by changing its name to the American Correctional Association in 1954.⁸¹ Within this larger context, San Quentin's performance culture was yet again radically re-invigorated and re-structured as it was called to traffic in the public sphere on a scale never before imagined and never since recreated.

The California Experiment: The Community-Based Performances of Clinton Duffy's "Prison Town"

Immediately after having been appointed warden, Clinton Duffy, the son of a former prison guard, publicly declared that he and the other children who had grown up on San Quentin's grounds had always affectionately referred to the institution as "Prison Town" and had

⁷⁸ McLennan demonstrates how Lewis A. Lawes (warden of Sing Sing prison from 1920-1943) helped to spread a model of "penal managerialism" across the country. Lawes argued that the educational and recreational programs developed during the Progressive Era should not be used to rehabilitate prisoners, but rather to help maintain order within the prison: "For Lawes, unlike [Thomsa Mott] Osborne and the new penologists, the chief task of prison administration was not to 'cure' criminals or deter crime; it was to maintain the peace and security of the prison, both within the institution's walls and outside, in the large sphere of penal politics." For further discussion see McLennan, *Crisis of Imprisonment*, 446-7.

⁷⁹ For further discussion, see Bookspan, 104-107; Lamott, 226-243; and Warden Clinton T. Duffy as told to Lee Jennings, *The San Quentin Story* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 57-61.

⁸⁰ Larry E. Sullivan explains: "Building on the analyses of the functional school, the Era of Treatment saw a greater trend toward the classification of prisoners, group therapy, increased use of the indeterminate sentence, and the emergence of California as the leader in the treatment of offenders," 61.

⁸¹ American Correctional Association <<http://www.aca.org/pastpresentfuture/principles.asp>> (accessed June 5, 2010).

always viewed its inhabitants as their neighbors.⁸² As Duffy recalled in his memoirs, “Though San Quentin is undeniably a prison—and one of the largest in the world at that—it is also a town. My home town... San Quentin is my home, and these are my people.”⁸³ With a flare for public spectacle and also a generous dose of creative license, Duffy recounted that in his first twenty-four hours on the job, he fired the violent Captain of the Yard, banished the use of whips, straps, rubber hoses, and all other forms of corporal punishment, eliminated the con-boss system in which inmate trustees held positions of power within the institution, built fresh water showers, ripped the iron door off of the dungeon to ensure that the facility could not be used again, and walked unattended and unarmed onto the yard to greet San Quentin’s 5,000 inhabitants. Duffy explains that he felt it was crucial to communicate to the San Quentin community, as well as to the free world, that he saw prisoners “not as strangers or criminals or even numbers on a file card, but as human beings.”⁸⁴ Throughout his term, Duffy insisted on informing the public that while San Quentin’s prisoners were currently his neighbors, 95% of them would soon be their neighbors, and they had a responsibility not only to welcome them back into society upon their release, but also to support them while they were doing their time.⁸⁵

The “rehabilitative” ideal of the 1940s drew from and expanded on Progressive Era penology by casting prisoners as imperfectly socialized men and women who could be cured of their wrongdoing through a series of behavior modification programs focused on increased classification, psychological intervention, and training in obedience and industry. Under Duffy’s leadership, the men at San Quentin (San Quentin’s women prisoners had been transferred to the women’s facility at Tehachapi in 1935) would no longer be “convicts” represented by a string of numbers, but would rather be “inmates” referred to by their given names. While this expanded integration of progressive creeds and deeds opened up yet another field of interaction between prisoners, administrators, policymakers, and the general public, it also ushered in new forms of surveillance and control that were increasingly characterized by the language and practice of “treatment.” Within this context, artistic programming increasingly came to be incorporated into San Quentin’s “corrective” machinery. In his regular public speeches, Duffy explained to his public audiences that prisoners provided “the raw material...from which we must fashion a good citizen. That is the ultimate product that you, as citizens, are entitled to expect from this institution and others like it.”⁸⁶ Duffy argued, in turn, that arts programming might have a civilizing influence on men that could “soothe the savage beast.”⁸⁷ Because of its public nature, however, San Quentin’s performance culture continued throughout the 1940s to be mobilized as a vehicle not only for re-shaping the individual, but also for re-shaping society. While these inside-outside exchanges were heavily controlled and censored events, they continued to both tighten and loosen the “treatment” model’s various constraints.

⁸² Warden Clinton T. Duffy as told to Lee Jennings, “San Quentin is My Home 1,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, Mar 25, 1950, 147.

⁸³ Duffy, “San Quentin is My Home 1,” 20 and 147.

⁸⁴ Duffy as told to Lee Jennings, “San Quentin is My Home 3: The Worst Part of the Job,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, Apr 8, 1950, 96.

⁸⁵ “San Quentin’s First Broadcast,” *The San Quentin News* 2.5 Jan 29, 1942, 3.

⁸⁶ “S.Q. Broadcast Latin American Music On Next,” *The San Quentin News* 2.29 Jul 16, 1942, 8.

⁸⁷ Duffy, “San Quentin is My Home 8: What Happens When You Turn Them Loose?” *Saturday Evening Post*, May 13, 1950, 34.

In his first years in office, Duffy used the arts (and the performing arts in particular) to facilitate a nationwide public relations campaign through which he aimed primarily to heighten a sense of public responsibility for prisons and prisoners. In addition to significantly expanding San Quentin's education program, Duffy revived *The San Quentin Bulletin* by repackaging it as *The San Quentin News*, a bi-monthly publication that was distributed to an international readership; he continued to support the prison's longstanding interest in vaudeville by hosting regular small and large scale performances of both inside and outside talent; and he instituted the San Quentin Hobby Program, which trained prisoners in the creation of visual arts and crafts that they could then sell in a retail shop and/or exhibit in annual prison art fairs. Some of the most noteworthy programs that developed under Duffy included the San Quentin Jazz Band, which came to perform live for thousands of local residents and on a weekly radio broadcast for over twenty million listeners across the country, and the San Quentin Little Theater Group, an all-inmate company that regularly performed live and on the radio for audiences of prisoners and public alike. These creative interactions between inside and outside artists and audiences generated enough interest in the institution's new "rehabilitative" agenda that San Quentin prisoners and staff were able to significantly expand their educational, recreational, and artistic programs, which they funded in large part through private donations and volunteer labor.⁸⁸

The development of the San Quentin Jazz Band offered both prisoners and prison administrators an opportunity for interaction—albeit highly constrained—with one another as well as with the public sphere. Duffy recalls that when he first took over as warden, he made the San Quentin Band one of his major projects. Within his first week in office, he remembers walking past the band's Sunday afternoon concert in the prison garden: "The inmate musicians wore the traditional somber gray-and-black uniforms, and they played as though the parole board

⁸⁸ Despite the abundance of historical records that are available from San Quentin in the 1940s, I have found it as, if not more, difficult to account for diverse perspectives during these years than during previous decades. For instance, whereas *The San Quentin Bulletin* (1911-1936) offered prisoners a forum to publicly advocate for their interests by critiquing the creeds and deeds of "incarceration," "criminalization," "rehabilitation," and "reform," *The San Quentin News* that Duffy initiated in 1940 reads more as a kind of mouthpiece for the warden's public relations agenda, the tone of every article invoking the same tone as Duffy's memoirs as well as his numerous interviews. Deeming the *San Quentin Bulletin* a "personal plaything of the prison intellectuals" (Duffy quoted in Lamott, 204), Duffy restructured the prison paper into this more light-hearted collection of "poetry, quizzes, cartoons, short stories, gags and news," explaining that this restructured publication was designed to boost morale not only by making prison rules more transparent, but also by offering "a safety valve for all sorts of wacky stories and jokes" (Duffy as told to Lee Jennings, "San Quentin is My Home 5: World Without Women," *The Saturday Evening Post*, Apr 22, 1950, 34). Even though the more frequently published and more widely circulated *San Quentin News* enabled prisoners to engage with one another and with the public sphere in a greater volume than they ever had before, their voices come across as highly censored. The limitations of this publication present a challenge for the study of San Quentin's history: even though prisoners entered into far greater interaction with the public sphere under Duffy's leadership, it is Duffy's voice and not the voices of prisoners or other administrators that seems to speak most clearly through the available documentation. Given the univocal character of much of the historical record, it is important to heed such cautions as that of James Park, who served as a clinical psychologist in the California prison during the early 1950s and who later became associate warden of San Quentin: "[Duffy] got an awful lot of publicity, [but] people were still being beaten to death under Duffy's regime. He was not the great fucking savior that his own press agent built him up to be" (For further discussion, see Cummins, 14). Given both the abundance of historical documents and their corresponding limitations, it may be all the more challenging and also all the more crucial to read for the "hidden transcripts" that prisoners may have been constructing during these years (Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, xi).

had just turned them down. The audience consisted of ten bored civilians and a half a dozen sea gulls which swooped overhead and unnerved the players.”⁸⁹ Duffy searched his employee files to find a staff member capable of re-invigorating the band. He soon found that Ted Stanich, who had been working as a guard overseeing the jute mill and furniture factory, was an accomplished musician and that Major John Hendricks, a prisoner serving a life sentence, was a former army band leader. Together Stanich and Hendricks transformed this sorry orchestra into the San Quentin Jazz Band. Stanich remembers that whereas the San Quentin Band had historically been perceived as a unit set aside for prisoner recreation at the end of the daily routine, he, Duffy, and Hendricks reconfigured it to be an integral part of the new prison’s operations. In addition to public Sunday afternoon concerts, the band began to give daily performances in the mess hall during the noon lunch hour and additional evening performances once a week with the officially stated goal of improving inmate morale.⁹⁰

By early 1941, Stanich and Hendricks had put together a full-length show that the band and the newly formed thirty-member glee club began to present to invited public audiences. Because heroin had become so popular within the jazz community and because San Quentin was the regional intake center on the West Coast, the institution came to confine such accomplished musicians throughout the 1940s and 1950s as Dexter Gordon, Frank Butler, Art Pepper, Frank Morgan, and Ed Reed. Reed recalls that band members thought about music night and day, composing, rehearsing, and improvising with one another whenever they had the chance. He reflects that participation in the band offered its members a “powerful anti-depressant,” adding that, “It’s not as simple as, ‘they played music, and so they recovered from their addictions’ . . . but being able to do the things we were able to do there, it gave us a glimpse that we could go somewhere, we could make something of ourselves after we got out, whenever that would be.”⁹¹ While the opportunity to play music together offered band members a vehicle for imagining an alternate reality, it offered Duffy and the prison’s administrators the opportunity to greatly expand on the early nineteenth century practice of prison tourism that had once attracted such prominent visitors as Alexis de Tocqueville and Charles Dickens.⁹² Instead of coming to see a well-ordered prison factory, these mid-twentieth century visitors came to witness a different kind of demonstration of “civilization” in action. During these years, the prison’s “corrective” operations were enacted not through industrial labor, but rather through music, song, and the presentation of theatrical sketches and acrobatic routines. Unlike Prentice Mulford’s nineteenth century prisoner musicians who performed out of a spirit of resistance to the prison, San Quentin’s mid-twentieth century musicians were called to perform as part of an elaborate advertisement for it.

San Quentin soon began hosting weekly benefit dinners and prisoner-led performances for local civic associations such as the Shriners, the American Legion, the Elks Lodge, and the Bay Area Masons. At the first of these events, the prisoners performed for several hundred

⁸⁹ Duffy, “What Happens When You Turn Them Loose?,” 34.

⁹⁰ “Music An Aid in Rebuilding the Lives of San Quentin Men,” *The San Quentin News* 2.18 Apr 30, 1942, 2 and 5.

⁹¹ Rachel Dovey, “San Quentin on the Air: Heroin and Prison Jazz in the ‘40s,” *Paste*, Apr 29, 2009 <<http://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2009/04/san-quentin-on-the-air.html>> (accessed April 2, 2010).

⁹² *The San Quentin News* never directly indicated whether or not the performers they discussed were prison inmates. Instead, the paper employed such playful euphemisms as “local talent” to refer to incarcerated artists. For an example, see “Cast Set for ‘Front Page’ Production,” *The San Quentin News*, 3.42 Nov 11, 1943, 11.

spectators and by early in 1942, they were regularly entertaining public audiences of up to 1,800 at a time.⁹³ The public would gather at San Quentin to enjoy the show and to listen to Duffy and other officials speak about how they were working to realize the “rehabilitative” ideal. At each event Duffy gave a speech in which he insisted that in order for the prison to achieve its mission, the public needed to demonstrate a renewed sense of responsibility. Duffy emphasized that the prisoners must be made to feel that they “belonged to the world,” and in turn, that the world must back up those sentiments with actions.⁹⁴ At one event in December 1941, Duffy’s regular speech was broadcast throughout the prison in the radio hookups he had installed in every cell:

You hear of parole violators...because they make news. But, you never hear of the huge majority of parolees who MAKE GOOD. It costs the state—you taxpayers—\$235 annually to keep each man in here; it costs you less than \$40 to supervise them on parole. Accept these men. Do not treat them as outcasts. They are no different from you men, except that they made mistakes and are paying for them. Dress them in your clothes, and you can’t tell them from any of you. Confinement is punishment and because of our treatment of them, men do not leave here embittered. They go out resolved to go straight and to lead clean, honest lives, it is up to you to help them in their aims.⁹⁵

The San Quentin News reported that upon completion of his speech, the entire prison rumbled with the applause and cheers of the incarcerated men who had been listening from the cellblocks. In response, the public audiences at each of these events were reported to have contributed significant donations to the Inmate Welfare Fund, paid for subscriptions to the bi-monthly newspaper, and bought hundreds of prisoner-produced musical recordings. These performances enabled Duffy to walk a delicate line in which he simultaneously demanded that the public bear its share of the obligation for the wards inside and assured them that not one dime of their tax dollars were being spent on these “self-sustaining” programs.

As San Quentin was developing its musical culture, prisoners also convinced the administration to support the formation of a drama company within the institution.⁹⁶ San Quentin’s Little Theater Group performed both established and original plays to incarcerated and public audiences alike, albeit on a smaller scale than the band. In December 1940, the prison orchestra played the overture for their first production of two one-act plays—Percival Wilde’s *The Visitor* and Eugene O’Neill’s *Bound East for Cardiff*—for a public audience of two hundred visitors.⁹⁷ Several months later, the drama group followed up by performing three original one-act plays for a combined audience that included members of The Ross Players, the Marin

⁹³ In May of 1941, they hosted an event for “several hundred” Shriners (see “Shrine Honored,” *The San Quentin News* 1.19 May 19, 1941, 1) and by October of that same year, they had produced a show for 1,800 Bay Region Masons (see “1800 Bay Region Masons Convene,” *The San Quentin News* 1.40 Oct 16, 1941, 1).

⁹⁴ Duffy, “San Quentin is My Home 5: World Without Women,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, Apr 22, 1950, 145.

⁹⁵ Duffy’s speech quoted in “Prison Impresses Visiting Shriners,” *The San Quentin News* 1.48 Dec 11, 1941, 1.

⁹⁶ The prison’s burgeoning “Little Theater Movement” was announced in the first issue of *The San Quentin News*, with regular stories following in almost every issue for several years. “Outsiders Applaud Efforts of Inmate Performers,” *The San Quentin News* 1.1 Jan 7, 1941, 7.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

County's Little Theater company.⁹⁸ Over the following two years, under the direction of prisoners Charles McCarthy and Homer Ward, the San Quentin theater company would produce Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* set in Rome during the rise of fascism; *The Front Page*, a popular farce about Chicago crime reporting on the eve of an impending execution; and *Green Pastures*, adapted from a recent Broadway production to include an all-black cast of 85 prisoner-actors and a chorus of 30 prisoner-singers.⁹⁹

The "San Quentin Little Theater Movement," as it came to be called by prisoners, administrators, and public audiences, derived its name and its corresponding philosophy from the Little Theater movement that had developed alongside the new penology and various other Progressive Era reforms.¹⁰⁰ Proponents of Little Theater argued that creative self-expression through drama was uplifting and character building on both individual and collective levels. Rejecting the frivolity of the touring shows from New York, Little Theater practitioners sought to create regional theater of and for specific communities throughout the country. Unabashedly amateur and anti-commercial, Little Theater, as theater historian Dorothy Chansky notes, aimed to provide performers and audiences with "a chance to explore social issues and to resist the numbing lure of predictably scripted spectacle shows. They believed that on a personal and also a collective level, Little Theatre could improve American society."¹⁰¹ In 1940, when Duffy named San Quentin "Prison Town," he invited the prisoners to organize as a distinct community—their own performance company positioned as comparable to that of the Ross Players in neighboring Marin County. The San Quentin Little Theater Group, in turn, helped to constitute a sense of community not only within the prison, but also among the combined incarcerated and public audiences.

By January 1942, San Quentin's performance culture had garnered such mainstream attention that Duffy was able to make a deal with the Mutual-Don Lee Pacific Coast network to hold a weekly radio show featuring the prison's performers. "I felt that with the magic of radio," Duffy recalls, "we had penetrated the invisible wall that separates imprisoned men from those who judged them, and would judge them again in the outside world."¹⁰² San Quentin on the Air became so successful that radio stations across the country soon picked it up; increasing amounts of fan letters, money, and other forms of support began flowing into the prison from the millions of listeners around the country. During off hours, the prison's makeshift recording studio enabled regular broadcasts throughout the institution on what came to be called San Quentin's Gray

⁹⁸ "Drama in March," *The San Quentin News* 1.3 Jan 28, 1941, 1; "Drama Group Plays Listed," *The San Quentin News* 1.10 Mar 19, 1941, 1.

⁹⁹ "Caesar Next," *The San Quentin News* 1.18, May 14, 1941, 1; "Thespians Bring Caesar to San Quentin," *The San Quentin News* 1.22 Jun 11, 1941, 4; "Drama Group in News Play," *The San Quentin News* 1.29 Jul 31, 1941, 4; "The Front Page," *The San Quentin News* 1.35 Sep 11, 1941, 9; "Extra! The Front Page Opens Here for Week's Run," 1.37 Sep 25, 1941, 1; "All Colored Cast Is Selected for Green Pastures," *The San Quentin News* 1.42 Oct 30, 1941, 1; "Drama Group Closes 1941 Season With Superb Presentation of Connelly's 'The Green Pastures'" 1.49 Dec 18 1941, 7.

¹⁰⁰ "Outsiders Applaud Efforts of Inmate Performers," 7.

¹⁰¹ Dorothy Chansky, *Composing Ourselves: The Little Theatre Movement and the American Audience* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press), 4.

¹⁰² Duffy, "San Quentin is My Home 8: What Happens When You Turn Them Loose," *The Saturday Evening Post*, May 13, 1950, 179.

Network.¹⁰³ Even though San Quentin prisoners performed their final national broadcast in 1944, they continued to create and to serve as audiences for multiple musical and dramatic activities throughout the 1940s and into the 1950s.¹⁰⁴

The establishment of such prisoner-run organizations as the San Quentin Jazz Band and the San Quentin Little Theater Group enabled the prison's performance culture to thrive during the 1940s and 1950s. In fact, the level of interaction between the prison and the public sphere during these years may be unimaginable to those of us living in a period when prisons and prisoners are increasingly cordoned off from mainstream society. Despite the widening field of interaction between prisoners and the public during the mid-twentieth century, the expanding link between performance and "rehabilitation" also limited those interactions in significant ways. The developing connection between artistic expression and "treatment," for instance, led Duffy, as well as the wardens who succeeded him, to ban any and all expressions of alternative gender or sexual identities—expressions that had long served as a, if not the, defining component of the prison's performance culture up to that point. Even though performers were given a forum to interact with one another and with the public sphere in far greater volume and frequency than ever before, they were no longer allowed to perform in drag or to represent effeminate or homosexual behaviors either on or off the prison's stage.¹⁰⁵ Duffy's reform program required greater attention to prisoner classification and, in particular, necessitated that all forces of "perversion" be rooted out and segregated from the general prison population. Duffy recalls that when he first took over as warden, "queens" were "still allowed to work and mingle with the other men in the yard" even though "they had fomented more violence, engaged in more feuds and perhaps cost more lives than all other prisoners put together."¹⁰⁶ Conflating non-heteronormative sexuality with "criminality," Duffy not only banned all cross-dressing performances, but he also "rounded up" all of the prisons known homosexuals and confined them in the institution's old Spanish cellblock.¹⁰⁷ Guided by the new spirit of "treatment," Duffy

¹⁰³ While the drama group reduced the scale of their productions in the mid-1940s, it continued to perform radio plays for fellow prisoners including presentations of Archibald McLeish's *Fall of the City* and Edgar Allen Poe's *The Pit and the Pendulum* and *The Tell Tale Heart*. See "Fall of the City to Be Performed by Radio Group," *The San Quentin News* 2.2 Jan 8, 1942, 2; "Radio Drama Given Here," *The San Quentin News* 2.24 Jun 11, 1942, 2; "San Quentin Drama Group Scores Again," *The San Quentin News* 2.25 Jun 18, 1942, 2.

¹⁰⁴ "SQ on the Air" to Broadcast Last Program of Series," *The San Quentin News* 4.27, Jul 14, 1944, 1; "Closing Show is Best of All," *The San Quentin News* 4.30, Aug 4, 1944, 1.

¹⁰⁵ The San Quentin Little Theater Group, for example, was required to select plays with all male casts or to rewrite plays so that they included no female characters. Director Charles McCarthy was thus praised by critics for adapting *The Front Page* so that audiences could imagine all interactions with female characters to have occurred off stage. The production, explained one review in *The San Quentin News*, was well adapted "to fit prison circumstances," circumstances which had been radically altered from just several years prior. "Drama Group Scores Again," *The San Quentin News* 1.38 October 2, 1941, 2-3; "Outsider Reviews 'The Front Page': By Bernice Freeman (S.F. Chronicle Reporter)," *The San Quentin News* 1.38 October 2, 1941, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Clinton Duffy, "World Without Women," 146.

¹⁰⁷ Duffy was responding to what anthropologist Roger Lancaster refers to as a "sex panic" (a moral panic about sexuality) that dominated the 1940s and 1950s. Drawing from Estelle Freedom's work on the subject, Lancaster demonstrates how "because every sex offender was viewed as posing the threat of violence, nonviolent offenders charged with sodomy and exhibitionism could also be incarcerated under sexual psychopath laws. Thus, a connection between homosexuality and child murder was drawn. Various psychiatric professionals, journalists, law enforcement officials, and popular writers explicitly equated homosexuality with sexual psychopathology and violence, either seizing upon isolated incidents or conjuring stereotypes about the seduction of innocents by

invited Dr. Alfred Kinsey to run experiments on these men in an effort to “correct” them.¹⁰⁸ Duffy’s “rehabilitative” agenda thus mandated the elimination of all behavior—both on and off the stage—that did not conform to a model of heteronormativity.¹⁰⁹

As we have seen, the concept of “rehabilitation” advanced by the new penology entailed an ethic of civic and state responsibility that thoroughly transformed the chattel/convict model of contract prison labor that had dominated the previous era. However, this “correctional” model also ushered in new forms of disciplinary power that were significantly expanded in the mid-twentieth century as the state honed its correctional technologies. As the arts came to be harnessed by these new forms of power, prisoners, administrators, and the public creatively navigated within the prison’s shifting machinery. Historians tend to focus on how the new penology’s tools of behavior modification, which had first been developed at the turn of the century, were greatly expanded and subtly transformed in California during the 1940s as “criminality” came to be viewed as a disease that could be cured with the proper scientific techniques.¹¹⁰ By equating “rehabilitation” with the treatment of disease, the late twentieth century American prison adopted what historian Eric Cummins describes as an increasingly “sinister, Orwellian character”¹¹¹ in which prisoners were called to serve as “willing participants, or [to act] like such, in any program their keepers required. The prison seemed to come alive with a new sense of purpose, the reform of its inmates via ‘program.’”¹¹² As prisoners came to be judged more and more according to their capacity to be cured of criminality, the use of indeterminate sentencing—a hard won progressive reform for which many prisoners had advocated—was greatly expanded and arbitrarily implemented so that the median time California prisoners spent behind bars ended up significantly increasing rather than decreasing during this period. Furthermore, as greater numbers of black men came to occupy the state’s prisons in the period following World War II, indeterminate sentencing came to function as a tool for “rehabilitating” white men while further “criminalizing” racially marginalized subjects.

Attention to San Quentin’s performance culture reveals that while the concept of “rehabilitation” that was re-invigorated under Clinton Duffy’s leadership in the 1940s certainly did mark the implementation of a coercive correctional regime, it also signaled competing meanings of the term that have since fallen out of both scholarly and popular discourse. By failing to account for the integral role that public performance played in the early years of this

oversexed perverts,” “State of Panic,” in *New Landscapes of Inequality: Neoliberalism and the Erosion of Democracy in America*, ed. Jane L. Collins, Micaela di Leonardo, and Brett Williams (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2008), 48.

¹⁰⁸ Duffy, “World Without Women,” 146.

¹⁰⁹ Beth Richie explores the possibility of developing a Black feminist queer critique of the prison in “Queering Antiprison Work: African American Lesbians in the Juvenile Justice System,” in *Global Lockdown: Race, Gender, and the Prison-Industrial Complex*, ed. Julia Sudbury (New York: Routledge, 2005), 73-85. I would add that developing a queer of color critique of prison history would help to expose how the institution has functioned since its inception—albeit in different ways—as a powerful gendering apparatus.

¹¹⁰ The establishment of the California Adult Authority in 1944 signaled greater reliance on groups of professional penologists, sociologists, and psychologists who sought to determine whether or not each individual inmate had been healed from his or her “deviant” ways. By the early 1950s, however, the Adult Authority came to be staffed predominantly by law enforcement personnel. For further discussion, see Eric Cummins, 17-18.

¹¹¹ Cummins, 15.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 13.

“California experiment,” prison historians and theorists fail to account for the multiple valences of “rehabilitation” that circulated during these years. Throughout the mid-twentieth century, San Quentin’s performance culture provided prison administrators with both an effective disciplinary tool and a powerful instrument of public relations while also offering prisoners the opportunity to build communities and establish ties within and beyond the institution. By facilitating exchanges between prisoners and the public sphere, multiple social actors in and around the prison system struggled throughout the first half of the twentieth century to refigure “rehabilitation” in terms of a shared responsibility for prisoners and public to work together for a more just social order. Through these creative exchanges, “rehabilitation” continuously emphasized the inextricability between individual and social transformation. As the treatment model gained force in the 1950s and 1960s, and as the prison came to increasingly rely on an individualized understanding of “rehabilitation” and “reform,” prisoners continued to use performance practices to simultaneously reinforce and unsettle these shifting discourses. The 1957 production of *Waiting for Godot* at San Quentin offered both inside and outside artists with yet one more opportunity to creatively maneuver within the system’s shifting constraints.

Godot Arrives

Even though they may not have been aware of it, when the San Francisco Actor’s Workshop came to San Quentin in 1957 to perform *Waiting for Godot*, they were joining a performance culture that had been active for over a century. When the members of the San Quentin Jazz Band played the overture for the production, they welcomed Herbert Blau and his actors into a ritual of artistic exchange that dated back to decades before Sarah Bernhardt had performed on the prison yard. Despite fluctuations in the institution’s regime, San Quentin prisoners had been continuously creating music and theater at the institution since it was first constructed in 1852. Furthermore, in the years immediately preceding the production of *Godot* at San Quentin, prisoners had not only written their own comedies and dramas, but they had also adapted the work of such prominent writers as William Shakespeare, Edgar Allen Poe, and Eugene O’Neill. In addition to mounting theatrical productions, San Quentin prisoners had also been audience to outside performers at least since 1911. In fact, as recently as 1956, a touring theater company had presented *Cry the Beloved Country* in the garden chapel.¹¹³

By not attending to this history, we may miss key aspects of the production’s cultural significance.¹¹⁴ When San Quentin’s prisoners responded to the performance with such appreciation, perhaps they did so less because they were unfamiliar with theater and performance and more because of how this particular production intersected with their own longstanding artistic traditions. Blau and other members of the San Francisco Actor’s Workshop recount that while public audiences met their production with silence and confusion, San Quentin’s audience

¹¹³ “Hollywood Stars In Stage Play at Garden Chapel,” *The San Quentin News* 16.8 April 4, 1956.

¹¹⁴ It is noteworthy that even the staff-written editorial in *The San Quentin News* contributes to this narrative by reporting that, “For the first time within memory, live drama graced the boards of the San Quentin stage tonight.” “Workshop Players Score Hit Here: San Francisco Group Leaves SQ Audience Waiting for Godot,” *The San Quentin News* 17.24 Nov 28, 1957, 1. While this trope certainly makes for a more dramatic story that enables prisoners and administrators to mark the significance of this particular performance, it seems unlikely that a maximum-security facility in which many men are held for decades would not carry any institutional memory of performance activity that was taking place just ten to fifteen years prior to this event.

actively and enthusiastically participated in the production. They recall, for instance, that when Lucky, the slave, was dragged onto the stage by a rope tied around his neck, the prisoners began laughing and talking back to the stage. They then use this moment to illustrate how San Quentin's prisoners—both because of their lack of expectations about what theater should be and also because of their personal experiences of incarceration—understood the play in a way that public audiences did not.¹¹⁵ While it is certainly important to account for how San Quentin's prisoners had developed different viewing practices than those of theater audiences across the U.S. and Europe, it is also important to consider how they developed those viewing practices in conjunction with their own distinct performance culture. *The San Quentin News*, for instance, cast *Godot* not as an avant-garde production, but rather as a “vaudeville-like drama” and a “burlesque tragic-comedy.”¹¹⁶ By linking the play with the vaudeville performances that prisoners had been both creating and watching since the turn of the century, San Quentin's prisoners may have shown a heightened appreciation for the ways in which the play drew upon clowning and other forms of comedic performance. Prisoners further connected *Godot* to their own performance traditions by likening it to a work of jazz. The “limbo-like” experience of perpetual waiting resonated, for instance, with what had been for two decades the jazz band's playful and soulful theme song, “Time on My Hands.” *The San Quentin News* noted that Herbert Blau had drawn a similar connection in his opening speech: “Just like jazz,” Blau explained, “one must listen for whatever they may find. It is the same with ‘godot.’ For each there will be some meaning, some reaction, and dressed in what we hope is good theater.”¹¹⁷ When Blau delivered these lines, the San Quentin musicians responded with an impromptu flourish, establishing themselves not only as audience members, but also co-participants in the production.¹¹⁸

Whereas Esslin and others explained that the prisoners *en masse* loved the show because Beckett's theme of perpetual waiting spoke to them in a way that it did not speak to the free world, writers for *The San Quentin News* emphasized that men at San Quentin had varied responses to the actual play. One reporter noted that even though the majority of prisoners he spoke with did not necessarily express deep enthusiasm for this particular drama, they generally did note their interest in facilitating more artistic exchanges:

This writer asked many men about it and one answer summed it up. Leaning against a cell-block wall, this man said hesitantly: “I just don't know...but I'd go back to see it tomorrow night. Anyway, maybe they'll bring something else over here. Maybe next month or next year—or whenever.” He grinned before he walked away. “Like the man said. Nothing happens!”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ For further discussion, see Jacob Adams in collaboration with Herbert Blau, Alan Mandell, and John Irwin, *The Impossible Itself* (Podunc Pictures, 2009).

¹¹⁶ “Dramatic Presentation Comes to San Quentin: Bizarre Puzzler Unveiled Locally By Bay City Workshop Group,” *The San Quentin News* 17.23 Nov 14, 1957, 1.

¹¹⁷ “Workshop Players Score Hit Here: San Francisco Group Leaves SQ Audience Waiting for *Godot*,” *The San Quentin News* 17.24 Nov 28, 1957.

¹¹⁸ See Herbert Blau interview in *The Impossible Itself*.

¹¹⁹ “Workshop Players Score Hit Here,” 3.

Godot's arrival at San Quentin thus enabled prisoners to wedge their feet into the doors that the San Francisco Actor's Workshop had re-opened by using the production to petition the warden for increased performance opportunities. In a matter of months, the warden granted his approval to reconstitute the Little Theater Group that had been active throughout the previous decade. The Little Theater Group performed *Twelve Angry Men* in May 1958, *The Cain Mutiny Court Martial* in November of that same year, *Mister Roberts* in May 1959, and *Stalag 17* in October 1959. By late 1959, they were regularly performing weeklong runs for thousands of inmates and hundreds of public spectators. The group soon expanded into three semi-independent divisions: the first focused on continuing to produce large scale public performances, the second worked on developing regular radio plays, and the third offered a scene study class that was run through the educational division.

When Rick Cluchey, an inmate serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole, took over the drama group in 1962, he further expanded the program by establishing an off-season theater workshop focused on avant-garde performance. Under Cluchey's leadership, the Little Theater Group was reconfigured into the San Quentin Drama Workshop, an ensemble that followed many of the developments taking place in the American theater at the time by taking a process-based approach emphasizing concept over spectacle. The San Quentin Drama Workshop, as it was modeled after the San Francisco Actor's Workshop, gained increasing attention in the outside theater community for its experimental approach to drama. As theater scholar Arthur Sainer notes, the establishment of experimental, process-based ensembles and the corresponding transition from the works of Arthur Miller and Eugene O'Neill to those of Jean Genet and Samuel Beckett signaled "a radical loosening" in the American theater of the period.¹²⁰ Throughout the 1960s, the San Quentin Drama Workshop contributed to this "radical loosening" by participating in the cultural and social movements that were developing not only outside, but also inside prison walls.

From 1957 to 1967, San Quentin prisoners carved out a space within the institution for a series of avant-garde art experiments by successfully convincing the prison administration that the artistic process would aid in the prison's "rehabilitative" mission.¹²¹ They used the dominant discourses of the period to argue that drama, much like the group counseling and bibliotherapy programs which were taking hold at the time, had a therapeutic effect that could cure them of their "deviant" ways. Rick Cluchey was but one prisoner artist of the period to use these discourses to successfully argue for his release. To demonstrate his transformation from

¹²⁰ Arthur Sainer, *The New Radical Theatre Notebook*, expanded revised edition (New York: Applause Books, 1997), 9.

¹²¹ For The San Quentin Drama Workshop's first production, the group re-mounted *Waiting for Godot* with an all-inmate cast, which they performed in the prison chapel. *Waiting for Godot* was a popular choice within the prison not only for its content and form, but also because it conformed to the mid-twentieth century prison's strict rules about representations of gender and sexuality. After the all-inmate revival of *Waiting for Godot* in 1962, the San Quentin Drama Workshop constructed a black box theater in the prison's former dungeon, which had been serving as a storeroom ever since Clinton Duffy had torn off its iron door some twenty years prior. In the following years, they would perform *Waiting for Godot* on at least three more occasions, as well as Beckett's *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape*. They would also perform Kenneth Brown's *The Brig*, a production inspired by the Living Theater and an original prisoner-written production entitled *Le Cage*, inspired by the writings of Jean Genet. For more details, see Diane Christine Nardone, "The History of the San Quentin Drama Workshop," Diss. (New York University, 1978), 52-57.

“criminal” to “citizen-artist,” Cluchey drew not only from available correctional discourses, but also from available arts discourses. He described, for instance, how the 1957 production of *Waiting for Godot* furthered both the prison’s correctional mandate by awakening him to the possibility of a new life and the avant-garde’s transformative mandate by creating a rupture in his perceptual field:

...the curtain opened on a vacant, silent landscape, unbroken except for the endless void of darkness which engulfed it! I was reminded of a great cage. I sat transfixed as the play unfolded, the words coming forth with knife-like reason...

The convicts all stood at once when the play ended; the applause was loud and sustained, while the San Francisco Actors Workshop cast took their curtain calls. Everything came into focus. I had been waiting for Godot now for over three years and didn’t realize it...¹²²

Even though Cluchey would later admit that the conditions of his custody had not allowed him to attend the 1957 production, his narrative speaks to the power that the performance held beyond the moment of its reception. By marking Godot’s arrival in his own life, Cluchey merged the prison’s mid-twentieth century discourse of “rehabilitation” and the avant-garde’s mid-twentieth century discourse of perceptual re-awakening to pave not only figurative, but also material escape routes from the prison’s disciplinary regimes. Cluchey, who was originally sentenced to life without the possibility of parole, secured his release from San Quentin in 1966 on the grounds that theater had “rehabilitated” him. Since his release, he and a group of former prisoners have continued to perform across the United States and Europe, even entering into a lifelong collaboration with Beckett himself. Rick Cluchey was thus able to refigure available discourses of “rehabilitation” and “transformation”—discourses that permeated not only the prison community but also the arts community—to shed the social role of “criminal” and adopt instead the social role of “artist.”

As Cluchey’s story shows, even in the historical period in which the coercive capacity of the prison’s “rehabilitative” operations are purported to have been at their height, arts programs offered multiple social actors the opportunity for what Shannon Jackson describes as “alternate spheres of identification” both within and beyond the prison’s disciplinary framework. Throughout San Quentin’s history, prison artists like Rich Cluchey simultaneously shaped and were shaped by the prison’s shifting discourses and practices of “rehabilitation” and “reform.” Attention to the complexities of these practices may temper reductive readings of Foucault’s analysis of the prison’s disciplinary power. While art and performance were certainly used throughout the prison’s history as tools for producing and policing the boundaries between social norms, they were also used to counter the prison’s segregation from the social world by creating opportunities for greater interaction between those on the inside and those on the outside of prison walls. Ultimately, for San Quentin prisoners in the mid-twentieth century, the figure of

¹²² Rick Cluchey, *Beckett: Waiting For Godot* (Chicago: Keep Strong Publishing Company, 1977). This is text from a souvenir program commemorating the twentieth anniversary of Godot at San Quentin, quoted in Nardone, 16.

Godot came to signify the futility of endless waiting, but also the promise of a different kind of repeating.

Today, Rick Cluchey continues to direct the San Quentin Drama Workshop, an ensemble that not only tours professionally but that also regularly performs for and leads theater workshops with prisoners across the United States and Europe.¹²³ While Cluchey maintains his commitment to “rehabilitation” through the arts, he also argues for the need to develop a more nuanced understanding of the concept. “There’s some confusion about the term ‘rehabilitation,’” Cluchey notes. “My understanding is that it means ‘to restore to a former state’. Where are you going to return me to? Reform school; orphanages; a failed marriage; two years in the military, then a bus ride to San Quentin?”¹²⁴ Our contemporary approach to “rehabilitation,” Cluchey suggests, must account for a more capacious understanding of both the limits and possibilities of individual and social transformation.

While the San Quentin Drama Workshop has performed continuously across the United States and Europe for the past forty-five years, the group’s presence within the prison was short-lived. Soon after Cluchey’s release, a new warden was appointed at San Quentin in 1967. When Warden Louis Nelson disbanded the prison drama program, he signaled the advent of yet another transformation in penal creeds and deeds. Nelson argued that prisoners should not be encouraged to lose contact with reality by adopting the identities of other people. Theater, he claimed, did not “rehabilitate” criminals, but instead contributed to their “deviance.” Nelson made his case by emphasizing that the San Quentin Drama Workshop had become a “cesspool of iniquity” in which actors regularly used their rehearsal time to do drugs and engage in homosexual acts.¹²⁵ Thus, in 1967, during the same year that the nearby city of San Francisco celebrated its Summer of Love, San Quentin’s administration came to equate practices of theater and performance no longer with the therapeutic and character-building promise of a Little Theater aesthetic, but rather with the perceived social and sexual “perversion” of the counterculture. Nelson’s banning of the San Quentin Drama Workshop presaged how popular expectations and anxieties surrounding prison arts programming would transform yet again in the late twentieth century. In the coming years, prisoners, administrators, and the general public would continue to struggle over the possible meanings of “rehabilitation” and “reform” as they navigated the potentialities and the pitfalls generated by prison arts practices in the era of globalization.

¹²³ For further information, see the San Quentin Drama Workshop website <<http://thesqdw.org/>> (accessed June 5, 2010).

¹²⁴ Rick Cluchey quoted in Mark Brown, “Godot give us strength,” *The Scotsman*, August 2, 2008 <<http://thescotsmen.scotsmen.com/features/Godot-give-us-strength.4345409.jp>> (accessed May 2, 2010).

¹²⁵ Nardone, 60-61.

Chapter 3

Animating Bureaucracy: Arts-in-Corrections in Globalizing California

The history of art-making at San Quentin reveals how incarcerated men and women have been creating theater, music, dance, writing, and visual art since the birth of the modern prison in the nineteenth century. Whereas institutionalized arts practices were led and organized by prisoners throughout the first half of the twentieth century, with inside-outside exchanges operating primarily on a volunteer basis, the development of California Arts-in-Corrections (AIC) marks a significant transformation in U.S. prison arts programming in the late twentieth century, a period in which the state began to compensate both outside and inside artists for their creative labor. During these years, prison artists continued to animate the bureaucratic field by mobilizing the perpetually shifting discourses of art's "rehabilitative" promise. Former Arts-in-Corrections Director William Cleveland recalls that while AIC artists and administrators always maintained a deep commitment to the arts, "the real work became about how to *work* bureaucracy. It's an immensely powerful force, like riding a wild bronco. How do you take advantage of all this power? How do you learn to ride knowing that it will throw you off?"¹ Cleveland's comments serve as a point of departure for exploring how community arts practices like AIC depend not only on explicitly creative pursuits, but also on the art of riding "bureaucratic Broncos"—simultaneously following their lead and steering them in alternate directions.

While little has been written about the history of California Arts-in-Corrections,² my conversations with the program's artists and administrators help to illuminate not only AIC's history, but also how and to what effect that history is remembered.³ Much like Martin Esslin and Herbert Blau frame the history of theater at San Quentin with a narrative in which outside artists venture behind prison walls, administrators and artists of California's Arts-in-Corrections

¹ William Cleveland, interview by author, January 27, 2008.

² In 1992, William Cleveland published a chapter on the history of AIC titled "Arts-In-Corrections: Art From California prisons," in *Art in Other Places: Artists at Work in America's Community and Social Institutions*, ed. William Cleveland (Amherst, MA: Arts Extension Service Press, 2000), 75-88. Rena Fraden also offers a one page discussion of the history of AIC in *Rena Fraden, Imagining Medea: Rhodessa Jones and Theater for Incarcerated Women* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 185-86 and 225-26. In addition, several AIC participants have published memoirs that address aspects of the program's history from a personal perspective: Judith Tannenbaum has written her memoirs about teaching poetry for AIC at San Quentin and she and former student Spoon Jackson have recently co-written a book about the work that they began together as part of AIC: Judith Tannenbaum, *Disguised as a Poem: My Years Teaching at San Quentin* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000); Tannenbaum, Judith and Spoon Jackson. *By Heart: Poetry, Prison, and Two Lives* (Oakland, CA: New Village Press, 2010). Kenneth Hartman also speaks about his experience as an Arts-In-Corrections student in his memoir about his experience as a California prisoner during the buildup of the prison industrial complex: Kenneth E. Hartman, *Mother California: A Story of Redemption Behind Bars* (New York: Atlas & Co., 2009). The University of California at Los Angeles is currently in the process of compiling an archival collection about the California Arts-in-Corrections program. William Cleveland's personal papers, which I cite throughout this chapter, will soon be held in that archive. The UCLA archive should greatly enable further historical research.

³ I have spoken primarily with William Cleveland and Laurie Brooks (former AIC directors), Ellen Davidson and Susan Hill (former program administrators), Steve Emrick and Jim Carlson (former AIC artist-facilitators), Judith Tannenbaum (former AIC teaching artist), Spoon Jackson and a group of other longtime inside AIC artists at New Folsom prison.

program tend to frame AIC's history with outside artist Eloise Smith's first journey into the prison system. Unlike the stories of *Godot* at San Quentin, however, AIC participants tend to emphasize how prisoners invited Eloise Smith and other outside artists to join and to enrich their already active arts culture. Eloise Smith, along with her husband Page, had long been a prominent figure in the intellectual, artistic, and political communities in and around Santa Cruz, California. When Jerry Brown established the California Arts Council in 1975, he appointed Smith as the organization's director. One of her first assignments was to travel throughout the state assessing the existing arts activity in its social institutions. Cleveland reflects that it was as if the king asked, "What is the cultural state of my kingdom? What is going on in the places where we actually feed and house and clothe people... and how do we respond to it as the government?"⁴ In the course of her travels, Smith was moved by the cultural life she encountered inside the prisons. There, she met men and women who were developing innovative genres such as painting with coffee, weaving with used Camels cigarette packages, and sculpting with the bones of rodents.⁵ She was particularly moved by the talent of Verne McKee, a self-taught artist serving a life sentence at the California Medical Facility (CMF) in Vacaville.⁶ McKee, along with a host of other prisoners, told Smith that they were eager for more formal creative outlets and proposed that they be given the opportunity to hone their skills through increased interaction with outside artists.

AIC participants tend to follow up by explaining how Eloise Smith responded to these requests by founding Arts-in-Corrections, which quickly grew into the largest institutional arts program in the world; few note, however, that AIC developed in conjunction with Jerry Brown's launching of the largest prison construction project in the history of the world.⁷ This chapter attends to the implications of this partnership between California artists and the massively expanding California Department of Corrections (CDC).⁸ It follows Smith and Brown into the prison system by examining how and to what effect AIC and the discourses surrounding AIC developed. Through a combination of historical analysis and discursive critique, I seek to unpack the relationship between Arts-in-Corrections and the developing prison industrial complex in California and across the nation. Whereas AIC narratives tend to focus on the unlikely bonds that developed between such individuals as Eloise Smith, Verne McKee, and Jerry Brown, I attend to the systemic forces that both shaped and were shaped by those particular relationships. Stuart Hall's concept of a conjuncture provides a theoretical tool for analyzing the dynamic interplay between individual subjects and bureaucratic systems. To think conjuncturally, Hall explains, involves mapping the intersections between "overlapping, interlocking, but non-corresponding

⁴ William Cleveland, interview by author, February 29, 2008.

⁵ William Cleveland, interview by author, February 8, 2008.

⁶ CMF is a psychiatric institution established in 1955 to house male felons. In addition to McKee's talent and interest, the prison's healthcare mission and its supportive warden made it a particularly viable location for establishing an arts program. For more information on CMF, see California Department of Corrections <http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Facilities_Locator/CMF.html> (accessed June 8, 2010).

⁷ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 5.

⁸ William Cleveland, *Art in Other Places: Artists at Work in America's Community and Social Institutions* (Amherst, MA: Extension Service Press, 2000), 87.

‘histories.’”⁹ By considering the convergences between community arts history and prison history at the end of the twentieth century, I wish to shed light on how multiple social actors have both shaped and been shaped by the intersecting systems of power influencing contemporary prison arts programming in California and across the nation. Moreover, I hope to show how penal-welfare performance as an analytical lens can expand and complicate our understanding of the opportunities and the constraints facing contemporary prison arts programming and the community arts field more broadly situated.

The chapter begins by marking how the discourses and practices that enabled AIC’s establishment in the 1970s and its growth throughout the 1980s and 1990s were shaped by a set political, economic, and cultural projects characterized by the rollback of social welfare and the mass expansion of the prison. I take the term “globalizing California” from Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s recent study, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. Gilmore argues that California responded to the crises spawned by globalization’s uneven development by leading the national turn to mass incarceration. I extend Gilmore’s analysis to show how neoliberal restructuring in the late twentieth century effectively launched the burgeoning fields of arts in corrections and community-based performance. From within this historical context, we may investigate how and to what effect AIC participants navigated society’s neoliberal turn, their bargaining processes with the state necessitating complex and contradictory maneuvering within the growing prison industrial complex.

The Community Arts Movement and the Challenge to Artistic Autonomy

Eloise Smith’s commitment to establishing state-funded arts programming in the California prison system was enabled not only by the requests of inmate artists like Verne McKee, but also by the U.S. community arts movement, a movement for which the San Francisco Bay Area served as a hub. In the 1960s and 1970s, increasing numbers of artists sought to overturn the dominant model of “art-for-art’s-sake” by emphasizing their enmeshment with diverse communities. Rather than advancing modernism’s notion of autonomous “high” art, community artists of the period turned their attention to process-based works that upheld the principles of participatory democracy.¹⁰ Scholars and practitioners tend to attribute the development of this movement and the corresponding establishment of community-based programs like Arts-in-Corrections to the idealism and progressive activism that permeated the period. Less attention is paid, however, to the shifting political-economic climate that created the material conditions from which these projects could be established and sustained.

The community arts movement both influenced and was influenced by the formation of federal, state, and local funding bodies that positioned artistic labor as integral to, rather separate from, a healthy society. California, for example, was among the majority of states to form an arts

⁹ Stuart Hall, “Black Diaspora Artists in Britain: Three ‘Moments’ in Post-war History,” *History Workshop Journal* 61 (Spring 2006): 3.

¹⁰ While many community artists in the 1960s and 1970s saw their contribution as entirely new, their vision of artists as society’s creative problem-solvers was largely informed by the cultural activism of previous generations, and of the 1930’s WPA artists and Popular Front cultural workers, in particular. While I focus here on the developments in the United States, it is also important to note that the late twentieth century community arts movement was international in scope. Augusto Boal’s work in Brazil, for example, had a major influence on the developing community-based cultural work in Europe and the United States.

council and a series of corresponding nonprofit arts organizations in response to the establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in 1965.¹¹ The NEA held great symbolic value as the country's first gesture since the cultural programs of the New Deal toward forming a national cultural policy.¹² With the development of this federal arts organization, the government positioned the material conditions for cultural production as integral to the greater social welfare. In conjunction with the formation of arts councils and nonprofit arts organizations, the community arts movement was further catalyzed in 1974 when John Kreidler of the San Francisco's Neighborhood Arts Program (NAP) tapped into funds made available by the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA). CETA was a federal jobs program instituted by the Nixon administration in response to the nationwide recession. Kreidler succeeded in acquiring CETA funding for twenty-four local muralists. After four hundred artists lined up around the block to compete for the positions, CETA arts programming quickly spread throughout the country.¹³ Modeled on the New Deal's Work Projects Administration (WPA), CETA paid artists to provide social services, which often entailed partnering with state institutions. This short-lived program had a symbolic function that far outlived its mere seven years in operation. As community arts scholar Arlene Goldbard reflects, "There is scarcely a U.S. community artist who was around in the mid-1970s who did not either hold a CETA job or work directly with someone who did."¹⁴ Kreidler adds that CETA arts functioned more than anything as a kind of "consciousness raising program."¹⁵ The program is largely credited with having inspired a generation of artists to dedicate itself to community-based cultural work.

¹¹ Before the NEA was formed, there were only six state arts agencies in the country, but by 1980 all states and territories had established such organizations. In the San Francisco Bay Area, only twenty to thirty nonprofit arts organizations were in existence in the late 1950s, but within just thirty years the area was home to about one thousand. This decentralized model of public and private arts funding contributed to a restructuring of arts organizations and shaped a new direction in the work produced. For further discussion, see John Kreidler, "Leverage Lost: The Nonprofit Arts in the Post-Ford Era," *Journal of Arts Management, Law & Society* 26:2 (Summer 1996): 79-100 <<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=9612040117&site=ehost-live>> (accessed February 15, 2009).

¹² Despite the country's resistance to instituting an explicit cultural policy—a resistance that continues to the present day—the Cold War provided an impetus for the development of a federal organization that would challenge Soviet ideology through artistic displays of "freedom" and "individualism." Even with the NEA's role within the military industrial complex, the rationalization for its establishment sounds quite progressive in today's cultural climate: Public Law 89-209 declares that, "While no government can call a great artist or scholar into existence, it is necessary and appropriate for the Federal Government to help create and sustain not only a climate encouraging freedom of thought, imagination, and inquiry, but also the material conditions facilitating the release of this creative talent." For further discussion, see George Yúdice and Toby Miller, "The United States, Cultural Policy, and the National Endowment for the Arts," in *Cultural Policy*, (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 35-71.

¹³ Kreidler, "Leverage Lost."

¹⁴ Arlene Goldbard, *New Creative Community: The Art of Cultural Development* (Oakland: New Village Press, 2006), 124-125.

¹⁵ John Kreidler, interview by Susan B. Reiss, 1978, The Arts and the Community Oral History Project, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, CA <<http://www.archive.org/details/sfneighborartpro00riesrich>> (accessed April 15, 2009).

The California Arts Council, which was formed at the height of CETA arts programming, sought to further encourage creative partnerships between artists and the state.¹⁶ To this end, Jerry Brown and Eloise Smith put together a council of working artists, many of whom had been active in California's counterculture movements. In addition to anarchist street performer Peter Coyote, this first council consisted of activist director Luis Valdez, public artist Ruth Asawa, and found art sculptor Noah Purifoy. After enjoying positive experiences working for CETA, many of these artists were optimistic about the potential of partnering with (rather than explicitly resisting) government bureaucracy. Coyote, for example, who had been living in a radical commune on the California coast recalls, "From the farthest edge of the outside, I had...been invited to the inside of the inside."¹⁷ Despite his distrust of the establishment, Coyote remembers being compelled by this opportunity to help "define the state."¹⁸ Before the formation of the California Arts Council, a small commission consisting mostly of wives of the governor's friends had been in charge of determining California's limited cultural policy. The socially-engaged artists who sat on the newly constituted arts council challenged the aristocratic patronage model by shifting to a system that would pay salaries to artists in exchange for their cultural and social services.¹⁹ Because of its strong ties to the community arts movement, one of the California Arts Council's primary commitments became contracting artists to conduct long-term and in-depth residencies in state agencies. After her research trip into the departments of health, education, and welfare, Smith became instrumental in establishing the council's Artists in Social Institutions, Artists in Communities, and Artists in Education grants. While her tenure on the council was brief, she succeeded in launching long-lasting programs offering matching funds to community-based agencies that hired artists to work for a minimum of twenty hours a week for a period of six months to three years. Through this program, artists were given an opportunity not only to pay their bills, but also to creatively engage diverse communities throughout the state.

The Radical Prison Movement and the Challenge to the Rehabilitative Ideal

Whereas every Arts-in-Corrections administrator and teaching artist that I have talked with has spoken in some way about the significance of the community arts movement to their careers and to the development of the program, only a few have mentioned the impact of the political and cultural activity that was occurring in and around the prison during the same period. Ellen Davidson, for example, who is the daughter of Eloise Smith as well as a former AIC administrator, reflects that she and her mother were focused primarily on being arts advocates:

¹⁶ In California, arts council member Noah Purifoy is credited with having popularized this notion. For further discussion of the California Arts Council see Peter Coyote, "Stepping Out of the Wind," in *Sleeping Where I Fall* (New York: Counterpoint, 1998), 327-346.

¹⁷ Coyote, *Sleeping Where I Fall*, 334.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 333.

¹⁹ Eloise Smith's participation on the council marked this transformation from a patrician arts commission to a council of, by, and for the people. Smith's appointment to the arts council was likely due to her own position as the wife of a friend of Jerry Brown. Cleveland describes Smith as having an odd combination of "bare knuckles political instinct and finger sandwich doily sensibility" (interview by author, February 29, 2008). Ellen Davidson remembers that Smith was primarily a homemaker and that directing the arts council was her first paying job. Smith left the position after only several months because she did not want to commute from Santa Cruz to Sacramento (interview by author, June 11, 2009). As a result of Smith's short tenure on the council, Gary Snyder is often credited with having been the first council director.

“It kind of didn’t matter where [the program] was; it just happened to be prisons.”²⁰ Even though Smith made no particular claim to prison activism, it is important to consider how the program she ended up launching was made possible not only by the community arts movement’s critique of artistic autonomy, but also by the prison movement’s challenge to the rehabilitative ideal. Understanding the larger context of the prison movement encourages us to ask why, at this particular time and place, Eloise Smith viewed prisoners as a distinct community within the state of California. What social, cultural, and political factors enabled her to envision prisoners not only as a community, but also as a group of already existing and/or potential artists?

In the years leading up to Smith’s research trip, prison walls across the country were becoming increasingly permeable as activists and artists on the inside and the outside of the system collaborated with one another. In California, these developing relationships were facilitated in large part by a change in prisoners’ legal status, a policy shift that resulted from decades of prisoner organizing. This prisoner-led activism culminated in the passage of California Penal Code sections 2600 and 2601 in 1968 which declared that prisoners were no longer “civilly dead,” but in fact bore some (but not all) rights of citizenship: for the first time in history, U.S. prisoners could inherit personal property, correspond confidentially with attorneys and other public officials, and own the writing they produced while incarcerated.²¹ This new legislation contributed to an outpouring of letters alleging prisoner abuse and a sudden increase in the publication of prison literature, all of which brought prisoners and mainstream society into radically new forms of communication.²²

The activity in and around California prisons came to serve as a fulcrum around which activists throughout the world mobilized for free speech, peace, labor, Third World Liberation, Black Power, and more. In his history of the radical prison movement, Eric Cummins demonstrates how prison literature—specifically the literature that developed in and around San Quentin prison—guided this movement.²³ Eldridge Cleaver, for example, published *Soul on Ice* shortly after having been released from San Quentin. Rather than presenting himself as a penitent convict on the road to “rehabilitation” as previous prison writers had often done, Cleaver followed Malcolm X’s lead by emphasizing his rage at a racist and classist justice system endemic to a racist and classist society. *Soul on Ice* signaled the advent of a new genre of prison literature, a radical Black Marxist class analysis that saw the prisoner as the heart of the imminent people’s revolution. Cleaver’s bestseller called for a radical overhaul of the prison system as the necessary revolutionary transformation of global systemic racism.

²⁰ Ellen Davidson, interview by author, June 11, 2009. Davidson served as the director of the William James Association throughout the 1980s and 1990s. William James was the nonprofit organization responsible for contracting teaching artists for Arts-in-Corrections in the Northern half of the state.

²¹ California Penal Code Section § 2600, § 2601 (1968)

<http://www.lawserver.com/law/state/california/codes/california_penal_code_2601> (accessed April 15, 2009).

²² For further discussion see Eric Cummins, “Crime Fetishism in the Radical Left,” in *The Rise and Fall of California’s Radical Prison Movement* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 128-150.

²³ A caveat about Cummins’ work: while I appreciate Cummins’ attention to the prison movement’s cultural as well as social activism, I take issue with his argument that the prison abolition movement resulted from naivety about the political nature of crime and criminality. By focusing on the internal dynamics within the prison movement without considering the external forces to which that movement was responding, Cummins forecloses the possibility of a systemic critique of the relationship between crime and punishment. Moreover, he succumbs to the very racist conceptions of criminality that enabled the development of the prison industrial complex.

When it was published the following year, George Jackson's *Soledad Brother* brought increased attention to the injustices inherent in the prison's "rehabilitative" ideal. At eighteen, Jackson had been charged as an accessory to a \$71 gas station robbery. Despite evidence of Jackson's innocence, his attorney advised him to take a guilty plea in exchange for a lighter sentence. Due to indeterminate sentencing laws, Jackson received a sentence of one-year to life. Targeted for his race and his political views, he was kept behind bars for the rest of his life, receiving more than forty-seven disciplinary citations over the following twelve years. After having been framed for the murder of a prison guard, Jackson and Soledad brothers Fleeta Drumgo and John Clutchette became the focus of a popular resistance movement. When Jackson was shot in the back by a San Quentin prison guard in August of 1971, prison riots swept the country. The ensuing Attica rebellion and no-negotiation policy adopted by the army composed of over 1,000 police and National Guard led to the death of thirty-two prisoners and eleven prison staff.²⁴

In the days leading up to the Attica massacre, prisoners had attempted to negotiate for systemic reforms. Demanding that the prison take "rehabilitation" seriously, the prisoners devised "Fifteen Practical Proposals" which included increased educational opportunities, the elimination of censorship, and the expansion of prison libraries.²⁵ These prison uprisings and the state's repressive responses to them brought mainstream attention to the injustices inherent within the penal system. While those on the right responded by arguing for increased controls, many on the left expressed a renewed commitment to prisoners and prison-related services. In the following years, a growing number of artists and educators entered U.S. prisons and jails either as volunteers or with the financial backing of universities, arts councils, and other government programs. Because little has been published or archived about these projects, many of them have succumbed to the kind of cultural amnesia that so often surrounds prison arts practices, as well as other kinds of alternative and community-based work. Nevertheless, the available documentation presents a picture of what prison poet William Aberg describes as a "prison renaissance"²⁶ throughout the 1970s in which organizing both within and beyond the walls led to a major expansion in educational and cultural programming in penal institutions across the country.

²⁴ Tom Wicker, *A Time to Die: The Attica Prison Revolt* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), ix.

²⁵ The prisoners' "Fifteen Practical Proposals" are listed in an appendix to Wicker, *A Time to Die*, 321. They include: "1. Apply the New York State minimum wage law to all state institutions. STOP SLAVE LABOR. 2. Allow all New York State prisoners to be politically active, without intimidation of reprisals. 3. Give us true religious freedom. 4. End all censorship of newspapers, magazines, letters and other publications coming from the publisher. 5. Allow all inmates, at their own expense, to communicate with anyone they please. 6. When an inmate reaches conditional release date, give him a full release without parole. 7. Cease administrative resentencing of inmates returned for parole violations. 8. Institute realistic rehabilitation programs for all inmates according to their offense and personal needs. 9. Educate all correctional officers to the needs of the inmates, i.e., understanding rather than punishment. 10. Give us a healthy diet, stop feeding us so much pork, and give us some fresh fruit daily. 11. Modernize the inmate education system. 12. Give us a doctor that will examine and treat all inmates that request treatment. 13. Have an institutional delegation comprised of one inmate from each company authorized to speak to the institution administration concerning grievances (quarterly). 14. Give us less cell time and more recreation with better recreational equipment and facilities. 15. Remove inside walls, making one open yard, and no more segregation punishment."

²⁶ Cited in Bell Gale Chevigny, ed., *Doing Time: Twenty-Five Years of Prison Writing* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2000), xv.

Eddie Ellis, who was incarcerated at Attica during the uprising and then transferred shortly thereafter along with five hundred other Attica prisoners to New York's Green Haven prison, remembers that "Attica was the turning point in America for a spotlight on prisons and what was taking place in prisons because of the number of people that [were] killed, because of the way in which it was done, and because of the voices that came out of Attica which were voices that previously had not been heard."²⁷ In 1973, in conjunction with a prisoner organized group called The Think Tank, Marist Community College began offering a four-year college degree program at Green Haven and colleges and prisons across the country followed suit. These degree-granting initiatives, often sponsored by universities and community colleges, were financed in large part by prisoners' eligibility to receive Pell Grants from the federal government.²⁸ In addition to offering classes in literature, history, math, and science, colleges and universities also began offering courses in the creative arts. For example, in 1972, graduate students from the History of Consciousness and Community Studies programs at the University of California at Santa Cruz began a radical educational and cultural program at the California Institution for Women (CIW).²⁹ Over the next four years, a volunteer group of students, professors, artists, and activists traveled to CIW each weekend to lead the first university program for women prisoners (and arguably the first women's studies program) in the country. Along with such courses as women and the law, ethnic studies, and radical psychology, the program also offered courses in creative writing and creative arts. In response, individual artists and arts organizations were inspired to sponsor cultural programs in prisons across the state.

By the time Eloise Smith took her research trip for Governor Jerry Brown, the prison had become a central focus for organizing both inside and outside the walls of the institution. Even though Smith was not an active participant in the prison movement, she was part of a growing body of artists and community leaders who viewed penal institutions as compelling sites for political and cultural intervention. As a result of this activity, Brown faced considerable pressure to respond to the prison movement's demands. Throughout the decade, federal courts had ruled in favor of prisoners' claims for just and humane treatment. In turn, these courts had directed the state of California to fulfill its "rehabilitative" promise by relieving inhumane conditions like overcrowding, ceasing the racist and classist enforcement of policies such as indeterminate sentencing, and providing educational and other programming.³⁰ For Brown, the development of a publicly funded prison arts project could function as one possible response.

Unlikely Alliances: Building the Arts into Corrections

It was within this progressive socio-political climate that Smith was able to respond to the requests of Verne McKee and a group of fellow inmate artists at the California Medical Facility by assisting them in applying for a grant from the California Arts Council to cover the cost of arts supplies. Shortly thereafter, Smith and McKee capitalized on growing support for "rehabilitative" programming by starting the Prison Arts Project. Through her husband's

²⁷ For further discussion see Barbara Zahm, *The Last Graduation: The Rise and Fall of College Programs in Prison* (New York: 1997).

²⁸ Pell grants were instituted as part of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (Pub. L. No. 89-329).

²⁹ For more information, see Karlene Faith, "Education for Empowerment: California, 1972-1976," in *Unruly Women: The Politics of Confinement and Resistance* (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1993), 275-324.

³⁰ Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 91.

nonprofit organization, the William James Association, Smith received three years of funding from the California Arts Council's Arts in Social Institutions and Artists in Communities grants, the San Francisco Foundation (which John Kreidler of CETA arts had recently taken over), the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. With this local, state, and federal support, the Prison Arts Project began to operate at CMF in 1977 with a small staff of paid professional artists and inmate assistants who offered weekly workshops in arts, crafts, and creative writing.

When the Prison Arts Project had earned respect from prisoners, prison administrators, and outside artists, Smith sought to expand it into a statewide, state-funded program; however, even though she had created her Prison Arts Project at a time when there was an increasing degree of political and cultural support for "rehabilitative" programming, she developed her proposal to expand that project during the very year that the state signaled a turn toward a more punitive approach to incarceration. Shortly after Smith had received funding for her work at CMF, the state of California responded to the federal government's mandates by simply removing the concept of "rehabilitation" from its mission altogether. The 1977 Uniform Determinate Sentencing Act marks this transformation from the model of penal welfarism to that of punitive custody. With this act the government addressed its problems of prison overcrowding and the racist enforcement of indeterminate sentencing with the sweeping declaration that "the purpose of incarceration is punishment," and punishment only.³¹ In the ensuing years, the rest of the country followed California's lead by shifting from a "rehabilitative" to a "punitive" model of punishment. This reversal quickly led to the collapse of the system's educational and cultural programs. The backlash was made evident throughout the following decades as cultural and educational opportunities for prisoners were radically defunded and dismantled. The conservative shift in policy was solidified when Congress (under the Clinton administration) eliminated Federal Pell Grants for prisoners.³² By the end of the century, there were only about a dozen limited degree-granting programs left, all of which were run on volunteer labor.³³

It is no surprise, then, that in 1978 the Department of Corrections rejected Smith's initial proposal to expand her Prison Arts Project into a statewide, state-funded Arts-in-Corrections program. What is surprising, however, is that the program managed to make its way into the state budget anyway. AIC artists and administrators credit this development to another unique individual, State Senator Henry Mello. As a jazz musician and the father of a professional dancer, Mello was a strong supporter of the arts. In addition to believing in Smith's vision, he also made it no secret that he supported Smith's proposal because he owed her the favor. Smith and her husband were politically connected members of the Santa Cruz community who had helped (and held the power to continue helping) the conservative Democrat Mello win needed support in a dense left-wing area. Mello not only held political power as a state senator, but he

³¹ 1977 Uniform Determinate Sentencing Act cited in Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 91. For further discussion of this act and its effects, see Gilmore, "The Prison Fix," in *Golden Gulag*, 88-127. Davidson recalls that this legislation effectively released so many people from prison that entire wings in the state's facilities were left empty for a brief period. It was precisely this empty space that first allowed AIC to establish its own classrooms and studios within each facility. Ellen Davidson, interview by author, June 11, 2009.

³² Federal Pell Grants were eliminated in 1994 as part of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act.

³³ Linda Wang, "Chemistry Behind Bars," *Chemical & Engineering News* 85.43: 17-22. <<http://pubs.acs.org/cen/coverstory/85/8543cover.html>> (accessed December 2, 2009).

also proved to be a particularly valuable asset because of his positions on both the appropriations and rules committees, groups responsible for approving the state budget and for approving all of the governor's appointees, including the wardens. "For Arts-in-Corrections," reflects Cleveland, "this was the Rosetta Stone. No one would say it, but he was effectively the most powerful person in state government—and he would break legs."³⁴ Shortly after Smith pitched her proposal to the CDC, Brown approved a major budget increase to finance facilities renovation and construction projects.³⁵ With pressure from Mello, the Department of Corrections received a \$500 million allocation in the 1980/81 state budget with the stipulation that \$400,000 of that sum be set aside for a prison arts program. Arts-in-Corrections would be financed by the CDC which would then contract independent community-based nonprofit arts organizations to coordinate operations: initially Smith's William James Association in Northern California assumed leadership and later UCLA's Artsreach in Southern California joined in. By November of 1981, Arts-in-Corrections had hired a director, six full-time civil service artist-facilitators, and eighteen visual, performing, and literary artists to work in institutions across the state.³⁶

While \$400,000 was a significant amount of money with which to build an arts program, it was only a drop in the bucket of an exponentially increasing corrections budget. Even though the CDC turned toward an increasingly punitive form of custodial punishment throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the department continued to support Arts-in-Corrections in large part because the state's prison construction project required Mello's cooperation. To ensure that cooperation, the CDC continued partitioning a small percentage of its budget to the arts. By 1984, Arts-in-Corrections had not only received a \$375,000 budget increase, but it had also secured a commitment that the CDC would fund the continued employment of AIC artists and administrators as well as the construction of arts facilities in each of the new penal institutions the state was in the process of building.³⁷

In the ensuing years, the number of California state prisons increased by more than 700%, quickly expanding from 12 prisons housing 20,000 people to 33 prisons housing 150,000, with more construction plans on the way.³⁸ In no time, Cleveland reflects, Arts-in-Corrections became the biggest employer of artists in eighteen counties.³⁹ Artist and administrator Susan Hill adds that AIC rapidly grew to become the "big daddy" of all the community arts programs in the state.⁴⁰ In addition to providing jobs for up to three hundred outside artists, AIC also made use of the prison's Work Incentive Program to provide full time paid employment to inmate artists at

³⁴ Cleveland, interview by author, January 27, 2008.

³⁵ Even though Brown might have addressed these issues by revamping the state's parole system or by providing community-based sentencing alternatives, he invested instead in expanding the penal system. For further discussion, see Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 92-93.

³⁶ Cleveland, *Art in Other Places*, 78.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

³⁸ These numbers do not account for the CDC's 40 prison camps, 12 community correctional facilities, and 5 mother prisoner center as well as the state's contracts with private detention facilities or the California Youth Authority's growing institutions or the County Jail system
<http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Divisions_Boards/Adult_Operations/docs/Fourth_Quarter_2008_Facts_and_Figures.pdf> (accessed December 2, 2009).

³⁹ Cleveland, interview by author, January 27, 2008.

⁴⁰ Susan Hill, interview by author, June 8, 2009. Susan Hill was the director of UCLA's Arstreach until 2000. Artsreach was a nonprofit organization that oversaw the contracting of teaching artists for Arts-in-Corrections.

each institution.⁴¹ Modeling itself after both CETA and the California Arts Council, AIC hired inside and outside artists to collaborate as creative problem solvers not only within the prison system, but also within its surrounding communities.

Even though Arts-in-Corrections participants tend to credit the program's success to the tenacity of such individuals as Smith and Mello, their stories also reveal how a number of multi-million dollar CDC budget increases enabled Arts-in-Corrections' incorporation into the California penal system. In order to better understand the discourses and practices that facilitated the program's development, we must probe a bit deeper into the systemic forces that led the state to embark on such a massive expansion project in the first place.

Culture Wars: Law, Order, and the Neoliberal Construction of Deviance

Prison histories tend to explain that the left's critique of the prison led to a general lack of faith in the "rehabilitative" ideal that in turn popularized a reactionary agenda privileging "punishment" over "rehabilitation," however this narrow perspective obscures the central role that the prison came to play in the shifting political economy and popular imaginary of the late twentieth century.⁴² It is important to remember that while the left's resistance to the prison system gained popular attention in the 1960s and 1970s (a period dominated by welfare state policies and social democratic politics), the public response to that movement came to the fore in the 1980s and 1990s (a period dominated by conservative politics and free-market neoliberalism).⁴³ When George Deukmejian succeeded Jerry Brown in 1982, he followed Ronald Reagan's lead in campaigning against "big government," but paradoxically for a bigger government-run policing and punishing apparatus. Both Deukmejian and Reagan drew upon the developing strategy of packaging profound economic and social crises under the racialized banner of crime and criminality. In so doing, they represented deep social unrest as a containable problem. Over time, this political strategy—which grew increasingly popular among Republicans and Democrats alike—contributed to the quantitative and qualitative shifts in the practice of incarceration that continues to the present day.

Whereas politics provided the means for mass prison expansion, socioeconomics were a major underlying cause of the problems that "law and order" policymaking was called to fix. The rise of "tough on crime" political rhetoric, legislation, and enforcement was not the result of a political conspiracy, but it did result from complex and multivalent responses to shifting systemic problems—problems that were exacerbated, if not caused, by the neoliberal restructuring of the Keynesian welfare state. Since the late 1960s, the golden age of U.S. capitalism had been in decline as the market became saturated and increasingly globalized. These changes in the political economy left a large section of the population, namely young urban working class men and women of color facing the prospect of permanent unemployment or

⁴¹ The Work Incentive Program, which was established in 1983, offered a day-for-day sentence reduction in exchange for full time work. Aligned with the privatization of the prison system and the accompanying popularization of prison labor, the program encouraged inmates to "work for their keep." In addition, it provided a means of reducing prison overcrowding while still promoting a tough-on-crime agenda.

⁴² Eric Cummins' *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement* exemplifies this dominant line of argument.

⁴³ David Garland, *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 98-102.

underemployment. The turn to “law and order” policymaking assisted in managing this surplus population while also stimulating a racialized and sexualized moral panic that turned attention away from the crises spawned by over-accumulation, de-industrialization, and globalization.⁴⁴

In order to understand how and why the punitive turn in the prison system was accompanied by the retrenchment of social welfare provisions, it is helpful to examine how the language of “law and order” became inextricably tied to the discourse of a “culture of dependency,” a dynamic that was popularized by the shared agendas of Republican Richard Nixon and Democrat Daniel Moynihan. During Nixon’s presidency, Moynihan headed the Urban Affairs Council, a group that sought to reform welfare by guaranteeing a minimum level of income to all Americans. Their proposed Family Assistance Plan (FAP) promised to eliminate the developing “culture of dependency” by instilling a work ethic in the country’s poor.⁴⁵ Throughout the following decades, both liberals and conservatives came to rely on a tough-on-crime and tough-on-welfare platform that blamed economic, political, and cultural problems on what was construed to be the fundamentally pathological (and criminal) character of poor men and women of color. According to Moynihan, the responsibility for a crumbling social structure lies with the matriarchal structure of the black family in which emasculated men do not work and domineering women depend on the state for a free ride. “Once or twice removed,” he argues, “[the weakness of the family structure] will be found to be the principal source of most of the aberrant, inadequate, or antisocial behavior that did not establish, but now serves to perpetuate the cycle of poverty and deprivation.”⁴⁶ Within these combined “law and order” and “culture of dependency” discourses, the assistential and penitential arms of the bureaucratic field are called to manage a perceived “tangle of pathology” that is rooted not in social, political, or economic systems, but rather in the failings of individuals and their individual nuclear families.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Barry Goldwater developed the “law and order” strategy in 1964, but Nixon won the presidency with it in 1968. For further discussion of how “law and order” policymaking arose in response to the radical cultural and social movements of the 1960s, see Dylan Rodríguez’s discussion of White Reconstruction in *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 19-28. For more on how the discourse of “law and order” served as an integral component of neoliberal restructuring see Loïc Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 29.

⁴⁵ The Family Assistance Plan was a progressive agenda that proposed a minimum level of income for all Americans. With the recession, the Watergate scandal, and a considerable conservative backlash, however, Nixon’s administration was never able to enact the policy. What I find troubling about the FAP lies less in the policy itself than in the “dependency” discourse upon which the policy relied. For further discussion of the FAP, see Premilla Nadassen, “The Guaranteed Annual Income and FAP,” in *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 157-193.

⁴⁶ Daniel P. Moynihan, “Chapter IV. The Tangle of Pathology,” in *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, Office of Policy Planning and Research United States Department of Labor, 1965
<www.dol.gov/oasam/programs/history/moynchapter4.htm> (accessed April 15, 2009).

⁴⁷ For further discussion of the dynamic relationship between the “assistential” welfare system and the “penitential” prison system in the late twentieth century, see Loïc Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor*. Roger Lancaster also interrogates the sexualized component of this moral panic in “State of Panic,” in *New Landscapes of Inequality: Neoliberalism and the Erosion of Democracy in America*, ed. Jane L. Collins, Micaela di Leonardo, and Brett Williams (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2008), 39-64. “Modern sex panics,” Lancaster argues, express anxieties about ongoing institutional changes triggered by the new social movements of the 1960s: the sexual revolution, the women’s movement, and gay liberation,” 49.

Prior to this historical moment, critiques of the welfare state tended to be reformist in nature: arguments focused on how the state wasn't doing enough and how welfare needed to be improved. With the economic restructuring of the 1970s and 1980s, however, the middle classes began to view their taxes as money paid out, not in support of their own self-interests, but rather for the benefit of an increasingly undeserving, racialized, gendered, and sexualized underclass. These shifts in public sentiment and public policy are evidenced by the passing of Proposition 13 in California in 1978—legislation that significantly reduced property taxes throughout the state. The passing of this proposition signaled a nationwide “taxpayer revolt,” which in turn helped Ronald Reagan win the presidency.⁴⁸ David Garland offers a pithy analysis of these social, cultural, and political transformations when he explains that the developing social anxieties about “tax-and-spend government,” “undeserving welfare recipients,” “the break-up of the family” and “the breakdown of law and order” are precisely the anxieties that free-market neoliberalism addressed by weakening trade unions, shifting power back toward managers and capital, deregulating economic life, and rolling back welfare. These reactionary agendas made room for neoconservatism’s anti-modern themes, such as “tradition, order, hierarchy, authority,”⁴⁹ and both prison expansion and welfare state rollback took on a new strategic significance: they functioned to legitimate social and economic policies that punish the poor.⁵⁰ As Moynihan so aptly notes, “In a world where completed men and women stand on their own feet, persons who are dependent—as the buried imagery of the word denotes—hang.”⁵¹ By highlighting how the “dependent” members of contemporary U.S. society are inevitably left to hang, Moynihan exposes how the ideology of dependency that has emerged in the United States in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries simultaneously informs and is informed by a racialized, sexualized, classed, and gendered notion of criminality, a notion that serves to perpetuate the state-sanctioned and extralegal enforcement of both civil and physical death.

This political, economic, and cultural perspective may deepen our understanding of the contemporary prison industry, with the word industry calling us to interrogate not only the role that the prison has been called to play in late modern capitalism, but also the role that the prison has been called to play in producing certain kinds of subjects.⁵² Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, neoliberal dependency discourse and the trope of individualized deviance became the dominant ideology for those on either end of the political spectrum. As the prison system was massively expanded, other social institutions were also marked as symbols of a culture of (criminal) “dependency.” In the 1980s and 1990s, for instance, both welfare and arts funding were targeted as wasteful social programs.⁵³ While schools, hospitals, libraries, museums, theaters, community

⁴⁸ For more on the relationship between Proposition 13 and the expansion of the prison industrial complex in California, see Gilmore 42-64.

⁴⁹ Garland, *The Culture of Control*, 97-99.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁵¹ Daniel P. Moynihan, *The Politics of a Guaranteed Income: The Nixon Administration and the Family Assistance Plan* (New York: Random House, 1973), 17.

⁵² Angela Davis and Gina Dent “Prison as Border: A Conversation on Gender, Globalization and Punishment,” *Signs* 26.4 (Summer, 2001): 1238.

⁵³ For further discussion, see Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004). “It is not coincidental,” Kester writes, “that the two primary areas of conservative polemic, at least until more recent assaults on the ‘gay agenda’ were welfare and arts funding. Both of these areas of public policy allow conservatives to attack the moral pedagogy of the state. Welfare teaches

centers, and more were being radically de-funded, however, the California Arts-in-Corrections program not only survived, it thrived. As AIC participants have shown, the organization persisted in part because of the serendipitous alignment of Eloise Smith and Henry Mello's personal interests, but a systemic analysis reveals how its success resulted from far more than individual ingenuity. To survive the neoliberal turn toward mass incarceration and social service retrenchment, Arts-in-Corrections participants creatively mobilized the dominant ideologies of the period.

Arts In/As Corrections: Self-Esteem and “Revolutions from Within”

William Cleveland recalls that in the program's early years, the basic attitude among those involved in Arts-in-Corrections was that prisoners were the victims of a repressive and unjust system that needed to be transformed. “The artists coming in were not so different from the Weathermen,”⁵⁴ he explains:

They wanted to get jobs in the factory or the prison and enlighten the masses by teaching them about their oppression, by whispering Marxist theory on the assembly line. Imagine a painting class and the teacher stops and starts talking about the proletarian revolution.⁵⁵

Cleveland remembers that he and the other AIC artists and administrators quickly learned that they could not sustain this approach while simultaneously working in partnership with the Department of Corrections.

The minute these people went in and started talking about politics, the prisoners came to me. Verne McKee says to me “Get these people the fuck out of here. We're not stupid. If we want to read *Soul on Ice*, we'll read it. And we know how to do it and not get caught. These [artists] are going to get everything shut down.”⁵⁶

In response to the prisoners' critiques, Cleveland recalls that AIC teaching artists shifted their emphasis from working to “inspire and mobilize” prisoners to working to “heal and nurture” them.⁵⁷ In so doing, they drew upon and transformed the mission of healing and nurturing that had been built into the Arts-in-Corrections mission from the program's inception.

When Eloise Smith first conceived of the Prison Arts Project, she drew largely from the work of her friend and colleague M.C. Richards to articulate the philosophy behind her vision.

young women to have illegitimate children and to shirk responsibility (for work and for reproduction), while arts funding allows the state to support deadbeat artists who cannot earn a real living and whose works inculcate bad, anti-American values,” 132.

⁵⁴ The Weathermen or the Weather Underground was a radical leftist organization of the late 1960s and early 1970s that began as a faction of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Aligned with anti-imperialist and Black liberation struggles, the Weathermen were committed to the abolition of the U.S. prison system.

⁵⁵ Cleveland, interview by author, January 27, 2008.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Cleveland interview by author, February 8, 2008.

Richards was a poet and ceramicist who, along with John Cage and Merce Cunningham, had been active in the mid-century radical art experimentations at Black Mountain College. In her book *Centering*, Richards theorized that the process of centering a pot was also a process of centering oneself; shaping clay, she claimed, shaped the artist.⁵⁸ Richards's understanding of art as a vehicle for creative transformation significantly influenced Smith's initial vision.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Arts-in-Corrections came to legitimize its philosophy by adjusting Richards's radical philosophy to match the shifting values of the period. In time, the Arts-in-Corrections mission came to be articulated as follows:

The program is based on the belief that an inmate can improve his or her self-esteem and, thus, behavior by replacing lost physical freedom with an inner freedom gained through the discipline and rewards of art. The program provides an opportunity for inmates to learn, experience, and be rewarded for individual responsibility and self-discipline. Involvement can lead to an increase in constructive self-sufficiency, heightened self-esteem, and reduced tension.⁵⁹

This mission statement draws directly on the language of the self-esteem movement, which gained force first in California and then across the country throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The movement, which was marked by the California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility, advanced "self-esteem" as a technology of subjectivity that could solve a wide array of social problems by producing better self-governing subjects. In 1990, for example, the task force issued a report arguing that self-esteem could function as a "social vaccine" that would cut to the root of "crime, unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, teen

⁵⁸ For further discussion, see M.C. Richards, *Centering: In Pottery, Poetry, and the Person* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1962).

⁵⁹ Cited in California Task Force to Promote Self-esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility, *Toward a State of Esteem: The Final Report of the California Task Force to Promote Self-esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility* (Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1990), 114. The full report is available in William Cleveland Papers, Box 2, Book 2. In the CDC Operations Manual, AIC is listed in Chapter 10000 General Administration, Subchapter 11000 Organizational Structure, Section 11010 Organization. Subsection 16.2: "This unit makes use of the creative processes to raise inmate self-esteem and lower institutional tensions. The program contracts with professional artists and arts organizations to instruct and guide inmates in the visual, literary and performing arts. These resources are also used for institution beautification and community service arts projects." In the strategic planning materials of 1994, the mission is listed as follows: "The mission of Arts-in-Corrections is to provide the inmate population of the California Department of Corrections instruction by professional artists in the visual, performing, literary or media arts through workshops, performances and community service projects; in order to: *Develop and improve positive work and social skills that contribute to institutional safety and reduced recidivism; *Enhance participants' self-esteem, self-discipline and problems (sic) solving skills through individual artistic expression and artistic production; *Utilize the arts to develop constructive communication among participants, correctional staff and members of the outside community; *Develop skills and attitudes that reduce the potential for criminal behavior in and out of prison and increase employability." Below, the statement of philosophy reads: "The teaching professional artist is Arts-In-Correction's most potent resource. The program's positive impact on inmates is derived from a faculty of working artists who use their creativity, discipline and imagination to teach, and make art in an institutional setting. Their presence in prison, as models of self-discipline and independence, pose a pointed challenge to inmate art students—a challenge which offers them opportunities to make positive personal change through commitment and hard work." William Cleveland Papers, Box 2, Binder B.

pregnancies, educational failure, welfare dependency, and violence.”⁶⁰ This movement, as Barbara Cruikshank notes, “promise[d] to solve social problems from crime and poverty to gender inequality by waging a social revolution, not against capitalism, racism and inequality, but against the order of the self and the way we govern ourselves.”⁶¹ Claiming that “government and experts cannot fix these problems for us,” the task force argued that it is up to each individual to become a better esteeming subject.⁶²

In order to encourage social responsibility via personal responsibility, the task force recommended training, prevention, and treatment programs for individuals and families as well as the development of workplaces affirming dignity and respect for all employees.⁶³ While these proposals reflected a commitment to social justice, they did so through the very discourse of neoliberal governmentality that penalized a “culture of dependency.” Rather than advocating for programs that addressed the systemic forces behind poverty, racism, (hetero)sexism, and mass incarceration, for instance, the report proposed that women on welfare be required to undergo training that would instill in them a sense of “self-reliance.”⁶⁴ In conjunction with self-esteem courses for welfare recipients, another of the task force’s recommendations was to reduce crime (not to reform or restructure the criminal justice system) through “arts programs in institutional settings.”⁶⁵ The final report argued that to master an arts discipline “one grows in self-confidence and acquires a feeling of competence. These attributes make programs in the visual, literary, and performing arts particularly effective for incarcerated individuals.”⁶⁶ By producing better self-governing subjects, the report proposed, California’s Arts-in-Corrections program would not only reduce recidivism rates, but would also prevent crime.

Because the self-esteem movement diverted attention away from public responsibility and toward personal accountability, it coincided with the neoliberal shift from a welfare state to a penal state. As a result, “self-esteem” became a particularly potent tool for legitimizing prison arts programming. By the late 1980s, for example, Arts-in-Corrections had succeeded in winning the support of conservative James Rowland, George Deukmejian’s appointment as Director of the Department of Corrections. In his introduction to an AIC art exhibit, for instance, Rowland expounded on the program’s value:

The mastery of arts skills requires patience, self-discipline, and long term commitment. These attributes are basic to an inmate’s ability to function responsibly upon release... Through programs such as Arts-In-Corrections we have a greater chance of making a productive citizen of a probable repeat

⁶⁰ Task Force, *Toward a State of Esteem*, viii.

⁶¹ Barbara Cruikshank, “Revolutions Within: Self-Government and Self-Esteem,” in *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism and Rationalities of Government*, ed. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, Nikolas Rose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 231. Cruikshank’s essay provides a strong analysis of the self-esteem movement as a form of neoliberal governmentality. The critique I offer here draws heavily from her contributions.

⁶² Task Force, *Toward a State of Esteem*, viii.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 116-129.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 113. This finding is due in no small part to Cleveland’s shrewd participation task force meetings.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

offender. Salvaging one felon means one more person who will commit no crimes, with no future victims and no future economic loss.⁶⁷

Because AIC promoted “rehabilitation” during a period in which “incapacitation” had become the driving force behind incarceration, the program could easily have been dismissed by someone like Rowland or Deukmejian as a waste of taxpayer dollars. However, AIC’s focus on the “failed individual” enabled both conservatives and liberals of the period to further the notion that crime was not the result of social unrest but was rather a containable problem rooted in the pathologies of individual offenders.⁶⁸

Throughout the 1990s, the discourse of “self-esteem” made its way into a number of progressive movements. For example, Gloria Steinem’s *Revolutions from Within* (1992) had a major impact on feminism by arguing not for collective political organizing, but rather for a transformation in how we each govern ourselves. In this way, “empowerment,” a term developed in conjunction with the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, shifted in meaning from collective political action to a new state of esteem. By the 1990s, such terms as “empowerment” and “self-esteem” had become, as Cruikshank notes, “almost mandatory in mission statements and grant applications for non-profit agencies.”⁶⁹ Cruikshank’s analysis reveals how Arts-in-Corrections was not alone in strategically translating the value of its work into the neoliberal discourse of the times. During these years, artists across the country responded to the culture wars by arguing for art’s capacity to solve social problems, not through systemic intervention, but rather through individual acts of transformation.

The Birth of a Field: Art, Community, and the Neoliberal Mandate

The culture wars were already in full force in the late 1980s when Senator Alphonse D’Amato tore up a print of Andres Serrano’s *Piss Christ* and threw it on the Senate floor. Denouncing the public support of obscene art created by “social deviants,” conservatives attacked public funding for the arts with a vengeance. While the ensuing debates focused on questions of obscenity, sexuality, and censorship, they signaled a larger set of concerns about the relationship between the state and the social sphere, concerns that were manifested in shifting

⁶⁷ Light From Another Country Pamphlet, William Cleveland Papers Box 2, File C, 1.

⁶⁸ Cassandra Shaylor offers a powerful image of how the discourses and practices of “self-esteem” continue to play out in the contemporary California prison system. On a recent tour of a women’s prison, she along with a group of visitors was invited to view the following as a model of the prison’s “rehabilitative” programming: “Lined up side-by-side in a room just large enough to fit them were six cages, each holding one woman. Though the warden, who was also on the tour, referred to these cages as ‘modular holding cells,’ it is no exaggeration to call them cages: they were approximately eight feet tall, three feet wide, and four feet deep, with solid metal walls on three sides and metal mesh on the front. Inside they were just large enough for one person to stand or sit on a small seat built into one side. The women inside them could look out of the front but were unable to see each other. On one end of the room, a guard was sitting on a chair squeezed into the small space left in front of the cages, and a television cart was shoved in the doorway since there was no room for it inside. According to the Director of Mental Health Services, the women were watching a video about ‘self-esteem’ and would be able to talk to (though not see) each other when the video ended. This was the new ‘therapy’ program of which he claimed to be so proud: since the women were able to be in the same room, they would be able to talk with each other about their abusive pasts and begin to heal.” For further discussion see Shaylor, “Not Light But Fire: Gender, Violence, and Strategies for Prison Abolition,” Diss. (University of California, Santa Cruz, 2007), 76-111.

⁶⁹ Cruikshank, “Revolutions Within,” 238.

welfare and criminal justice policy.⁷⁰ Conservatives in Congress attacked the arts in part by questioning their social efficacy. If government support for the arts were to continue, they insisted, then it should be focused on activities that could be proven to provide a concrete social function. This right-wing argument resonated rather uneasily with the language radical community artists had been using for decades. Suddenly, a critical mass of both neoconservatives and progressive cultural activists found themselves emphasizing the limitations of “art-for-art’s sake” and instead upholding the potential for artists to work as social service providers.

During the 1990s, as social and cultural provisions were slashed across the board, the community arts field received increasing attention and support from individuals and institutions across the political spectrum. Community arts advocate Linda Frye Burnham explains that the culture wars paradoxically enabled tremendous growth in the community arts field:

It was not long before this [utilitarian] mandate spread throughout the arts-funding world, and it began to re-tool. . . Every major foundation initiative is now built on a “theory of change” (a term borrowed from academics), articulating exactly what the funder expects for its money. In what sounds like a cross between social science and venture capitalism, funders are now demanding community partnership principles, change theory, outcome measures, and projected impacts.⁷¹

The restructuring that Burnham references is exemplified by the National Endowment’s *American Canvas* (1997), which notes a significant increase in socially engaged, community-based arts activity across the country. The report upholds community-based cultural partnerships as a model for the direction the art world should follow into the twenty-first century.⁷² Describing the recent growth of the community arts field as “a mountain-to-Mohammed shift that has no precedent in American culture (outside of wartime mobilization, perhaps),”⁷³ *American Canvas* argues that the reason for artists to engage their communities lies less in idealistic pursuits and more in pragmatic constraints. People can no longer effectively argue for the intrinsic value of art, the report claims; instead, artists and arts organizations need to translate

⁷⁰ For further discussion, see George Yúdice, “The Privatization of Culture,” in *Art Matters: How the Culture Wars Changed America*, ed. Brian Wallis, Marianne Weems, and Philip Yenawine (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 288. It is also important to note that since its inception, the role of the NEA has always been primarily symbolic. Even at its peak, the NEA budget cost only 66 cents per person (\$176 million); by 1998, the organization cost only 36 cents per person (\$98 million). Thus, it was the symbolic role of the NEA more than the actual cost of the program that was so vehemently debated throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Statistics cited in Yúdice and Miller, *Cultural Policy*, 58.

⁷¹ Linda Frye Burnham “Theories of Change” in “How Do You Make Social Change?” *Theater and Social Change*, a special issue of *Theater* 31.3, ed. Alisa Solomon (Fall 2001): 64. Arlene Goldbard offers a powerful critique of this development, which she terms The Metrics Syndrome in the field of community cultural development. Arlene Goldbard, “The Metrics Syndrome,” *The Community Arts Network*, October 2008 <http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2008/10/the_metrics_syn.php> (accessed April 15, 2010).

⁷² George Yúdice and Grant Kester offer incisive critiques of the *American Canvas* report. For further discussion, see Yúdice, “The Privatization of Culture,” 287-299 and Kester “A Critical Framework for Dialogical Practice,” in *Conversation Pieces*, 124-151.

⁷³ Gary O. Larson, *American Canvas* (Washington, DC: The National Endowment for the Arts, 1997), 80.

the value of their work into language (and corresponding practices) that can convince civic and corporate leaders as well as “the average joe” of their value.⁷⁴ This shift in emphasis constitutes a significant difference from the community arts movement of the previous era. Instead of being compelled primarily by a commitment to social engagement, contemporary community arts activity can also be driven, as *American Canvas* documents, by “a trace of desperation,” a desire to survive at all costs.⁷⁵

While renewed attention to community-based programming has enabled tremendous growth in the community arts field and in the subfields of arts in social institutions and arts in corrections, this utilitarian mandate for the arts runs the risk of compromising the work produced.⁷⁶ Even though contemporary community arts practice certainly has radical, populist, and even utopian motivations, its utilitarianism also has a reactionary, neoliberal, and even neoconservative bent. As the welfare state has been rolled back, artists have been increasingly called to manage the social in ways that uphold rather than transform the status quo.⁷⁷ A recent report from Americans for the Arts’ Institute for Community Development sheds light on the “correctional” mandate in the contemporary community arts field. It extends the *American Canvas* argument by focusing on the example of arts programs in the criminal justice system. Arguing that “art holds a key” to law enforcement, the report invokes Arts-in-Corrections’ mission statement by claiming that the central value of art lies in its ability to teach “self-discipline.” As a result, art can function as a cost-effective solution to the social problems presented, in this case, by at-risk youth. Community-based art programs, the report promises, are not about coddling problem or delinquent youth: learning how to play a musical instrument, rehearsing a play, or executing a mosaic mural requires long hours of practice, focus, and perseverance—all components of self-discipline, a trait that many at-risk youth are desperately lacking.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Larson, *American Canvas*, 15.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁷⁶ It is important to note that the arts in the United States remain woefully underfunded and that the community arts field is certainly no exception. While this increased attention to community arts partnerships has enabled certain artists to survive, the vast majority of artists in the field continue to struggle day-to-day and month-to-month.

⁷⁷ The considerable momentum in community arts activity that has been generated over the past two decades has led to increased attention in prison arts both in California and across the country. Even though contemporary programs struggle to survive in an increasingly hostile and underfunded climate, prison arts are also receiving renewed interest, as witnessed by the publication of books, the documentation of programs, and the organization of prison artists in national and regional collectives. There is also no doubt that artists today are working in the U.S. prison and related penal institutions in far greater numbers than ever before. Of course, given the massive expansion of the prison system over the past three decades, it is also clear that there are proportionally fewer programs in relation to the prison population than there were in the mid-1970s. For further discussion see Krista Brune, “Creating Behind the Razor Wire: An Overview of Arts in Corrections in the U.S.,” *Community Arts Network* (January 2007), <http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2007/01/creating_behind.php> (accessed December 2, 2009).

⁷⁸ Arts Programs for At-Risk Youth: How U.S. Communities Are Using the Arts to Rescue Their Youth and Deter Crime, Institute for Community Development, Americans for the Arts, 3, <http://www.artsusa.org/information_services/research/institute_community_development/default.asp> (accessed January 15, 2009).

Legitimizing the work in these terms effectively positions the arts as vehicles for reforming “failed individuals” rather than as engines for addressing systemic problems. Grant Kester provides a concise articulation of this dynamic:

The effect can be to elide any analysis of the systematic causes of poverty and to put in its place a closed circuit of creative personal transformation presided over by the artist. Unless the artist devises strategies to challenge it this focus on the primacy of individual transformation implies, first, that the individual *is* morally or emotionally flawed (the poor suffer from ‘malaise’ and lack of ‘self-motivation’); second, that this flaw bears a causal relation to his or her current (economically, emotionally, or socially) disempowered status; and third, that the artist is in a position to remedy this flaw and to provide him or her with what George F. Will would call the “social capital necessary for civilized living.”⁷⁹

Kester helps to shed light on how, when artists such as Serrano and Mapplethorpe were used to demonize the arts community as being akin to the dependent welfare mothers that suck at the teat of “big government,” many in the arts community reconfigured themselves as welfare providers rather than recipients in order to ensure their continued survival. From this perspective, we can see how and why the community arts movement evolved over the past three decades into a field of endeavor and a field of study. As the social safety net has been rolled back to save taxpayer dollars, more and more artists have stepped in to take up the slack.

Today, scholars and practitioners of community-based art tend to celebrate exemplary programs that work to solve social problems. As both a scholar and a practitioner within this field, I, too, am deeply committed to supporting this work, which remains overwhelmingly undervalued on political, economic, and cultural registers. With regard to the field’s “correctional” mandate, however, I would encourage a bit more caution. William Cleveland highlights the problems created by current community arts discourse when he reflects that:

As is often the case, when the powers that be saunter into the community café, pull up a chair, and start ordering martinis, the conversation starts to shift. Meanings start to move around a bit or get reconstituted. And what you thought you meant doesn’t come across as clearly as it did when you and your nutcase friends were the only ones sitting around that table.⁸⁰

By adopting the pervasive neoliberal ideologies of “self-making” and “correcting,” community-based artists and scholars may inadvertently reinforce the expansion of the prison industrial complex and the retrenchment of the welfare state even as they attempt to resist them.

Given the limitations of Arts-in-Corrections’ stated mission, it would be easy to close this chapter here by concluding that the organization, like so many U.S. community arts projects of the same period, became complicit with the very institutions that it sought to transform. AIC participants, however, demand that the analysis be a bit harder to do. Near the end of my first

⁷⁹ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 138.

⁸⁰ Cleveland, *Art in Other Places*, xviii.

conversation with Cleveland, he added, “At every turn there is the surface narrative and then there is the...” He paused, searching for the right word. “The more nuanced...” he said, and paused again.⁸¹ Closer attention to Arts-in-Corrections’ nuances reveals how participants struggled to carve out a space that was simultaneously within and beyond the systems that constrained them. They did so, in part, by borrowing from another familiar vocabulary.

The Fine Art of Riding Bureaucratic Broncos

Artsreach director Susan Hill explains that her work with Arts-in-Corrections quickly taught her the art of “speaking bilingually.”⁸² She illustrates this point through a story about being challenged by a warden during the program’s early years. “For the amount of money we’re spending on this art crap,” the warden told her, “I could have two trucks and three guards. So how come it’s a good thing?” Hill remembers explaining the value of building spontaneous and flexible environments in which people could hone the art of creative imagining. It didn’t take much, she remembers, to see that this line of argument was not going to get her or her program very far. “Their mission is punishment,” she notes, “and my mission is creativity. So how do you have a conversation together? Would I like prisons out of business? You bet. Would they like the artists out of business? It wouldn’t bother them at all.” Hill and other AIC participants found that in order to survive within this hostile environment, it was necessary to make strategic use of the argument that art could function as a “cost-effective” intervention strategy for creating “self-disciplining,” “self-esteeming,” “self-governing subjects.”⁸³ To avoid the trappings of this neoliberal rhetoric, however, AIC participants re-mobilized the very discourse that community-based artists had initially sought to overturn. Hill continues:

We had a joke because there was another thing that it was then necessary to say which is, “Hello, I am the director of this prestigious nonprofit. We are here to work with you, it is our pleasure to work with you, we feel very fortunate to be able to do this kind of programming, but we are mandated by the California Arts Council and by our funders to do only *fine arts* programming.”⁸⁴

Even though the community arts movement was founded on a critique of the fine arts as elitist forms that do not sufficiently acknowledge the artist’s enmeshment within, and responsibility to, larger social structures, AIC came to utilize a “fine arts” vocabulary to counter the violence inherent in a more utilitarian change-based approach to community art.⁸⁵

AIC participants returned to the language of artistic autonomy first and foremost to protect themselves from becoming subsumed by the prison’s many pressing demands. Day to day, these demands depended less on the need to prove a particular “rehabilitative” effect and more on the drive for bureaucratic expediency. Hill, for example, recalls being directed to mass

⁸¹ Cleveland, interview by author, January 27, 2009.

⁸² Susan Hill, email to author, June 5, 2009.

⁸³ Susan Hill, interview by author, June 8, 2009.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ While AIC was labeled a “fine arts” program, they worked with an expanded understanding of the category that not only included but also emphasized popular arts and crafts such as native American jewelry making, African dance, textile work, ceramics, and more.

produce football posters for an upcoming tournament, Artist-Facilitator Ernest Dillihay remembers being asked to have his students re-paint the walls of the institution, and teaching artist Judith Tannenbaum recollects being directed to have her students manufacture “Say No To Drugs” bookmarks. “I tell them we’re a fine arts instructional program and that we don’t have the capacity to do what they ask,” says Dillihay: “if they want signs, there’s a graphic illustration department and a wood shop.”⁸⁶ In the micro-operations of prison life, the language of aesthetic autonomy provided AIC artists and administrators with a means of shielding their work from bureaucratic instrumentalization. By claiming that the California Arts Council had mandated them to teach art (and only art) in a neutral environment that was separate from the social world of the prison, AIC artists sought both literally and figuratively to carve out a space that was situated simultaneously within and beyond the walls of the institution.⁸⁷

The discursive tension between the neoliberal rhetoric of “personal responsibility” and the modernist discourse of “artistic autonomy” was mirrored in AIC’s organizational structure. While Arts-in-Corrections was fully institutionalized within the CDC (codified within the Director’s Book of Rules, secured as a line item in the state budget, and housed in the CDC’s central office in Sacramento), programmatic operations relied on a partnership with two independent, non-profit community arts organizations: the William James Association and UCLA’s Artsreach. Even though the CDC funded these non-profit arts organizations, the artists those organizations in turn contracted were not mandated to advance the CDC’s agenda. Through this dynamic interplay between what Hill describes as the “approved purveyors of creativity” and the “world’s fourth largest paramilitary bureaucracy,”⁸⁸ teaching artists found ways of moving within the prison system while simultaneously maintaining an identity that was distinct from that very system.⁸⁹ This push and pull within AIC’s infrastructure both shaped and was shaped by the contradictory discourses that the organization came to employ. The institutional and rhetorical interplay between “corrections” and “aesthetics” enabled artists and administrators to work toward what teaching artist Phavia Kujichagulia terms, “a middle path.”⁹⁰

The “fine arts model” provided a buffer not only on the micro-level of day-to-day prison operations, but also on the macro-level of public definition. Judith Tannenbaum, a creative writer and community arts advocate who taught poetry for AIC at San Quentin prison throughout the 1980s, illustrates how the fine arts model served as a critique of the program’s competing correctional promise. Tannenbaum recalls that the question people most often ask about her experience with Arts-in-Corrections is, “How did your students change?” Because the notion of art as a behavior modification tool has achieved such a common sense status in our society, it is generally assumed that “the purpose of sharing poetry in a place like San Quentin is to transform

⁸⁶ *Memo Arts 3.4* (Jun 1991), pg. 10, William Cleveland Papers, Box 3, File A.

⁸⁷ Arts-in-Corrections was also established as an alternative to the Hobby Craft program that had existed in California prisons since Clinton Duffy first initiated the program in the early 1940s. Hobby Craft continues to provide a space for inmates to buy arts supplies and to use them to create products that can be bought and sold inside and outside the prison. In order to survive, AIC needed to establish an identity for itself that was distinct from this prison art market.

⁸⁸ Susan Hill, email to author, June 5, 2009.

⁸⁹ As they were civil servants hired directly by the CDC, the full time artist-facilitators at each institution straddled this line between the “purveyors of creativity” and the representatives of “the paramilitary bureaucracy.”

⁹⁰ Phavia Kujichagulia, interview by Judith Tannenbaum, December 1987, William Cleveland Papers, Box 3, File B.

men from criminals into productive citizens.”⁹¹ This correctional mandate, Tannenbaum and other AIC teaching artists note, can do violence. Tannenbaum finds that contemporary community-based artists, and especially artists in correctional settings, are eager to have a conversation about the limitations and the possibilities of this pervasive change rhetoric, but that this is a topic they have not yet been able to engage in a sustained way. About her own work with AIC, she explains:

In such an environment, “change” isn’t the point. I wasn’t—didn’t want to be—a criminologist, therapist, social worker, or priest. I wasn’t even a teacher, exactly, though I shared information and resources. I wasn’t trying to judge or analyze or, even, create poets. I wasn’t looking for what was “wrong” with my students. I wasn’t trying to change anyone.”⁹²

Tannenbaum expresses concern that the mandate for community-based artists to change individuals may be no more constraining than the mandate for them to change society. “Those who come in with a political change mission,” she cautions, “can be just as destructive as those who come in with the church version of change.”⁹³ In either case, Tannenbaum has found that artists perpetuate problematic power dynamics when they enter a community with the mission of acting upon that community in a unidirectional way. If an artist comes into the work with the goal of transforming the individuals in that community, she may inadvertently intensify hierarchical dynamics between herself and the group she seeks to join. This uneven relationship can be further exacerbated by the tendency for inside artists to be lower class, uneducated or undereducated people of color and outside artists to be middle class, college educated, and white.

Even though “fine arts” discourse carries with it the legacy of civilizing missions and the uneven power dynamics that first inspired the community arts movement to challenge it, AIC artists and administrators made strategic use of that language in order to counter the violence implicit in the program’s competing “rehabilitative” mandate. By mobilizing both of these problematic discourses, Arts-in-Corrections developed a survival strategy that kept inside and outside artists in a dynamic collaboration for over twenty years. In the 1990s, however, as the state filled more and more prison beds through increasingly punitive policymaking such as mandatory minimum (1986) and three strikes (1994) sentencing, and as Arts-in-Corrections grew into an increasingly large bureaucracy unto itself, participants reflect that the creative vitality of the program began to decline. During that time William Cleveland stepped down as director of the program, Eloise Smith passed away, Henry Mello retired, Ellen Davidson left her position as director of the William James Association, and Susan Hill and Artsreach pulled out of their partnership with AIC. Ultimately, in 2003, as the state began to falter under the weight of a tremendous deficit, Governor Grey Davis instituted sweeping budget cuts that eliminated all funding for Arts-in-Corrections and effectively gutted the California Arts Council. “I always felt like we were getting away with something and that it was just a matter of time,”⁹⁴ Davidson

⁹¹ Judith Tannenbaum, “Human Beings Together,” <<http://judithtannenbaum.com/articles-and-poems/human-beings-together/>> (accessed June 18, 2009).

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Judith Tannenbaum, interview by author, October 14, 2008.

⁹⁴ Ellen Davidson, interview by author, June 11, 2009.

reflects: “You’re counterculture, you’re against the system, you’re subversive” and there’s always the sense that the “people that you’re working for [are] going to find you out and it’s going to be all over.”⁹⁵ What is remarkable, Davidson and other AIC participants note, is that the program was able to survive for as long as it did.

For Susan Hill, the Arts-in-Corrections story parallels many of the histories she studied as a young artist working on Judy Chicago’s *Dinner Party*.⁹⁶ The history of Margaret Sanger, she suggests, can serve as one such example. Whereas Sanger tends to be remembered for her role in the Eugenics movement, Hill notes that her position within that history is actually far more complex:

Margaret Sanger was an early proponent of birth control. She had these tiny little clinics. She struggled like crazy. She was trying to get the word out to women about what birth control was and how you could regulate whether you got pregnant or not. After a while New York City hospital came along and said, “What you are doing is really amazing and we’re going to move your program into our hospital, and we will fund your clinic,” and she thought she was saved. But then there’s something that happens when institutionalization takes over because within a short cycle her program had been subsumed and it wasn’t the same any more.

Hill’s story stresses the importance of attending to the nuances of history. Careful attention to the nuances of the Arts-in-Corrections’ story can help to keep its official discourses from becoming naturalized, over-simplified, and co-opted.

In her memoir, Judith Tannenbaum discusses how in order to work creatively within the prison system she had to continually “strengthen [her] ability to live with paradox.”⁹⁷ Ultimately, any study of the Arts-in-Corrections program must also grapple with the workings of paradox. Founded on radical challenges to “artistic autonomy” and to the “rehabilitative” ideal, Arts-in-Corrections rode the wave of society’s neoliberal turn by adopting reactionary “rehabilitative” rhetoric as its own and then twisting that language back upon itself through the very discourse of “artistic autonomy” that the program initially sought to overturn. In so doing, AIC artists and administrators developed a means of animating the prison bureaucracy, albeit in contradictory ways and for a limited period of time. Their work could be sustained only so long as they continued to critically engage the limitations and the possibilities of their precarious alliance with the CDC.

AIC’s strategic mobilization of available discourses resonates with a methodology developed by women of color and transnational feminist activists and scholars. As Gayatri Spivak argues, while we cannot do without dominant discourses, we can destabilize them, thereby making room for transformation. The challenge, then, becomes to continuously and

⁹⁵ Ellen Davidson, interview by Tannenbaum, December 1987, William Cleveland Papers, Box 3, File B.

⁹⁶ The *Dinner Party* is a feminist installation art piece that works to make a place for women in the historical record. The piece consists of a large table featuring place settings for thirty-nine women, both mythical and historical. Artists and community members collaborated on the project from 1974-1979.

⁹⁷ Judith Tannenbaum, *Disguised as a Poem: My Years Teaching Poetry at San Quentin* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 163.

relentlessly work to de-naturalize the conceptual frameworks we cannot help but employ. “We must,” Spivak argues, carefully attend to “what is dangerous in the unavoidably useful.”⁹⁸ Strategy, she posits, is provisional and changeable; it is not a theory, but rather a form of action that “suits a situation.”⁹⁹ It is with a similar emphasis on strategy that Arts-in-Corrections sought to redirect both the arts establishment and the prison industrial complex by working within those institution’s very terms. By “speaking bilingually” through paradoxical discourses, AIC artists, from both within and beyond the prison, strove to continually unsettle the public’s competing expectations and anxieties about the role the arts might play both in and as corrections.

Coda: Arts-in-Corrections from the Inside Out

Even though AIC artists and administrators tend to credit the program’s increased institutionalization with its decline, their position within the California Department of Corrections is precisely what has enabled Arts-in-Corrections programming to survive into the present day, albeit in increasingly small pockets within the CDC. While the allocations within the state budget could not fund a fully functional arts program after 2003, artist-facilitators and prisoners throughout the state continued to develop creative ways of collaborating with one another. From 2003 to 2010, for example, project participants found ways for Arts-in-Corrections programming to continue relatively uninterrupted at San Quentin. Because AIC’s full-time artist-facilitators held civil service positions that were codified within the Director’s Book of Rules, they proved rather difficult to eliminate. Steve Emrick, who stayed on as San Quentin’s artist-facilitator until February 2010 succeeded in enlisting a handful of outside teaching artists who volunteered to continue teaching classes in creative writing, theater, printmaking, music, and more. Whereas maintaining a group of regular volunteers proved to be more difficult in the remote locations where most of California’s prisons are located, San Quentin’s location within the San Francisco Bay Area allowed for a relatively high level of inside-outside exchange. In addition, Emrick, in partnership with the William James Association, was also able to secure a series of private grants to support the program. Through these funds, he was able to purchase necessary supplies and, at times, even to continue paying the teaching artists for their labor.¹⁰⁰

In January 2010, however, amidst a rapidly escalating statewide (and nationwide) economic crisis, all artist-facilitator positions and corresponding Arts-in-Corrections programming were finally eliminated across the state. Spoon Jackson, who joined his first Arts-in-Corrections class over twenty-five years ago and who is currently serving out his life sentence at New Folsom Prison (officially termed the California State Prison, Sacramento) responds to these recent programmatic cuts as follows:

⁹⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (London: Routledge, 1993), 5.

⁹⁹ Spivak, 4. Spivak’s definition of strategy in this context is akin to Michel de Certeau’s notion of “tactics.” For further discussion, see Michel de Certeau, “‘Making Do’: Uses and Tactics,” in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Stern Rendall (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984): 29-42.

¹⁰⁰ Through the spring of 2009, teaching artist Beth Thielen was also able to continue teaching book arts to women at the California Rehabilitation Center in Norco, CA through the support of private funds from such organizations as the Sandler Foundation of New York and the Kalliopeia Foundation. After the defunding of Arts-in-Corrections in 2003, she was the only artist working with women in California state prisons. For more, see Beth Thielen, “In the Interest of Longevity,” in *Creating Behind the Razor Wire: Perspectives from Arts in Corrections in the United States*, ed. Krista Brune (Lulu Publishers, 2008), 17-20.

I understand that citizens who are losing all sorts of good programs don't care about the loss of arts for people in prison. But as Arts-in-Corrections goes, so goes a history of self-rehabilitation and restoration, a history of people changing deeply from within. What's left behind is an unnatural desert.¹⁰¹

Jackson is one of a handful of inside artists at New Folsom who have found ways of continuing Arts-in-Corrections programming by teaching their own courses in poetry, music, and the visual arts. With the support of Jim Carlson, who worked as artist-facilitator at the institution until February 2010 and who continues on as a staff member in the mental health department, these men—many of whom are serving life sentences in this geographically remote, maximum-security facility—have built a strong interracial community committed to using art as a vehicle for pedagogical transformation and social justice. The change they would like to see in the culture and the politics of U.S. prisons, these men argue, must come from the inside out. The group's proposed "revolution from within," however, has a significantly different character than that of Gloria Steinem's self-help vision.

When Spoon Jackson speaks of "self-rehabilitation," he takes the neoliberal discourse of "self-making" and re-mobilizes it into an argument for the value of collective prisoner-led cultural activism. In the memoir that Jackson recently co-wrote with Judith Tannenbaum, he reflects on the profound impact that the arts have had on his life. Whereas Tannenbaum marks the dangers of attributing a kind of "correctional" function to the arts, Jackson emphasizes the arts' transformative capacities. "I find and build freedom by living in the moment," he explains in the book's conclusion. "This allows the warmth and light in my soul and heart to flow through my poetry and prose and gives me something to share." Reflecting on his experience playing Pozzo in a 1987 Arts-in-Corrections revival of *Waiting for Godot* at San Quentin, Jackson follows up by quoting Beckett, "That's how it is on this bitch of an earth." He continues: "I will be released from prison one day by a beautiful real life or by a beautiful real death. In either case, I have found my niche in life which is something not even death can take away."¹⁰²

In a poem entitled "Rehabilitation," Rick, a participant in Spoon Jackson's writing classes at New Folsom, speaks to how processes of art-making have enabled him and other prisoners to transcend the prison's correctional regimes:

To hell with rehabilitation is dead

I and many other artists will not be denied the god given gift to create and to dream. To escape the confines of correction on the wings of our passion.

So when there is a flute, a pen, a paintbrush, a guitar or any other artistic paraphernalia in our hands we are examples of rehabilitation.

¹⁰¹ Spoon Jackson, "Other Voices: Killing arts program in state prisons will hurt rehab efforts," *The Union*, Mar 27, 2010 < <http://www.theunion.com/article/2010100329814> > (accessed Apr 15, 2010).

¹⁰² Judith Tannenbaum and Spoon Jackson, *By Heart: Poetry, Prison, and Two Lives* (Oakland, CA: New Village Press, 2010), 192.

No longer in need of condemning or correcting.

Rehabilitation lives. It lives in me and in every other artist
Who, in spite of this place,
Still exercises the god given gift to be an artist.¹⁰³

At first glance, Rick's poem may appear to parrot the discourses that, as Foucault argues, have both constituted and been constituted by the disciplinary power of the prison throughout the institution's two hundred year history; upon a closer read, however, Rick may also be understood to join in the legacy of prison artists who have mobilized alternative meanings of "rehabilitation" and "reform" throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. From this perspective, we can see how Rick's poem works to re-direct prison discourse by detaching "rehabilitation" from both the correctional rhetoric of twentieth-century penal welfarism and the punitive language of the contemporary workfare-prisonfare nexus. Rick thus reconnects the term to its etymological root (*habilitare*) which means not to discipline failed individuals into a model of "correct" and "conforming" behavior, but rather to empower people by endowing them with ability or capacity.

Today, Rick, Jackson, and the inside artists at New Folsom Prison are continuing to keep "rehabilitation" alive—even amidst the most hostile circumstances—by liberating the concept from its history of "condemning and correcting" and instead re-defining it in conjunction with community-based agency and activism. Through this one surviving pocket of the now thoroughly debilitated Arts-in-Corrections program, the men at New Folsom prison are continuing to use the artistic process to re-habilitate "rehabilitation": empowering the concept by radically re-imagining it beyond the terms of oppressive penal regimes and neoliberal constructions of subjectivity, agency, and freedom. Through the simultaneously individual and collective acts of creating and dreaming, these men are using such instruments as flutes, pens, paintbrushes, and guitars to reject, refuse, and resist the racialized, classed, sexualized, and gendered identity of "criminal"; in its place they are adopting, transforming, and rehabilitating the identity of "artist."

¹⁰³ Rick, "Rehabilitation," in *Creating Behind the Razor Wire: Perspectives from Arts in Corrections in the United States*, ed. Krista Brune (2008), 58.

Chapter 4

“Easy Intimacy”: The Medea Project and Theater for Incarcerated Women

Performance artist Rhodessa Jones began working in the community arts field in the 1970s when she was hired through CETA funding to lead workshops in diverse locations throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. In 1989, she accepted a job with the San Francisco Arts Commission, teaching aerobics to women in the county jail system. Like many of the Arts-in-Corrections artists who entered penal institutions during the same period, Jones remembers accepting the position less out of a commitment to prison-related activism and more out of a need to earn a living wage. During her first class session, however, she recalls being moved by the familiar faces she saw inside the jail: childhood friends of her daughter who had spent nights at her house, women of color whose life stories resonated with one another’s as well as with her own. Feeling that the creative process had enabled her to survive in a racist, classist, and (hetero)sexist society, Jones began to explore how art might also serve this group of women in some way. “I went inside the jail,” she remembers, “and bam, there were all these women in jail. And all I knew was easy intimacy. I wanted to just trade stories.”¹ In 1992, Jones, along with social worker and community organizer Sean Reynolds, brought together a core group of incarcerated women and a team of outside women artists, teachers, and activists to create a contemporary retelling of the Greek myth Medea.² Since that initial production, the Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women has received critical acclaim for its public performances interweaving personal story, cultural mythology, and social critique.³ Throughout this process, Jones and the Medea Project have come to advance “easy intimacy” as an art of creative survival.⁴

Unlike Arts-in-Corrections, the Medea Project has a relatively flexible partnership with the penal institutions in which it operates. While company members work in close collaboration with the facilities that host them, they function as guests rather than employees of the criminal justice system. This more informal institutional relationship affords the ensemble a distinct set of opportunities and constraints. Most significantly, whereas employees of prisons and jails tend to be subject to policies that restrict them from engaging in such intimate behavior as sharing details of their personal lives, developing friendships with inmates, and maintaining contact with students after their release, participants in the Medea Project are free to form lasting relationships

¹ *My Life in the Concrete Jungle*, Post-Performance Discussion. Lorraine Hansberry Theater, San Francisco, October 29, 2006.

² The company’s first production, *Reality is Just Outside the Window*, premiered at San Francisco’s Theatre Artaud on January 8, 1992. For an in depth analysis of this performance, see Rena Fraden, *Imagining Medea: Rhodessa Jones and Theater for Incarcerated Women* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 27-66.

³ The company performed *Food Taboos in the Land of the Dead*, an adaptation of the myth of Eurydice, in 1993; *A Taste of Something Else: A Place at the Table*, an adaptation of the myth of Sisyphus, in 1994; *Buried Fire*, an adaptation of “The Ugly Duckling,” in 1996; *Slouching Toward Armageddon: A Captive’s Conversation on Race*, an adaptation of Pandora’s Box, in 1999; and *Can We Get There By Candlelight?*, an adaptation of the story of Innana, in 2001.

⁴ I developed my thinking on “easy intimacy” as part of a seminar on activist performance for ASTR 2007, convened by Sonja Kuflinec and Tamara Underiner. I am especially indebted to Laura Edmondson and Rachel Chaves for challenging me to think further about the relationship between efficacy and intimacy in community-based performance practice.

with one another.⁵ Over the past two decades, the company has made use of its liminal position between the inside and the outside of the penal system to develop an anti-racist feminist approach to community-based performance that embraces not only the familiar, but the familial, as well.

In January 2006, I joined the Medea Project for the company's seventh performance collaboration inside the San Francisco county jail system. Throughout the following year, I participated in the project as both ethnographer and assistant director, helping to guide an ensemble of professional performers and incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women in translating Nigerian author Amos Tutuola's 1954 novel, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, into our contemporary American re-telling, *My Life in the Concrete Jungle*. Through workshops inside and outside the jail, we developed an original production from exercises in personal reflection and social critique. At the culmination of this process, the Sheriff's Department, as it had done for the previous fifteen years, granted permission for the company's incarcerated participants to perform alongside the larger ensemble on a public stage.

Whereas Tutuola's novel told the story of a boy who escapes slavery by entering a ghost world, the Medea Project's production adapted this tale into a narrative about a young woman who disappears into an impoverished urban landscape. "This is about a girl," the sixteen-woman ensemble proclaimed at the opening of the performance as they burst through the Lorraine Hansberry Theater's backdoors and rushed the stage from behind and within the audience.

This is about babies, cities—San Francisco, Oakland, Richmond. This is about Army Street, 6th Street, the Helen Hotel. When the days of dead luck came to the hood, the girl was caught in the concrete jungle, another land of the dead. Disappeared into the Bush administration—somewhere between the jailhouse, the crack house, the ho house, the no house, the White House—anesthetized by fire and smoke, she was missing, gone for several lifetimes. Until this day, she wonders: can she get back home?

⁵ Most arts programs in and around the U.S. penal system are subject to strict rules prohibiting familiarity between employees and prisoners. Arts-in-Corrections artists and administrators, for example, are subject to the California Department of Corrections' policy 3400 "Familiarity" which states, "Employees must not engage in undue familiarity with inmates, parolees, or the family and friends of inmates or parolees." For further discussion see Judith Tannenbaum, *Disguised as a Poem: My Years Teaching Poetry at San Quentin* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 124-145. Tannenbaum remarks: "The world of corrections views any intimate human exchange—not only sex, but also friendship, political comradeship, or a variety of other forms of bonding—between prisoners and staff as dangerous," 141. In addition, members of Pat Graney's Keeping the Faith dance project for incarcerated women, a company that is often compared with the Medea Project, are allowed to embrace only in the event that a prisoner has suffered a death in the family, and even then, for no longer than thirty seconds. For further discussion, see Jessica Berson, "Baring and Bearing Life Behind Bars: Pat Graney's 'Keeping the Faith' Prison Project," *TDR: The Drama Review* 52:3 (Fall 2008): 81. As I discuss above, the Medea Project's flexibility in this regard is due in large part to its position *in* but not *of* the penal system. In addition to its flexible institutional status, the company is afforded a bit more flexibility because jail environments tend to be less regimented than prisons: as they are situated between the prison and the larger society, these pre-trial detention facilities may be seen as liminal institutions. Additionally, some of the Medea Project's freedom of movement is personality driven: much like AIC was protected by Henry Mello's support, the Medea Project enjoys a privileged status within the jails because Mike Hennessey, San Francisco's progressive sheriff, is a strong supporter of Jones and functions as a kind of guardian angel for the company.

Scholarly and popular attention to the Medea Project's work tends to focus on how the process empowers incarcerated women by combating their social invisibility. In *Imagining Medea*, for example, Rena Fraden argues that the company's central act is "to make visible what has been repressed and oppressed. That which has been sequestered, kept out of sight, bursts out among us, so loudly and with such exuberant, menacing energy that it is impossible to ignore."⁶ I propose that by staging their engagement with one another as well as with such social institutions as "the jailhouse, the crack house, the ho house, the no house, The White House," the ensemble does more than make incarcerated women visible, an act that may perpetuate the disciplinary forces of surveillance as well as the exploitative effects of spectacularization; instead, the Medea Project develops the guiding principle of "easy intimacy" to illuminate and to strengthen the intersubjective and the infrastructural ties between self and other, subject and social world—ties that have been frayed by the declining welfare state and the expanding penal state in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

This chapter follows the arc of the *My Life in the Concrete Jungle* production from the Medea Project's staged descent into the bush of ghosts to its final escape attempts. I begin with Jones' introductory "Rant from the Jungle," a spoken word performance that exposes how the contemporary penal-welfare nexus both compensates for and also exacerbates the social insecurity experienced by incarcerated women, their families, and their larger communities. After having outlined the infrastructural and ideological dimensions of the performance's larger context, I examine the Medea Project's mission of personal and social change by performing three readings of the ensemble's staged emergence from the underworld. I mark how, on the one hand, the content of the Medea project's work may mute the company's social critiques by replicating the neoliberal discourse of "self-esteem" and "personal responsibility" that pervades much contemporary community-based arts practice and scholarship. The performance's ensemble form, on the other hand, unsettles this racialized, classed, and gendered rhetoric, thereby realizing and productively troubling community-based performance's promise of transformation.

"Rant From the Jungle": The Welfare Queen, Social Insecurity, and Civil Death

In every performance of *My Life in the Concrete Jungle*, Jones began by introducing the audience to the ensemble's yearlong process. While her curtain speech changed nightly, she always concluded with the same story about working in a South African jail the previous year. Over tea with the warden, she and Reynolds had asked about the justice system there:

We're asking him, "What is life?" And he says, "Twenty-five years." And we say, "No, but we're talking about life—what's a life sentence, you know?" And he says, "Twenty-five years." And we say, "No, we're talking about life, you know, like the death penalty, or what about life in prison?" And he says, "Ladies, twenty-five years is a life, is it not?"

⁶ Fraden, 1.

Jones' story draws attention to the severity of punishment practices in the contemporary United States. With this anecdote, she invites the audience to ask why, in conjunction with such policies as three-strikes-you're-out, life terms without the possibility of parole, and active use of capital punishment, the U.S. has come to incarcerate not only more people, but also a greater percentage of its population than any other nation in the world. While a number of countries are now following in its punitive footsteps, the United States remains what a recent report by the Pew Center on the States describes as "the global leader in the rate at which it incarcerates its citizenry, outpacing nations like South Africa and Iran."⁷ Even South Africa, Jones reminds her audience, a country famed for its draconian penal policies, has no language for understanding life and death beyond the sentence of just "twenty-five years."

By posing life sentencing as a question, Jones invites performers and audience members to consider how the workings of the contemporary U.S. penal system are not inevitable or natural, but rather are constituted by specific cultural and historical forces that must be constantly negotiated and renegotiated. "Twenty-five years is a life," she calls out in the voice of the South African warden, resituating his answer into a question for the public to consider, "Is it not?" Softly, she begins to hum as she launches into a spoken word performance in which she assumes the voices of those who intersected with the workshop process. "It's like a jungle sometimes. It makes me wonder what keeps me from going under."⁸ She howls before assuming the authoritative voice of a police officer, "Put your hands in the air like you just don't care." She inhales deeply from an imagined pipe as she shifts subtly into a woman's voice, "CPS took my kids, girl," CPS being an acronym for California's Child Protective Services. "CPS took my—" She interrupts herself in the voice of another character: "No sister, you *gave* your kids to CPS." She takes another hit. "You want to step to me? You can get *ghost*, you can get *ghost*, you can get—*ghost*." Her body slouches as her eyes widen: "Is that like—being *dusted*? Is that like—being *busted*?" With this chorus of voices, Jones brings performers and audience members into the bush of ghosts, a liminal space between the living and the dead, the visible and the disappeared.

Throughout the yearlong workshop process, the Medea Project utilized the guiding image of the underworld to interrogate the perpetual processes of symbolic and material cancellation that constitute contemporary practices of incarceration. By connecting personal stories to cultural mythologies, the ensemble explored the *ghosting* of criminalized populations within and beyond the walls of prisons and jails. In the process, we examined how, even though incarcerated people have been technically granted their civil rights, social and physical death continue to be effected through the wide-reaching disenfranchisement of incarcerated women, their children, their families, and their communities.⁹ Through her portrayal of a crack-addicted woman who complains that Child Protective Services (CPS) has taken her children, Jones highlights some of the complex ways in which social death sentences are gendered, classed, and racialized. Because women are the country's primary caretakers and the majority of welfare recipients, the stories of

⁷ *One in One Hundred: Behind Bars in America 2008* (Washington DC: The Pew Center on the States, 2008), 5.

⁸ Here, Jones invokes "The Message," by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five. When "The Message," performed by Melle Mel, was released by Sugarhill Records in 1982, it signaled the advent of a growing socially conscious hip-hop movement. Interspersed with verses about urban poverty, drugs, and crime, the chorus repeats: "It's like a jungle sometimes. It makes me wonder how I keep from going under."

⁹ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1985).

incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women expose how the prison and welfare systems conspire to disenfranchise certain groups of people in ways that are simultaneously political, socio-economic, and cultural. The statistics perform a drama of their own: while women constitute only about seven percent of the U.S. prison population, they are the fastest growing prison population in the nation.¹⁰ In California alone there are now more women behind bars than there were in the entire country in 1970.¹¹ The majority of female prisoners are low-income, unmarried mothers of color who move in and out of penal institutions at a recidivism rate of around seventy percent.¹²

The multiple forms of disenfranchisement that accompany incarceration are exemplified by war on drugs legislation, which does not provide treatment for women who struggle with addiction, but rather denies them access to cash assistance, food stamps, public housing, education, and employment. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (known colloquially as the “welfare reform” act)—which was passed under the Clinton administration in conjunction with a number of increasingly punitive crime control bills—placed a lifetime ban on cash assistance and food stamps for people with a history of a drug-related conviction, a ban that currently affects more than 96,000 women (as well as approximately 135,000 children), 48% of whom are African American or Latina.¹³ That same year, the federal government also passed the One Strike Initiative, which authorizes Public Housing Authorities to deny housing or to evict tenants who either hold a drug conviction or whom they suspect of drug involvement.¹⁴ In conjunction with its welfare reform agenda, the federal government has also repealed prisoners’ eligibility for college Pell grants and authorized the delay or denial of federal financial aid to anyone with a history of a drug conviction.¹⁵ Along with the stigma that often prevents those with a criminal record from securing legal forms of employment, many states now have broad discretionary powers either to reduce the likelihood that a woman with a history of a felony conviction can hold public employment or to enforce an automatic lifetime ban.¹⁶

¹⁰ *Women in the Criminal Justice System Briefing Sheets* (Washington DC: The Sentencing Project, May 2007), 2. Whereas the U.S. incarcerated a total of 11,212 women in 1977, that number rose to 96,125 by 2007—an increase of 757%. For further discussion, see Natasha Frost, Judith Greene and Kevin Pranis, *The Punitiveness Report-Hard Hit: The Growth in the Imprisonment of Women, 1977-2004*, Institute on Women in Criminal Justice (New York: Women’s Prison Association, May 2006), 7.

¹¹ For further discussion, see Angela Davis, Foreword, *Imagining Medea: Rhodessa Jones and Theater for Incarcerated Women*, by Rena Fraden (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), xi.

¹² Pew, 18. From 1986 to 1996, even though the rate of female drug use declined, the number of women incarcerated in state facilities for drug offenses increased by 888%, “Women in the Criminal Justice System,” 4. African-American women are over three times more likely to be in prison than white women, and latinas 69% more likely. For further discussion, see Frost et al, 21-26, and Pew, 6.

¹³ Patricia Allard, *Life Sentences: Denying Welfare Benefits To Women Convicted Of Drug Offenses* (Washington DC: The Sentencing Project, 2002), 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁵ Federal Pell Grants were denied to prisoners in 1994 and federal aid was denied to anyone with a history of a drug conviction in 1998 as part of an amendment to the Higher Education Act.

¹⁶ Allard, 17.

These policies highlight how the contemporary prison and welfare systems constitute the right hand and the left hand of the contemporary bureaucratic field.¹⁷ Loïc Wacquant demonstrates how contemporary “workfare” and “prisonfare” have come to represent “two gendered sides of the same population coin.” These conjoined systems manage the racialized poor by effectively locking them out of the fabric of social relations. With women (and their children) representing 90% of welfare recipients and men constituting 93% of prison inmates, the dual pillars of the contemporary penal-welfare nexus serve not only to manage, but also to promote the social insecurity that has accompanied neoliberal restructuring.¹⁸ As they are positioned at the crossroads of both workfare and prisonfare, the Medea performers expose how such punitive policies as welfare reform and the war on drugs utilize the discourse of “security” to rationalize the rupturing of social ties and the promotion of an increasingly insecure society. The mass expansion of the prison system effectively locks out large sections of the population from stabilizing social institutions. Social cohesion depends upon the institutions that invariably break down when cages come to replace networks of support—networks that extend from the informal care work performed by those who share the same households or neighborhoods to the more formal services provided by educational, employment, health care, childcare, and other organizations. This fracturing of communities both effects and is effected by racialized, classed, gendered, and sexualized operations of dehumanization, operations that threaten survival on symbolic and material registers.¹⁹

What is the relationship, Jones asks, between “getting *dusted*,” “getting *busted*,” and “getting *ghosted*”? The poor, black, drug-addicted mother of young children that she embodies in her opening performance is a familiar figure in the public imagination. As we have seen in the case of Arts-in-Corrections, the “culture of dependency” discourse that was popularized by Moynihan in the 1960s (in conjunction with Nixon’s “law and order” platform) and that circulated widely throughout the welfare reform debates of the 1990s was a central component of neoliberal restructuring. With her “Rant from the Jungle,” Jones sheds light on how this discourse has been and continues to be personified by the figure of the unmarried, impoverished, woman of color who (as she is understood to be both pathologically lazy and criminally fecund) “gives her kids to CPS,” draining social resources as a result of her moral failing. Wahneema Lubiano highlights the cultural politics of “welfare queen” ideology when she explains that this public identity:

is finally the synecdoche, the shortest possible shorthand, for the pathology of poor, urban, black culture. Responsible for creating and maintaining a family that can only be perceived as pathological compared to the normative (and thus

¹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market*, Trans. Richard Nice (New York: New Press, 1999), 1-2.

¹⁸ Loïc Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 16.

¹⁹ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 16.

allegedly “healthy”) family structure in the larger society, the welfare mother is the root of greater black pathology.²⁰

Lubiano shows how ideologies like that of the “welfare queen” obscure the workings of power by functioning as “cover stories”—a naturalized series of “narrative constructions, activations, and deployments by the state.”²¹ By masquerading as “common sense,” such ideologies pervade cultural, economic, and political life. Not only do they represent reality, but they function as the building blocks of reality.

From this perspective, Jones’ opening performance may be seen as a warning to the audience. After her introduction, the Medea ensemble will take the stage, and it will be difficult, if not impossible, for the audience—even the progressive, theater-going, social justice-supporting, San Francisco audience—to *see* these women outside the terms of “welfare queen” ideology. Jones demonstrates how, even though the figure of the “welfare queen” captured greater public attention in the 1980s and 1990s than it does today, this public identity continues to haunt the background of the popular imagination. Her performance makes visceral how the “welfare queen,” which may appear to have lived and died in the late twentieth century, continues to circulate, albeit insidiously, in the contemporary moment.

Lubiano marks the “welfare queen’s” persistent power by demonstrating how she is omnipresent in U.S. culture and politics, even and especially when she goes unnamed. Writing in the 1990s, Lubiano notes that whenever such social ills as the “decline of the nation,” “the culture of poverty” or the loss of “family values” are referenced, whenever “urban crime, the public schools, the crack trade [and] teenage pregnancy” are discussed, the figure of “the welfare queen” is either explicitly or implicitly invoked.²² Today, when such topics often take a backseat to news stories and dinner table conversations about “the economic crisis,” “healthcare reform,” and “Obama’s post-race America,” the ghosting operations that continue to pathologize, criminalize, and dehumanize racialized, classed, and sexualized populations at home, as well as abroad, may become even more powerful as they continue to circulate without ever having to be invoked at all. Poor women of color, Jones reminds us, continue to be subjected to the draconian policies and rationalities that were built on the back of the “welfare queen” and her “culture of dependency.”

With her “Rant from the Jungle,” Jones challenges the ideological power of the prison and welfare systems by offering an expanded understanding of incarceration as a ghosting operation that serves both to perpetuate and to legitimize political, economic, and social disenfranchisement. The material stakes of cultural mythologies like that of the “welfare queen,” she demonstrates, are life and death. Even though the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women who perform with the Medea Project tend to be in or recently released from pre-trial detention, and even though they tend to serve sentences of no longer than a couple of years, they, their families, and their communities, must contend with social death sentences that stretch far beyond a limit of just “twenty-five years.”

²⁰ Wahneema Lubiano, “Black Ladies, Welfare Queens and State Minstrels: Ideological War by Narrative Means,” in *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), 335.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 327.

²² *Ibid.*, 333.

The Art of Self-Making, a Preliminary Reading

Following Jones' opening act, the members of the Medea Project take turns occupying center stage as they perform their personal ghost stories. After Dana Washington's tale of being haunted by the spirit of her murdered uncle in a crack hotel, Shameka Knight's memory of being raped by a john, and Darlene Harris' reflection on the impossibility of ending her love affair with addiction, the company emerges from the underworld through a series of poems, dances, and rituals that attempt to construct a livable future. "I am somebody," Taraina Grant declares as she leads the ensemble in enacting the hero's escape from the bush. "Moving these mountains." Dressed in camouflage, she weaves between the members of the chorus who are also clothed in jungle prints and fatigues. "Paying attention to self," Grant calls out, emerging downstage center. "*Prestando mi atención a mi misma*," echoes Greta Purnima who translates each line from within the chorus. There is a moment of stillness before the ensemble members hold their hands up and out to the audience as they call out in unison, "I will make my life myself."

When Grant affirms her ability to make herself anew, she invokes the Medea Project's public promise to "realize and celebrate" incarcerated women's "self-esteem and active personal responsibility."²³ As we have seen in the case of Arts-in-Corrections, the Medea Project's rehabilitative mission resonates with common themes in the community arts field. The company's focus on personal empowerment and individual agency is further aligned with a contemporary approach to feminist performance. Feminist dance scholar Christine Lomas describes this approach when she explains that "community dance does not empower communities; individual empowerment, self-intimacy, interaction with one's authentic self, a sense of fulfillment, a feeling of achievement all contribute to the larger whole."²⁴ This interpretation of feminism, as Jessica Berson notes, tends to twist the axiom "the personal is political" into a reductive notion that further bifurcates the concepts. Before we can attend to the political, this argument goes, we must first focus on the personal, a category that tends to be understood in terms of the psychological.

Even though the Medea Project critiques the political, social, and cultural forces that sentence poor women of color and their communities to social death, the company's focus on "self-esteem" and "personal responsibility" risks muting that very critique by assuring performers, as well as the public audience, that social change must stem first and foremost from internal and individualized transformation. When Taraina Grant—a formerly incarcerated, African-American woman who does not yet hold a high school diploma—promises the audience that she can emerge from the bush of ghosts by making her life herself, she also assures them that the social death she has experienced stems from bad personal choices and that she and she alone is responsible for her future.²⁵ As discussed in the previous chapter, this activist language of "individual empowerment" can operate hand-in-glove with the neoliberal discourse of "personal responsibility" that has been used over the past three decades to rationalize the cancellation of increasing numbers of U.S. citizens. By arguing that personal transformation is the key to political transformation, community-based performance companies like the Medea

²³ Promotional Flyer, 2006.

²⁴ Christine Lomas, "Art and the Community: Breaking the Aesthetic of Empowerment," in *Dance, Power, and Difference: Critical and Feminist Perspectives on Dance Education*, edited by Sherry B. Shapiro (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1998), 155. Quoted in Berson, 81.

²⁵ Taraina Grant did receive her GED the following year and continues to collaborate with the Medea Project.

Project may reinforce the ideologies that have served to rationalize the retrenchment of the welfare state and the mass expansion of the penal state. Just as the contemporary prison is called to conceal social problems, much of the discourse by and about the Medea Project runs the risk of inadvertently disguising those problems as personal obstacles that can be overcome through self-improvement projects.

A Second Reading: Extended Kinship and the Creative Labor of Care

While the content of the Medea Project's work invokes the neoliberal discourses of "self-esteem" and "personal responsibility," the company's community-based form reveals more complexity within Taraina Grant's declaration of self-making. When Grant asserts that she will make her life herself, she speaks in unison with an ensemble of women who stand behind and beside her on the public stage. Those who have participated in the process know that Grant is not speaking her own words. Rather, her affirmations of individual agency consist of fragments of ensemble members' writing that the group has woven together into a poem that Grant took on the responsibility of performing just two weeks prior to opening night when Trina Nicholson, the poem's original performer, suddenly dropped out of the production. Some lines were written by the women standing with Grant, while others were written by women like Nicholson who never made it to the stage.²⁶ In this, as in all other moments in the Medea Project's processes and productions, the language of "self-esteem" and "personal responsibility" cannot be separated from the practice of ensemble and community. Standing with Grant is a company of women who, in sharing the stage, cast the act of self-making as collective and intersubjective.

Months after the production closed, Grant shared with me that the Medea Project had a profound impact on her precisely because the opportunity "to be up there and able to be in front of all those people and interact with all these different personalities" enables you to "build a family outside of your own family."²⁷ Ensemble member Fe Bongolan added to Grant's observation by explaining: "In the way that I have fights with my sisters everyday, yeah, [the Medea Project's] like a family." Laughing, she continued:

It's exactly like a family! It's not a family of choice; it's a family of necessity, and necessity not in a disparaging way, I think necessity in a very deep social and cultural way in that we are on a mission to do something in this life and that we're sort of banded around these women together to do this, so that's how I feel about it. I mean, it's a pain in the ass. I hate going to the first days of rehearsal because they fill me with dread because I know I'm going to be open and splayed and all my private insecurities, prejudices are going to be open to this group of women but also I would trust my life with this group of women because they have covered my life time and again.²⁸

²⁶ In early October, Nicholson learned that she would be released from jail shortly after opening night. Because she did not feel she could commit to attending performances after her release, she opted to drop out of the production.

²⁷ Taraina Grant, interview by author, February 7, 2007.

²⁸ Fe Bongolan, interview by author, January 31, 2008.

When we view the Medea Project in the context of this extended kinship network of and for women of color—a network based not in biology, but rather in social necessity—the company’s approach to ensemble performance comes into focus as an anti-racist, feminist, non-heteronormative practice of care work. Through the sustained labor of “easy intimacy,” ensemble members combat social death by attending to how individual agency is always already dependent on reciprocal relations of responsibility.²⁹

The group’s kinship rituals begin in the first months of each yearlong performance process and also continue in the years between those processes. From January through July, the seven members of the core ensemble met regularly in one another’s homes to discuss the book and to develop ideas for the production. The text served as a point of departure and return for these preliminary discussions, which, over potluck lunches, tended to focus on catching up with one another and sharing the most personal developments in one another’s lives. While Jones and Reynolds began holding workshops in the jail during the month of June, it was not until the beginning of August that the rest of the ensemble members were granted legal permission to enter the facility. During the following three months, the group met in the jail for three-hour sessions three to four days a week and then outside the jail for additional three-hour sessions two days a week. Because formerly incarcerated women may not enter the jail as guests for at least six months after their release, those who wanted to continue participating in the process were required to work with the company in an outside venue. As a result, it was necessary to follow a complex rehearsal schedule in which the entire ensemble would not be together in the same space until just two days before the opening of the production.

In response to these logistical constraints, the Medea Project has developed a rehearsal process and a production aesthetic that remain in constant flux while simultaneously maintaining a commitment to cohesion. In most theatrical processes, the one constant is that there is a set cast of performers who show up to rehearsals and, aside from any kind of grave disaster, show up to the production; there is often a script that the performers memorize; there are roles that they are cast to play and lines for them to learn. On any given day in the Medea Project, the company does not know who will show up to rehearsals: incarcerated cast members drop out of the project or are released or transferred, formerly incarcerated participants struggle with finding employment, relationship issues, and the probability of relapsing, while other outside artists struggle to balance the rehearsal schedule with their day jobs, their professional artistic commitments, their families, and their physical and mental health. As a result, the form must accommodate a constantly revolving cast and a constantly changing script.

In order to facilitate the necessary balance between structure and flexibility, the Medea Project’s process is centered on a series of community rituals that encourage different acts of improvisation with every repetition. At the beginning of each workshop session, for instance, whether inside or outside the jail, the group sits in a circle and talks about how everyone is doing, what stories they have to tell, and what writing they have to share. This can go on for

²⁹ My attention to non-heteronormative kinship practices is inspired not only by my conversations and collaborations with the Medea Project, but also with my engagement with queer theory, and with a queer of color critique, in particular. For further discussion, see Judith Butler, “Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?,” in *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 102-130; and Roderick A. Ferguson, “Something Else to Be: *Sula*, *The Moynihan Report*, and the Negations of Black Lesbian Feminism,” in *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2004), 110-137.

fifteen minutes or it can last the entire rehearsal block. Angela Wilson, a longtime ensemble member and a formerly incarcerated woman, describes this ritual:

We all sit face to face, womb to womb, vagina to vagina... We may do a prayer, and we may do a dance, and may do a lifting ceremony afterwards when it's all said and done... but we're not fixing anything. We're just talking about it, and people are listening, and somehow, it's art.³⁰

After checking in, the ensemble moves. This usually begins and ends with playing games like Red Light Green Light and Freeze Tag. These exercises connect participants both to their own bodies and the bodies of the other members of the group. "My life was altered," Wilson remembers about her first collaboration with the company:

I had been reminded about who I am because there's a lot of those childhood games... that really brought me back into my body. This woman and this woman and this woman around you are embracing you, and you're more than a junkie, you're more than a tossup, you're more than whatever you have become, you're Angela Wilson, you belong somewhere, you belong to people.³¹

Wilson highlights how, through a series of community rituals, the Medea Project works to transform social death into an intimate yet expansive practice of collective belonging. Such repeated acts as sharing food, checking in, and playing children's games constitute an informal care network that fills some of the gaps left in the wake of neoliberal restructuring.

Through its practice of creative kinship, the company strives to build bridges not only between the jail and the stage, but also between the most intimate spaces in participants' lives. For example, when Tanya Coates, a twenty-one year old who had long since run away from her childhood home in Montana, was let out of jail the night before the production opened, she was released onto the streets with no money and no home to return to. She briefly considered reuniting with her girlfriend but was concerned that she would end up getting high and missing the performance. Instead, Coates walked from the jail to the theater and waited by the stage door until the rest of the cast arrived the following evening. Throughout the run of the production, ensemble members opened their homes to Coates so that she would have a place to sleep and collected modest sums of money so that she would be able to eat and pay for some basic necessities. Jones and Reynolds also helped her to connect to some community resources that could assist her in securing job interviews. Stories such as this one are commonplace throughout the Medea Project's performance cycle. From babysitting Shameka Knight's newborn child during Saturday afternoon rehearsals to helping Angela Wilson's teenage son through some disciplinary problems by offering him a role in the production to giving Darlene Harris money to pay off a former drug dealer who was harassing her, participants performed the material as well as the symbolic labor of kinship as they mobilized whatever resources they could to support one another.

³⁰ Angela Wilson, interview by author, February 15, 2008.

³¹ Ibid.

Jones expands on the company's approach to performance as a form of care work when she explains that the Medea Project's activist mission is not grounded in any particular political agenda, but rather in a commitment to what she terms creative survival:

You can be in my dream if I can be in your dream. This is what I know, sister. This is how you make bread, this is how you make community, this is how we can take care of our children, this is how we can live in the world as women. It's very homespun, it's very much mother wit."³²

The ensemble's "homespun" method profoundly destabilizes the "every man for himself" thinking that has rationalized the rollback of the welfare state in the name of independence, freedom, and personal responsibility. Not only does the Medea Project's approach to intimacy unsettle the neoliberal discourse of "personal responsibility," but it also problematizes the homogenizing connotations of the term "community." As Raymond Williams notes, "unlike all other terms of social organization (*state, nation, society, etc.*) [community] seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term."³³ In contrast, the Medea Project exposes the complex power negotiations that any act of community building invariably entails. By refusing to adopt a singular belief system or political agenda and by insisting on remaining open to the tensions of the ensemble process, the company's "easy intimacy" embraces a simultaneous commitment to unease.

As it is characterized as much by dynamic contestation as it is by harmonious collaboration, the Medea Project's process mirrors how intimate relations tend to play out in life. During technical rehearsal, for instance, a film student who had been hired to run the video projector during the performances was so taken aback by what he perceived to be the chaos of the rehearsal space that he interrupted Jones while she was giving notes (as well as the five or so other women who were calling out ideas and responses at the same time). "I've worked in the theater a lot before," he interjected, "and it really goes a lot more smoothly if only one person speaks at a time." While Jones responded with playfulness and humor, she also communicated in no uncertain terms that even though the ensemble's collaborative community-based method may not fit within the confines of conventional theater practice, it was in no way random or uninformed. The company's discordant process, she maintained, was intentional—even artful.

As the director of this project, I don't want anyone to be quiet. We are a bunch of wild women and everyone has a voice, dammit. This is theater for incarcerated women, and there are some wild women here who are not about to be quiet. There ain't nobody so fabulous that you know the whole goddam show.³⁴

Later that day, when we were reviewing notes, Jones laughed remembering the audacity of the technician, the one white male in the space, to suggest that the ensemble cede to his expertise: "I wanted to say, 'How dare you? How dare *you* tell *us* how to behave?'" While she is a strong and

³² Quoted in Fraden, 23-24.

³³ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 76.

³⁴ Personal Field Notes, October 24, 2006.

commanding director, Jones also insists that her voice is no more important than that of anyone else's and she invites all participants to take creative responsibility for the work.

Even though every Medea Project performer complains at some point or another that it is difficult to negotiate the multiple voices and strong personalities in the group, they also insist that the process must be messy—it must remain open to contestation. Felicia Scaggs highlights this dynamic when she explains that despite the inevitable frustrations with this kind of collaborative process, the conflicts that arise are essential to the work: “We are each other’s backbone,” she notes. “We’re there, you know, and we may fuss and fight but as soon as you’re ready to fall over the cliff, I got you. I just called you a bitch and your next step is over the cliff, and I got you. It’s like that.”³⁵ From this perspective, the Medea Project’s intimacy may be understood as an open and fraught process of ethical enmeshment. Through its ensemble form, the company enacts a community-based understanding of agency that lies less in self-reliance and individual empowerment and more in mutual responsibility and precarious relationality. Further attention to the open and fraught spaces beside and between each performer may expand our sight lines, yielding yet a third reading of Taraina Grant’s affirmations of self-making.

Reading Three: Staging the Police/Policing the Stage

“I am somebody,” Grant declares from within an ensemble of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women as well as professional actresses, dancers, activists, and teachers. “Where we at, y’all? Where we at?” Jones calls out into a microphone as she directs the cast from her seat in the front row of the audience. Because all ensemble members are costumed in camouflage, it is difficult for spectators to decipher which of the performers are prisoners and which are professionals, which will return to jail after the production, and which will return home. While the opportunity to watch “real criminals” on stage certainly titillates the public, helping to draw sold-out houses to every production, this blurring of boundaries between one performer and another challenges the audience to question what constitutes a “criminal,” what constitutes an upstanding “citizen,” and why. On either side of the stage, lights illuminate the sheriff’s deputies who stand guard throughout the course of the production. Even though their images are rarely saved in the photographs or video documentation of the work, these officers are among the most prominent actors in the Medea Project’s productions. Throughout the show, audiences split their attention between the performers onstage and the police, lit half in shadow, who stand guard on either side. “The posting of sheriff’s deputies by the exits is not a theatrical device,” writes *San Francisco Chronicle* critic Robert Hurwitt, “It’s protocol.”³⁶ Rhodessa Jones “does keep it real,” adds Nathaniel Eaton of *SF Weekly*, and “the police officers guarding the offstage exits prove it.”³⁷ According to Hurwitt, the guards are not posted at the edges of the stage for theatrical effect. Yet, as Eaton notes, their presence shows how the Medea Project stages the “real”; they are, in essence, a defining feature of the company’s aesthetic.

Even though Jones and the ensemble members have little control over where and how the police are positioned throughout the production, the company makes use of the officers’ presence

³⁵ Felicia Scaggs, interview by author, February 7, 2007.

³⁶ Robert Hurwitt, “Inmates, Artists Navigate a Difficult ‘Jungle,’” *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 31, 2006.

³⁷ Nathaniel Eaton, “My Life in the Concrete Jungle: A cast of women, many from San Francisco Jail No. 8, keeps it real.” *SF Weekly*, November 1, 2006 <<http://www.sfweekly.com/2006-11-01/culture/my-life-in-the-concrete-jungle/>> (accessed Aug 15, 2009).

to remind performers and audience members of exactly “where we are at,” grounding the performance in its larger social, political, and cultural context. When Grant declares that she will make her life herself, she does so not only while sharing the stage with a group of fellow performers, but also while standing before the gaze of armed officers of the law. In addition, Grant, the ensemble, and the deputies who stand over them are witnessed by an audience of approximately three hundred regular theatergoers, friends and family members, residents at halfway houses and drug treatment facilities, and representatives from the criminal justice system. In delivering her affirmations from within an ensemble of fellow performers and before a diverse public audience, Grant asserts her power of “self-making” while simultaneously exposing her own enmeshment in what Shannon Jackson describes as “a collective, power-ridden, and often disavowed interactive structure.”³⁸ From this perspective, the intimacy (or the building of bridges) for which the group strives is evidenced not only by its interpersonal, but also by its inter-institutional relations.

In order to survive, the Medea Project must forge close ties with the jail, rehab centers, halfway houses, and other state supported institutions. Some of the ensemble’s main supporters include the San Francisco Sheriff’s Department (which provides rehearsal space, staffing, transportation to and from the jail, and security), the Lorraine Hansberry Theater (which offers production space and handles the box office and group sales), the African American Cultural Complex (which, through city funds, provides office, rehearsal, and performance space), and the San Francisco Arts Commission (which regularly awards grants for individual projects). The company’s partnerships with this diverse array of social institutions shed new light on the question Jones’ student posed to her back in 1989: “Are you the police?” Even though Jones’ initial response drew a firm distinction between the role of an artist and that of a correctional officer, the student’s question also challenged Jones to examine her position in relation to the power structures with which she intersects.

At every stage in the process, the company’s approach to its ensemble method and to the aesthetics of its productions remains grounded in the constraints posed by the people and the institutions with which it partners. For example, when I asked Jones how and why she began teaching ensemble-based and story theater techniques in jail, I expected her to respond by talking about her background in Viola Spolin’s theater games, modern dance collectives, and performance art collaborations. Instead, she gave me a simple answer: the sheriff’s department required it. When the Medea Project was first granted permission to perform beyond the confines of the jail, they were required to stage their productions so that incarcerated participants would remain in public view at all times. For security purposes, the cast had to remain onstage together throughout the performance. It was in response to this mandate that the group developed its ensemble-based structure and its practice of sharing the stage. The “theatrical devices” that result from these “real-world” constraints prevent performers and the public from romanticizing the community-based process. At the same time, they also testify to the power of performance to exceed, and perhaps even to transform, the conditions of its constraint. Through the ensemble form, the Medea project negotiates both the limits of disciplinary surveillance and the possibilities of collectivized libratory praxis.

³⁸ Shannon Jackson, “Touchable Stories and the Performance of Infrastructural Memory,” in *Remembering: Oral History Performance*, ed. Della Pollock (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 55.

While the Medea Project certainly resists the forces that have cast its participants in society's criminal role, the company also calls performers and spectators to think critically about their complicity with those very forces. For instance, four days before the production opened, Jones announced to the ensemble of professional artists and formerly incarcerated women who were gathered on the Lorraine Hansberry stage that the sheriff's van would soon be arriving with the ensemble's incarcerated performers. She explained that for the following weeks, deputies would escort these cast members from the jail to the theater. The women would be transported to and from the jail in shackles; before each rehearsal and performance the deputies would then sweep the theater for guns and drugs; and during each event, one deputy would be assigned to guard each of the theater's exits. This, Jones told the group, was for the inmates' protection as much as for the public's protection, and it was "very important we make a special effort to show respect for the police and thank them for supporting our work."

Here, guest artist and radical spoken word poet Ise Lyfe interjected, "But Rhodessa, Fuck the police."

"I know," Jones responded, saying more with her eyes than with her words. "I'm the first one to say it, but I've put myself in this position where I intersect with the police. And we don't get to the women if we don't respect the police. OK?"³⁹

The following week, in a post-show discussion, Ise Lyfe spoke to the audience about this, his first experience performing with the company. Because the incarcerated performers were not granted permission to stay for this discussion, the deputies were in the process of escorting them off the stage as he spoke:

We grow up watching people get locked up and not come home. And we're just as much affected as those people that are locked up. And even being in this piece, we go home and we watch, and half the cast that makes the show goes home in orange. That van is out there. They climb in that van and they leave, in shackles. And we hear it. When I'm washing glitter off my face, I hear chains... That's what we hear right now. That's what you're hearing. They're shackling up people's bodies and putting them in a cage... And then, they come back here and they smile for you. And it's important that we see that.⁴⁰

Throughout the process and the final production, the Medea Project invites performers and spectators to grapple with what it means to see that. The presence of armed guards throughout the theater and the sounds of chains in the background call performers and audience members to examine how they each intersect with the police. By accommodating both a "fuck you" and a "thank you" to the state, the Medea Project simultaneously stages its resistance to and its complicity with the bureaucratic field.

In the process, the Medea women invite their diverse audiences to take responsibility for their shared act of public witnessing. "Understand me," the ensemble members tell the audience in a performance ritual adapted from a Stevie Smith poem.⁴¹ They move together toward the lip

³⁹ Personal Field notes, Rehearsal, October 22, 2006.

⁴⁰ Post-performance Discussion, October 29, 2006.

⁴¹ Stevie Smith, "Not Waving but Drowning," *Collected Poems* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, reprint edition, 1983), 301.

of the stage as they continue: “Back then, I wasn’t waving. I was drowning. And you saw me. You were the only one who saw me. What’s up with that?” Through this deceptively simple performance piece, the ensemble unsettles its own rhetoric of “personal responsibility” by challenging the public to confront the obligations that its act of spectatorship entails. In so doing, they cast the company’s “rehabilitative” promise in terms of a shared responsibility between self and other, subject and social world.

The Kicking Dance: Refiguring Responsibility through the Performance of Community

With the kicking dance, the Medea Project stages its complex relationship with its public audience as well as its careful negotiations with power. The ritual, which the ensemble performs in every show, tends to follow the sharing of a particularly difficult memory where the speaker recounts being victimized. Jones created the dance during rehearsals for the company’s first production after a woman in the group told a story about being beaten by her stepfather. When, as a teenage girl, she had retaliated by hitting him over the head with a frying pan, her mother sent her away to juvenile hall. Because this woman was sentenced to prison before the production opened, a fellow performer took her line: “I wanted to fight back.” The kicking dance, Jones recalls, grew from that.⁴² Ensemble member Gina Dawson explains that the dance represents “the time when uncle touched them and nobody did anything; it’s the pimp that pushed them out there; it’s the boyfriend that disappointed them; it’s all of that that you can channel right into it.”⁴³

In *My Life in the Concrete Jungle*, the ensemble performed the kicking dance in response to Nicole Stewart’s “The Ghost Inside Me”:

This one ghost has been haunting me for a while—my ex-boyfriend. I remember when he just beat me and beat me until I blacked out. How long was I asleep? Did I die? Who woke me up? Before I had time to think about it, he dragged me into the car and punched me in my side and head until I gave in... “Bitch, I’d kill you before I let you leave me...”

In her story, not only does Stewart’s boyfriend figure as a ghost who haunts her, but also her relationship with him has ghosted her, both literally and figuratively pushing her toward an impossible existence. “How did this ghost get inside me?” she asks at the end of the piece. “How do I get it out?” One week before the show went into technical rehearsal, Stewart was transferred to another facility and was denied permission to perform in the production. Instead, Gina Dawson, Angela Wilson, and Tamika Chenier took over the responsibility of performing her story.

At the end of the story, Dawson calls out one of Stewart’s lingering questions: “How long was I asleep?” as the band cues the rest of the ensemble to get into formation at the back of the stage. “Did I die?” Chenier asks. “Who woke me up?” shouts Wilson as she steps into a pair of four-inch heels. As the rest of the ensemble joins the three storytellers along the upstage wall, Stewart’s personal memory is transformed into a collective response to shared oppression. Each

⁴² Fraden, 96.

⁴³ Gina Dawson, interview by author, February 1, 2008.

of the women has a pair of high-heeled shoes either on her feet or wielded like a weapon in her hands. “We ain’t having it,” Jones commands from the front row of the audience, giving voice to the women who stand silently at attention. “You put a gun to my head, motherfucker? You better wish you killed me.” “Fast!” shouts Dawson as the women rush the lip of the stage. With the audience positioned as their imagined assailants, the women fight for their lives. “Fuck him up,” Jones calls out. “There’s a war on women in the world.” The women retreat slowly, never taking their eyes off the audience. “Slow!” shouts Dawson as the ensemble members take their time moving menacingly back downstage. Then, all at once, they launch their attack again. “Fuck him up,” Jones calls out to the beat of the music. “Take him out. You might kill me, but I’m gonna take one of your eyeballs with me.”

Throughout the dance, a video is projected both onto an upstage screen and across the bodies of the women who stand in the path of the light. An image of the earth appears, quickly followed by a satellite photograph of a hurricane. There is a picture of two men in a boat in the middle of a storm—a photograph of the ensemble in the jail rehearsing their group poem—a soldier manning a helicopter-mounted machine gun—the women in jail performing the gesture for Grant’s line, “I am somebody”—an Iraqi family being forced by soldiers from their home—the women in jail holding their hands up and out for the affirmation, “I will make my life myself.” The company compiled the footage for the kicking dance in an effort to stage a storm that would represent not only the devastation that first carries the girl into the bush of ghosts, but also the seemingly insurmountable forces that would need to be overcome in order for her to escape. On the most literal level, the kicking dance stages women defending themselves against the abuse of an individual such as a lover, father, or pimp, but by aiming their attack in the direction of the video, the audience, and the deputies who stand over them, performers also defend themselves against the web of forces that have led them to jail. By interspersing images of Taraina Grant’s affirmations of self-making with those from hurricane Katrina and the Iraq war, the Medea Project illuminates how performers’ individual and collective gestures both shape and are shaped by a wide-reaching, interlocking global system. In so doing, the company illuminates not only how “the personal is political,” but also how the personal and the political are mutually constitutive.

Throughout the performance, the theater is positioned as a microcosm of the prison. In combating both the individuals and the networks of power that confine them, ensemble members also combat the fourth wall of the stage. Yet, they do not break it down. After having performed their traumatic stories for the consumption of a paying audience, some of the performers will be led back to jail in shackles, others will return to halfway houses, and others still will return to the streets. Audience members, on the other hand, will leave the theater and, likely, return home. While the performance entertains the carnivalesque romance of a world turned upside down, its utopian impulse remains counter-balanced by the sheriff’s deputies positioned at every possible exit. The kicking dance is easily recognizable as an empowering act of both individual and collective resistance. What may initially seem disempowering—that the women do not escape—sheds light on perhaps a deeper and more nuanced form of power. By staging its intersection with the police, the Medea Project does more than make incarcerated women visible or enable each individual to make her life anew. Instead, the company exposes the systems of power that both produce and police those very lives. In the process, the Medea Project calls performers and audience members to see and to act upon the intersecting forces that the prison industrial

complex aims to disappear. When women who have been cast in the role of the “welfare queen” stand on the public stage, when “state-made” subjects claim access to the fictional act of “self-making,” they enact the impossibility of any subject making her life herself. The Medea Project thus grapples with life and death not only on symbolic, but also on material registers. With a population of women who experience life as in some way unlivable and their subjectivity as in some way impossible, the company approaches community-based performance as a vehicle for enacting an alternate reality. What is a *real* life and what is a *ghost* life, performers ask throughout the process and final production. What is the relationship between my story and your story? And where does responsibility lie?

Ultimately, for the Medea Project, translating personal experience into art provides a means of counteracting what Jones describes as “the impoverishment of the imagination.”⁴⁴ The performance process, ensemble members explain, offers both participants and audience members a forum for collective dreaming. Dreaming in this context is not the quiet and internal process that happens during sleep; rather, it is an active, embodied, and relational practice in which the stage, the theater, and the city that holds them become a landscape through which a radical imagination is cultivated in the spaces between performers and public.⁴⁵ The Medea Project’s approach to dreaming resonates with Judith Butler’s understanding of fantasy:

Fantasy is part of the articulation of the possible. It moves us beyond what is merely actual and present into a realm of possibility, the not yet actualized or the not actualizable. The struggle to survive is not really separable from the cultural life of fantasy, and the foreclosure of fantasy...is one strategy for providing for the social death of persons...Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings elsewhere home.⁴⁶

For the Medea Project as for Butler, dreaming is a matter of life and death. How can we imagine life differently, the Medea Project asks and answers in multiple ways throughout the process and the final production. How can we embody that vision? How can we manifest it in reality?

Coda: The Limits of Intimacy

In a recent provocation in *TDR: The Drama Review*, Laura Edmondson cautions that theater and performance scholars may be too deeply attached to the pervasive promise of transformation. No matter how much we attend to “formidable structures of domination,” Edmondson notes, we maintain a persistent optimism about the power of performance to effect both individual and social change. While our hopefulness is well intentioned, Edmondson warns that it may also serve as a “theoretical salve for our unease about an unjust and genocidal planet where our economic privilege and material comfort depend upon a harsh world order that

⁴⁴ Rhodessa Jones, interview by author, November 7, 2007. Jones’ concept resonates with Angela Davis’s call to “decolonize the imagination.” For further discussion, see Angela Davis, Foreword, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Chela Sandoval (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), xiii.

⁴⁵ The Medea Project’s focus on developing a radical imagination resonates with Robin Kelley’s work on freedom dreams: Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

⁴⁶ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 29.

consigns millions of human beings to squalor and despair.”⁴⁷ In response to this tendency within the field, she invites us to counterbalance our practice of “imagin[ing] alternatives with a vengeance” with increased attention to performance’s “ambiguities” and “dangers,” as well as its “gifts.”⁴⁸ Edmondson’s provocation reminds me that I was first drawn to studying and collaborating with the Medea Project because I was inspired by the vengeance with which the company imagines alternatives as well as its persistent optimism that performance can change the world no matter what obstacles stand in its way. After having worked intimately with the ensemble over the past several years, I remain deeply moved by the transformative power of the process. I also come away viscerally aware of the “formidable structures of domination” with which the ensemble contends, structures that are derived not only from the prison and welfare systems, but from the nonprofit art system, as well.⁴⁹

As we have seen, the Medea Project’s “easy intimacy” is enabled by the company’s liminal status inside and outside the state bureaucracy, yet it is this very interstitial positioning that makes the work so precarious. While the Medea Project does not risk the threat of over-institutionalization that Arts-in-Corrections faced, the company remains constrained by its easy, intimate, and informal approach. When women leave the project in the middle of the process or when the group disbands after the final show, Jones and the other members of the core ensemble invite participants to keep in touch with one another; they are specifically encouraged to call or stop by the office whenever they would like. Jones and other ensemble members do what they can to help participants find employment or enroll in school, and they invite capable participants to take part in any number of smaller performances that may take place throughout the year. However, after the final performance, the Medea Project returns to the jail only once for a wrap up session. Jones then pursues her solo performance projects and her other teaching and directing work, while the other participants move on to new artistic projects, focus on their day jobs, or work to find a day job. While she notes that there are advantages to being enmeshed with the prison system but not fully institutionalized within that system, Jones also laments that the Medea Project has not yet been able to build the kind of infrastructure that would lead to sustainable and continuous work. Throughout the rehearsal process women in the jail tend to ask how they may continue to participate in the ensemble after the final performance. “We don’t know,” outside artists respond. “We just have to wait and see.” In the one session we held after the closing of *My Life in the Concrete Jungle*, several incarcerated cast members asked if the process might continue or start up again sometime soon. Jones responded that she could not make any promises: “We’re renegades,” she explained: “We’re outlaws in a lot of ways.”⁵⁰

About a year after the closing of *My Life in the Concrete Jungle*, ensemble member Gina Dawson hosted a dinner party for all Medea Project participants. Because I was unable to attend the event (as I, too, had committed to new artistic and scholarly projects), Jones sent me an email to fill me in on what I had missed. After listing the updates of all who had been there, she

⁴⁷ Laura Edmondson, “TDR Comment: Of Sugarcoating and Hope,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 51:2 (Summer 2007), 7.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 7 and 9.

⁴⁹ For an incisive critique of the limitations of doing social justice work within the nonprofit sector, see Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, ed, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007).

⁵⁰ Personal Field Notes, Final Session, November 8, 2006.

mentioned that many of the professional performers had either been on vacation or engaged in artistic projects out of town. She concluded by noting that each of the incarcerated women who had performed in the production had fallen out of contact with the group. “Tanya is haunting the streets out in front of [the jail at] 850 Bryant. Sean says she sees her often there. Mele surfaced for a minute then disappeared cell phone is not working. No Dana. No Leyah, no Taraina, no Darlene... may the good spirits watch over our asses!”⁵¹

Because contemporary arts funding tends to be single-project focused, companies like the Medea Project struggle to sustain their long term, community-based processes. The performance of *My Life in the Concrete Jungle*, for instance, was largely funded by the Creative Work Fund (CWF), an organization that provides grants to San Francisco Bay Area artists to create original, socially engaged work.⁵² By limiting its support to new and innovative projects, CWF mirrors a larger pattern in arts funding that emphasizes novelty over sustainability. In order to survive, the Medea Project, a company dedicated to community rituals and the forging of lasting social ties, must find ways to re-define, re-package, and re-market itself each year. Jones succeeded in earning a CWF grant for *My Life in the Concrete Jungle* because she billed the production as the first in which the Medea women would partner with male guest artists.⁵³ There is no telling how or if the company might secure funding for a future project. Over the past several years, Jones and Reynolds have focused instead on taking their workshops overseas (to prisons and jails in such countries as South Africa, Italy, and Trinidad) where they have found more financial support, and they are currently keeping their work new by partnering with a San Francisco health center to collaborate with HIV positive women.⁵⁴

The cultural mandates for innovation over continuity fundamentally counteract the Medea Project’s commitment to intimacy. As Gina Dawson explains, the Medea Project’s ethos lies in participants’ lifelong commitment to one another and to their shared creative process. “There’s love there,” she explains:

Real intimacy is like, yeah, we can scream, we can be at our worst, but there is no option except working it out, screaming it out, fighting it out, because we’re not going to end this relationship. We’re not going to end this relationship so we’re just going to have to scream and fight, act like kids, do whatever it takes because we’re not going anywhere. And that’s kind of the grain of Medea. We’re going to do whatever it takes to get through this but we’re not going anywhere. We’re not ending this. This is a relationship that’s going to continue. So, what do we have to do to get from point A to point Z? We have to laugh, pray, write, scream, fight, move, dance, jump, meditate, dream, live.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Rhodessa Jones, email to the author, August 26, 2007.

⁵² For further discussion see Creative Work Fund <<http://creativeworkfund.org>> (accessed August 12, 2009).

⁵³ “In a departure from previous projects,” CWF explains, “Participants will include male actors, musicians, spoken word artists and singers and professional dancers. Jones believes that creating the piece outside of just a women’s forum and approaching the theatrical process like “the real world” can be extremely valuable. Working in a supportive atmosphere with men can be a positive step in the women’s rehabilitation.” <http://www.creativeworkfund.org/modern/bios/rhodessa_jones_2005.html>.

⁵⁴ This collaboration culminated in their performance of *Dancing With the Clown of Love* at the African American Cultural Complex in March 2010.

⁵⁵ Gina Dawson, interview by author, February 1, 2008.

When Dawson and other artists must respond to questions about the future of the company with indeterminate answers like “We don’t know,” and “We’ll just have to wait and see,” they reveal how such intimate acts as laughing, praying, writing, screaming, fighting, moving, dancing, jumping, meditating, dreaming, and living are dependent on infrastructures of support that, despite the company’s crucial interventions, remain woefully insufficient at best.

Chapter 5

Toward an Abolitionist Aesthetic: The Prison Project at Intersection for the Arts

The many structures that make carceral geographies disappear (which is to say, become ordinary) depend, for their productive capacity, on the infrastructure of feeling. To affect what lies beneath these structures, wherever it might be in space and time, requires radical revision. By turning what becomes ordinary towards the extraordinary, our expressive (and explanatory) figurative works cause what disappears to be visible, palpable, present here and now.

—Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Prison/Culture*, 2009

In the small gallery on the second floor of San Francisco's Intersection for the Arts, Mabel Negrete delivers a public performance in which she outlines the dimensions of her brother's "Secure Housing Unit" on the floor.¹ In the following weeks, visitors move through the traces of her brother's cell as they view a collection of visual art works that have been created by people living on the inside and outside of prison walls. Downstairs in Intersection's black box theater, saxophonist Howard Wiley plays an original jazz composition inspired by the musical traditions of prisoners and Charles Carbone, director of California Prison Focus, speaks about his organization's efforts to combat the prison's pervasive human rights abuses; Wiley and Carbone's presentations are part of a public event in which artists and social justice activists share work in process and brainstorm possibilities for future collaborations. In the lobby, audiences are invited to take a copy of *Golden Rules*, a zine created by a team of young artists and activists that maps the prison industrial complex through graphic representations of statistical research. Throughout the city and surrounding area, a group of people who have been impacted by the prison system go about their daily lives dressed in orange prison jumpsuits, thereby disrupting perceived boundaries between the inside and the outside, the prison and the public sphere. Across town, Sandow Birk's paintings of California prisons are displayed as part of an exhibition at San Francisco State University. From a distance the images mirror the idyllic nineteenth century paintings of the Western frontier; up close they expose how the expanding prison system blankets the contemporary California landscape.²

These works represent only a few of the artistic experiments brought together by the Prison Project, a yearlong exploration of the California prison system. The project resulted from partnerships between Intersection for the Arts—a nonprofit neighborhood arts organization—and a diverse group of individuals and organizations working at the crossroads of art and activism. From January 2007 through March 2008, artists working in music, theater, dance, and the visual

¹ Secure Housing Units or SHUs are part of the architecture of the new Supermax prisons, a model of incarceration established at California's Pelican Bay State Prison in 1989 that has spread throughout the world over the past twenty years. Prisoners in SHUs are held in solitary confinement for years on end, locked into tiny cells for twenty-three hours each day. As I noted in chapter one, it has been argued that this practice of incarceration constitutes a form of torture. See the American Friends Service Committee for further discussion <<http://afsc.org/resource/solitary-confinement-facts>> (accessed June 8, 2010). For an archive of Negrete's performance that includes more information on the SHU, see <<http://mabelnegrete.com/wb/current-series/prison-culture/you-and-me/>> and <<http://thecounternarrativesociety.org/home/prison-culture/you-and-me/>>.

² For more on Sandow Birk's paintings, see Sandow Birk, *Incarcerated: Visions of California in the 21st Century* (San Francisco: Last Gasp Books, 2001).

arts partnered with social justice activists, practitioners and scholars of criminal justice, and members of the general public to illuminate and make tangible the state's elusive carceral geographies. In so doing, they worked to transform what Ruth Wilson Gilmore (in her preface to a catalogue of the Prison Project) refers to as *the infrastructure of feeling*—the popular sentiments, values, and belief systems—that not only derive from, but also undergird the expanding prison industrial complex.³ By bringing together an ever-widening network of participants through diverse forms of public conversation and collaboration, the Prison Project aimed to intervene in the penal system on levels that were simultaneously perceptual and material, ideological and infrastructural. In the process, the Prison Project helped to cultivate an *abolitionist aesthetic*, an arts practice committed to radically transforming the carceral landscape by radically transforming the public imagination.

This chapter considers the limitations and the opportunities that arose when *abolition*, a concept generally associated with social and political activism, met the *aesthetic* realm, a sphere of practice generally associated with sensuous (and perhaps also sensual) forms of perception and reception. Prison abolitionism is a simultaneously utopian and pragmatic project that works to envision a future in which the prison industrial complex could become obsolete and that takes practical action in the present to further that vision.⁴ Because an abolitionist perspective highlights how the prison is fundamentally enmeshed in larger cultural, social, and political structures, the movement works in partnership with a wide range of global struggles against racism, (hetero)sexism, poverty, and social injustice. What new social institutions, abolitionists ask, would need to be established in order to build a world without prisons? How might we begin to imagine the possibility of this seemingly impossible goal? While not all of the participants in the Prison Project aligned themselves with an abolitionist agenda, the project as a whole contributed to what Erica Meiners terms a “horizon of abolition”; across a broad spectrum of intersecting aesthetic, social, and political practices, the Prison Project called into question not only the laws, policies, programs, and fiscal systems buttressing the prison system, but also the public feelings which enable that system to masquerade as an inevitable component of modern society.⁵

As Prison Project participants engaged the infrastructure of feeling underlying the prison industrial complex, they also bumped up against the infrastructures of feeling upholding

³ Sharon E. Bliss, Kevin B. Chen, Steve Dickison, Mark Dean Johnson, Rebeka Rodriguez, ed. *Prison/Culture* (San Francisco: City Light Foundation, 2009). Gilmore's concept of “infrastructures of feeling” draws from Raymond Williams' “structures of feeling.” Whereas Williams emphasizes the common values and beliefs of a particular generation, Gilmore attends to how those values and beliefs are sedimented in material structures. For further discussion, see Trevor Paglen, “Experimental Geography: From Cultural Production to the Production of Space,” *The Brooklyn Rail: Critical Perspectives on Arts, Politics, and Culture*, March 2009 <<http://www.brooklynrail.org/2009/03/express/experimental-geography-from-cultural-production-to-the-production-of-space>> (accessed June 5, 2010).

⁴ For further discussion, see Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003) and *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005); The CR10 Publication Collective, *Abolition Now!: Ten Years of Strategy and Struggle Against the Prison Industrial Complex* (Oakland, CA: Critical Resistance, 2008); and *Instead of Prisons: A Handbook for Abolitionists* (Oakland, CA: Critical Resistance, 2005). See also the website for Critical Resistance <<http://www.criticalresistance.org/>>.

⁵ Erica R. Meiners, *Right to Be Hostile: Schools, Prisons, and the Making of Public Enemies* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 165-186.

contemporary conventions of art-making and social justice organizing. In many ways, the Prison Project's relative distance from criminal justice bureaucracies offered partnering artists and activists greater freedom of movement than groups like the Medea Project or Arts-in-Corrections which were situated more directly within the system. The Prison Project's relative detachment from the prison, for instance, enabled participants to focus less on the correctional discourse (however nuanced) of "rehabilitation" and more on an expansive mission of public activation. As the project developed, however, participants came to grapple with their own enmeshment within multiple systems of power, systems that have both shaped and been shaped by the neoliberal regimes of the expanding prison industrial complex. How and to what effect did Prison Project participants maneuver within and among these intersecting infrastructures of feeling, infrastructures that not only constrained, but also enabled their work?

Throughout the duration of the Prison Project, I partnered with Intersection for the Arts as a community advisor, research consultant, and ethnographer. Unlike the Medea Project, which focused on forming intimate attachments among a small group of women, the Prison Project followed a sweeping model of aesthetic, social, and political engagement. Artists and administrators illustrated this approach through the metaphor of a train that covers wide expanses at high speed. Whereas my research methods with the Medea Project reflected the ensemble's emphasis on intimacy, my methods with the Prison Project mirrored its broad and at times breathless approach. This chapter builds from my experiences working in the Intersection office, interviewing contributing administrators, artists, activists, and spectators, and serving as audience for and participant in numerous productions, exhibitions, and community workshops. It traverses the Prison Project's expansive terrain while stopping to linger in places where the obstacles and opportunities of cultivating an abolitionist aesthetic are thrown into high relief. I begin by considering how the Prison Project's Open Process series, in conjunction with the Erika Shuch Performance (ESP) Project's production of *51802*, illuminated the competing anxieties and expectations that were raised by both the theme of the prison and the structure of the Prison Project. An analysis of Sharon Daniel's exhibition of *Public Secrets* enables me to reframe and reorient these debates through the conceptual framework of penal-welfare performance. By unsettling the boundaries between the prison and the public sphere, Daniel's work brings into focus how the Prison Project fostered a collaborative performance process that, while invariably limited, reached across and perpetually toward an abolitionist horizon.

At the Intersection of Art-Making and Social Justice Organizing

In February 2007, Intersection for the Arts launched the Prison Project with an Open Process event, a public gathering in which resident artists and staff members came together with local activists and community participants to begin a dialogue about the year ahead. Throughout the evening, numerous attendees—including but not limited to activists, social workers, legal advocates, and formerly incarcerated people—suggested that the Prison Project focus on solving prison labor issues, healthcare problems, the absence of educational opportunities, the dearth of re-entry programs, sex and gender discrimination, systemic racism, and poverty, more generally. Intersection's Executive Director Deborah Cullinan responded by asserting that the Prison Project must primarily offer aesthetic forms of social engagement. "We are artists," she repeated

throughout the evening. “And that is the kind of contribution we can make.”⁶ Cullinan’s claim recalls the story with which this dissertation began. “I’m an artist,” Rhodessa Jones replied when her student asked that she define her relationship to the police and by extension to the criminal justice system. Like Jones, Cullinan responded to questions about the Prison Project’s relationship to the penal system and the project’s corresponding responsibility to those impacted by that system by insisting that the artist could make a distinct kind of contribution. In the context of both Jones and Cullinan’s responses, however, the character of this contribution remained ambiguous. Throughout the course of that first evening and, indeed, throughout the year, the theme of the prison and the corresponding structure of the Prison Project raised questions about the artist’s responsibility to society and, in turn, about society’s responsibility to the artist—questions that remained open to ongoing discussion and debate.

Intersection for the Arts is an organization dedicated to exploring the relationship between aesthetic, social, and political practice. The nonprofit was founded in the early 1960s when a group of progressive churches and anti-war activists sought to create a gathering place where, as co-founder Ted McIlvenna remembers, “real social issues intersected with the arts.”⁷ From offering service opportunities to conscientious objectors to the Vietnam War, to hosting poetry readings by Allen Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, to producing films with urban youth about their experiences with local police, Intersection strove both to establish a safe space for artistic experimentation beyond the confines of the mainstream art world and also to provide opportunities for creative forms of social engagement. Over the past five decades, Intersection has worked to foster an environment of mutual exchange with its surrounding communities and also to provide the necessary infrastructure to support artists in the creation of original work. The organization currently serves as a kind of established anti-establishment institution in San Francisco’s arts scene. This small two-story storefront in the city’s Mission District is best described as an activated space: with a full time staff of seven, and on an operating budget of around \$700,000, the mid-sized nonprofit hosts more than three-hundred productions, exhibitions, and workshops each year. The building provides a home to over twenty resident artists in theater, literature, dance, jazz, performance art, spoken word, beat boxing, and more, most of whom have been in residency for years and have been invited to stay on for years to come. In addition, through its Fiscal Sponsorship and Artist Incubation programs, Intersection lends its resources—in the form of education, grant writing, networking, and fundraising—to over one hundred individual artists and arts collectives each year.

Intersection’s commitment to providing ongoing support to individual artists has become increasingly rare, and perhaps also increasingly urgent amidst the neoliberalization of culture. As we have seen with Arts-in-Corrections, the culture wars cast the artist as a social deviant who, akin to the “welfare queen,” self-indulgently drains social resources. In response to these shifting public feelings, funding bodies such as the National Endowment for the Arts have eliminated all support for individual artists. These shifting policies, in turn, have not only shaped public

⁶ Open Process, *The Prison Project*, Intersection for the Arts, February 1, 2007.

⁷ Jesse Hamlin, “Life Met Art Here, Part one: 1965-75” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 13, 2005 <<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2005/06/13/DDGQ4D6RM51.DTL>> (accessed September 28, 2009).

feelings, but also have structured the kinds of art that are and that can be produced.⁸ The case of the Medea Project further highlights how contemporary patterns in U.S. arts funding focus less on supporting artists and more on providing funds for single projects of limited duration, thereby discouraging and even preventing many artists from engaging in long-term and sustainable work. Hence, even though Intersection’s resident and partnering artists tend to directly engage with social issues (recent projects have addressed gay marriage, the war on terror, domestic violence, and homelessness), the organization insists that, within the contemporary cultural climate, supporting the life and work of individual artists constitutes a form of social activism no matter what the content or the form of those artists’ creations happens to be. In fact, within an environment in which (as we saw in chapter 3) funding bodies increasingly require artists to prove their projected social impact, a phenomenon that Arlene Goldbard aptly terms “the metrics syndrome,” Intersection for the Arts remains committed to nurturing the artistic process by both enabling and encouraging artists to create work on any topic and in any form, no matter how socially “useless” their creations may seem.⁹

In addition to supporting emerging artists in the creation of original work, Intersection seeks to fulfill its mission by establishing an infrastructure that democratizes the production and reception of art. To this end, the organization welcomes audience members on a sliding scale or pay-what-you-can basis and opens all of its exhibits to the public free of charge. Artists and staff also coordinate with community partners like the Walden House drug treatment facility and the Delancey Street residential care foundation to bring in diverse audiences and also to extend their processes of art-making throughout the city; they regularly host post-performance discussions and sponsor community-based events and workshops before and during their productions and exhibits; their Open Process Series offers quarterly programs where artists and community members share works-in-progress; and their Hybrid Project provides a forum for a wide array of local artists and young people to collaborate on the creation of artistic experiments. While other arts organizations in the city, such as the American Conservatory Theater, ODC, or the de Young Museum, also have community-based programs—which tend to fall under such categories as “education,” “audience development,” or “outreach”—those programs tend to be kept separate and distinct from the art that the organizations sponsor. In contrast, Intersection strives to thoroughly integrate its aesthetic and social forms of engagement.

Within the larger context of the San Francisco art world, Intersection’s hybridized mission requires that administrators and artists negotiate competing infrastructures of feeling about the relationship between aesthetics and politics, culture work and social work. As Deborah Cullinan notes, the nonprofit struggles to realize its intersectional mission in part because it lacks a vocabulary that can sufficiently communicate that mission to its diverse practitioners,

⁸ Honor Ford-Smith provides a strong critique of how funding structures shape the work that arts organizations produce. While she focuses on transnational funding, her analysis helps to expand upon the above discussion in key ways. “Ring Ding in a Tight Corner: Sistren, Collective Democracy, and the Organization of Cultural Production,” in *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, ed. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (New York: Routledge, 1997), 213-258.

⁹ Arlene Goldbard, “The Metrics Syndrome,” *Community Arts Network*, 2008
<www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2008/10/the_metrics_syn.php> (accessed June 5, 2010).

audiences, critics, and granting organizations.¹⁰ “We need new language,” Cullinan explains. “When we don’t talk enough about our *art*, our work is perceived to be too *community*; and then, when we talk too much about *art*, it’s perceived to be not *authentic* enough.” “If we don’t talk enough about our *theataah*,” she adds, mimicking a certain affectation associated with the art world elite, “then we don’t get theater money. But if we talk too much about our *theataah*, then we’re not *colorful* enough. We have to be able to articulate that [our work] is different. It’s neither *that* nor *that*, but something new and different.”¹¹ By referencing these interrelated binary divisions, Cullinan illustrates how, for certain audiences, a notion of “high” art is valued over and against a notion of “low” art, a division that tends to turn on a related distinction between “good” art and “community” art. For other audiences, however, the “authentic” work of social or political engagement is valued over the “artificial” work of aesthetic representation. By insisting that their contribution is “neither *that* nor *that*,” Intersection’s artists and administrators strive to confound both sets of categories as well as their competing expectations and valuations.

Whereas Intersection for the Arts has grappled throughout its history with the partitions separating those practices categorized as primarily “aesthetic” from those categorized as primarily “social” or “political,” the Prison Project brought both the potential convergences and also the persisting tensions between these categories to the fore in complex ways. By setting aside fourteen months in which all artists and staff would focus on responding to the prison industrial complex, Intersection aimed to merge artistic, social, and political practice on a larger scale than it had ever before attempted, yet as it enacted this experiment in creative bridge building, the Prison Project exposed the infrastructures of feeling not only undergirding the prison industrial complex, but also those underlying contemporary practices of art-making and social justice organizing.

The Prison Project began primarily as a series of discrete arts projects created by Intersection’s resident artists, artists who are primarily committed to what tends to be categorized as avant-garde, “high” art experimentation. As the project developed, however, it came to incorporate an increasingly diverse group of participants and spectators who brought to the process different sets of skills, concerns, and evaluative criteria. The Prison Project began to take shape in early 2006 when several of Intersection’s resident artists happened to embark on projects that intersected in some way with the theme of incarceration: in what participants refer

¹⁰ Intersection is funded primarily by individual grants that the organization applies for each year or, in some instances, every couple of years. As a result, even though the organization is committed to providing long-term and sustainable support to artists, its ability to realize this commitment may change dramatically year-to-year. The Prison Project was funded almost entirely by a series of single-project foundation grants. Contributing organizations included: The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, The Bernard Osher Foundation, The Columbia Foundation, The Fleishhacker Foundation, The Flintridge Foundation, Grants for the Arts/The San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund, The James Irvine Foundation, The LEF Foundation, Magic Theatre/Z Space New Works Initiative, The National Endowment for the Arts, The Phyllis C. Wattis Foundation, The San Francisco Arts Commission-Cultural Equity Grants, The San Francisco Foundation, The Sunflower Fund, Theater Bay Area’s New Works Fund, The Tournesol Project, The Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation, The Walter and Elise Haas Fund, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and The Zellerbach Family Fund. Together, these organizations may be seen to comprise what Andrea Smith and INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence have termed the “non-profit industrial complex.” For further discussion, see *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, ed. INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007).

¹¹ Deborah Cullinan, interview by author, November 6, 2007.

to as a serendipitous alignment of interests, choreographer Erika Chong Shuch had begun developing a dance theater performance about a love relationship severed by incarceration, jazz artist Howard Wiley had been collaborating with an ethnomusicologist to compose music inspired by the traditions at Angola prison, director Sean San Jose and the Campo Santo theater company had been collaborating with prison writer Jimmy Santiago Baca to create a new play, and visual arts director Kevin Chen had been in conversation with the departments of art and criminal justice at San Francisco State University about co-hosting a gallery exhibition of prison art. To facilitate greater collaboration between these separate art projects and also to connect them to a larger social, political, and cultural context, the organization sought to form a series of community-based partnerships and programs under the banner of the Prison Project. In time, Intersection established a community advisory network that comprised over twenty individuals and organizations including Critical Resistance, a nationwide prison abolitionist organization; Justice Now, which works with women prisoners and their communities to establish alternatives to incarceration; BuildingBloc Collective, which fosters artistic exchanges between those on the inside and the outside of prison walls; and the Transgender, Gender Variant and Intersex (TGI) Justice Project which aims to end human rights abuses and heterosexist gender-based discrimination both within and beyond the prison system.¹² A number of tensions emerged when those affiliated with these organizations entered into partnership with Intersection's regular artists and audiences.

These tensions were highlighted in the case of *51802*, a dance theater production that served as resident artist Erika Chong Shuch's contribution to the Prison Project. The performance, which consisted primarily of abstract ensemble-based movement and image sequences exploring the themes of confinement and loss, was grounded in the story of a love relationship between a woman on the outside and a man doing time on the inside. Throughout the piece, Shuch gave voice to the woman who experienced her lover's imprisonment as her own form of incarceration. While *51802* explored the irrevocable divisions between the inside and the outside of prison walls, it also worked to destabilize those very boundaries by considering how the space of the inside acts back on the space of the outside—tearing apart the life of a woman who technically remained “free.” At the opening of the performance, Shuch delivered a

¹² By March 2008, the Prison Project's community advisory network consisted of the following individuals and organizations: All of Us or None/Legal Services for Prisoners with Children <<http://www.allofusornone.org>> and <<http://www.prisonerswithchildren.org>>, The Beat Within <<http://www.thebeatwithin.org>>, BuildingBloc Collective <<http://www.buildingbloc.net/>>, California Coalition for Women Prisoners <<http://womenprisoners.org>>, California Prison Focus <<http://www.prisons.org>>, Community Works West/The San Francisco Sheriff's Dept. Women Reentry and Restorative Justice Center <<http://www.community-works-ca.org>>, County Public Library/Write 2 Read <<http://juvievrite2read.aclibrary.org/>>, Critical Resistance <<http://www.criticalresistance.org>>, Education Not Incarceration <<http://ednotinc.org>>, Ella Baker Center for Human Rights/Books Not Bars <<http://www.ellabakercenter.org/bnb>>, Free Battered Women <<http://www.freebatteredwomen.org>>, Freedom Archives <<http://www.freedomarchives.org>>, The Imagine Bus Project <<http://www.imaginebusproject.org>>, Justice Now <<http://www.jnow.org/>>, Larkin Street Youth Services <<http://www.larkinstreetyouth.org>>, The Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women/Cultural Odyssey <<http://www.culturalodyssey.org/medea>>, Plain Human <<http://plainhuman.org>>, Prison Activist Resource Center (PARC) <<http://www.prisonactivist.org/>>, Prison Radio <<http://www.prisonradio.org>>, Transgender, Gender Variant and Intersex Justice Project <<http://www.tgijp.org/>>, Walden House <<http://waldenhouse.org>>, William James Association Prison Arts Project and the Arts-in-Corrections program <http://www.williamjamesassociation.org/prison_arts.html>, and Margo Perin's Write & Rise <web.mac.com/margoperin1>.

monologue from this woman's perspective in which she shared that when her lover learned she would be performing in the piece, he asked what she hoped to achieve by "making art" on the subject. "Here's the thing," she explained: "Sometimes we need to make little worlds to look at, to live in. And sometimes these little worlds that we create for ourselves make the whole big world make sense." While maintaining a separation between the "little world" of the stage and the "big world" of the social sphere, Shuch also raised questions about the interdependency of the two realms. What responsibility, she invited her audiences to ask, did her "little world" of art-making have to that "whole big world" that surrounded it? And in turn, what responsibility did the larger society have to the individual artist and her littlest creations?

Such questions were the subject of considerable discussion between the Prison Project's diverse spectators and collaborators. *51802*, for example, was generally praised by art critics for maintaining aesthetic distance. Lauding the production for remaining as "intensely personal as it was universal," arts audiences repeatedly complimented Shuch for not advancing a particular social or political agenda.¹³ The intimate and transcendent qualities of *51802*, critics argued, saved the art from becoming subservient to the prison's social or political demands. Rachel Howard, dance correspondent for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, illustrates this common response when she notes that creating art on the subject of the prison system "could have proved ill-advised territory for Shuch: who wants to see her usual wide-eyed explorations of life's big questions bogged down in pleas for social justice?"¹⁴ Such evaluations were informed, at least in part, by a longstanding tradition stemming from nineteenth century aesthetics that perceives art to achieve "transcendence" by being, or at least appearing to be, independent from its material surroundings. As such, this critique invokes debates that have occurred throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries about the relationship between autonomy and heteronomy, with autonomy referring to that which is governed by internal rule (independence) and heteronomy referring to that which is governed by external rule (interdependence). Shannon Jackson sums up some of the concerns that persist among many contemporary arts practitioners and critics when she outlines the common worry (recently re-articulated by Claire Bishop) that "art practices that seek to ameliorate social ills—that is, those that 'do good'—risk becoming overly instrumentalized, neutralizing the formal complexities and interrogative possibilities of art under the homogenizing umbrella of a social goal."¹⁵ For many of *51802*'s audience members, the production succeeded because it occupied an autonomous "little world" that was not "bogged down" by a "do-gooder" ethos. The subject of the prison, they worried, could have mandated that Intersection's artists be limited to the creation of political propaganda that would sacrifice the formal complexity and criticality of their work—replacing the artist's ability to ask "life's big questions" with a contradicting directive to produce utilitarian tools for social problem solving.

¹³ Chloe Veltman, "Dance Theater Jail piece '51802' Makes Audience Its Bitch," *SF Weekly*, September 26, 2007. Emphasis mine.

¹⁴ Rachel Howard, "Review: '51802' Players Trapped by the Prison System," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 15, 2007. Another dance critic drew upon similar language by congratulating Shuch for "mercifully refrain[ing] from loading her contribution with a plea for social justice. Allan Ulrich, "Prisoner of Ambition," *Voice of Dance*, September 17, 2007.

¹⁵ Shannon Jackson, "What is the 'Social' in Social Practice?: Comparing Experiments in Performance, in *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*, ed. Tracy C. Davis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 138. For further discussion, see Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: The Infrastructural Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, forthcoming December 2010).

51802 succeeded, these audiences argued, because it crafted a “little world” that occupied a space apart from the contemporary carceral system’s pressing demands.

Such responses were influenced not only by dominant conceptions of autonomy and heteronomy, but also by the interrelated division between “artifice” and “authenticity.” In line with Shuch’s refusal to make a political stand or statement was her corresponding refusal to say whether or not the story she told in *51802* was true, as well as whether or not she was playing a character or speaking from personal experience. Reflecting on this decision in a personal interview, Shuch defended her choice by explaining “I wanted people to look at this as art.”¹⁶ If her audiences and critics were to receive her work as a form of personal testimony, she thought, then they might downgrade it to what art critic Arlene Croce in the early 1990s deemed “victim art”—a derogatory term that continues to be applied to community-based work (the Medea Project, for instance, serving as a prime target for such critiques).¹⁷ In order for *51802* to be taken seriously as “art,” Shuch found it necessary to avoid any association with a form of practice that can be viewed by certain audiences as overly bound to its social or political context. Had Shuch framed *51802* as an autobiographical performance, however, she might have alleviated some of the competing concerns that were raised by many of the Prison Project’s community partners who demanded that the project focus less on supporting the development of professional artists and more on supporting the life and work of incarcerated people and their communities.

In contrast to art critics who worried that the Prison Project might get “bogged down” by the weight of the social world, many community partners expressed concern that participating artists, like Erika Chong Shuch, would do violence if they did not shoulder their social “burden” in particular (and often also quantifiable) ways. Numerous participants, for instance, argued that it was not enough for Intersection to support artists in the creation of work *about* the prison system; instead, the Prison Project needed to focus on supporting those artists directly impacted *by* that very system. From this perspective, *51802* was criticized rather than praised for what was perceived to be its aesthetic detachment. Even though the content of the performance encouraged audiences to consider the prison’s expansive spheres of impact by illuminating how individuals, families, and communities on the “outside” may also be fractured and thoroughly debilitated by the carceral system, the piece’s fictional frame—in conjunction with Shuch’s presence as a white, educated, avant-garde artist—suggested to many audience members that *51802* risked exploiting those directly impacted by the prison system as the raw material for its artists’ socially detached musings.¹⁸

Such concerns were raised not only in post-show discussions, planning meetings, and community workshops, but also throughout the duration of the performance itself. “It’s really *fun*,” Shuch declared at one moment in the piece as she crawled dramatically toward the center of the stage, “to make *art* about how unjust and devastating it all is.” She reached up and then

¹⁶ Interview by author, February 7, 2008.

¹⁷ Arlene Croce, “Discussing the Undiscussable,” *The New Yorker* Dec 26, 1994/Jan 2, 1995, 54-60.

¹⁸ Erica Meiners argues that it is vital to expand our understanding of the prison’s impact to include more than just incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people. She adds that such an expansion is central to the praxis of abolition, explaining that it is crucial for us to acknowledge “that the PIC significantly impacts all, in a variety of ways. More people speaking out about the roles incarceration plays in their lives can challenge the gendered and racialized indifference that perpetuates the movement of too many into prisons and jails,” *Right to be Hostile*, 183.

collapsed lavishly in a style reminiscent of old-time movie actresses: “It’s really convenient—and easy.” If her performance necessarily occupied a “little world” that was detached from its social context, she asked, then would the performance’s limited positioning and scale invariably make it too “convenient and easy”—perhaps even self-indulgent and self-serving? Numerous Prison Project participants joined Shuch in asking whether the creation of seemingly independent, self-governing forms of art might lead to a self-indulgent and self-serving engagement with the prison system. Professional artists, participants cautioned, risked taking up the prison as a mere theme (the latest hot topic). This problematic power dynamic was exacerbated by the fact that after the month-long run of *51802*, the Erika Shuch Performance Project would necessarily move on to creating work on new subjects. Furthermore, when the Prison Project culminated at the end of the year, Intersection for the Arts would move on to new projects, as well. These concerns resonate with common criticisms (discussed in Chapter 1) about ethnographic research and hit-and-run approaches to scholarship. In its content, context, and form, *51802* encouraged audiences and performers to question how the artist, like the scholar, may perpetuate the very forms of violence she seeks to counter by creating representations of the “other” for the consumptive pleasure, in this case, of the art world elite.

Some community partners who raised questions at public events and in meetings between Intersection and its growing network of advisors argued that the Prison Project could only avoid such pitfalls if it specified a particular political agenda and then used its artistic interventions in the service of that agenda. One prison activist was particularly insistent that if Intersection were to set about creating art on the subject of the prison system without using that art to raise money for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people and their advocates, then the Prison Project would be fundamentally exploitative. Another community partner articulated a similar critique in the following terms: “If the Holocaust were still going on today, and an organization decided to make art on the subject and not directly intervene to stop the genocide, we would all agree that the project was obscene. It is every citizen’s responsibility to further the cause of social justice by resisting oppression, not by capitalizing on it.” Such critiques highlight how, when Intersection’s mission of supporting emerging professional artists converged with the urgent social issues presented by the prison industrial complex, the organization risked using the theme of the prison as a mere tool for artistic advancement.

While these criticisms raised serious questions about the Prison Project’s responsibility to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people and their communities (issues that participants would struggle to address throughout the year) they also risked reversing the constructed binary between “aesthetics” and “politics” in problematic ways. Recall, for instance, how the culture wars advanced a narrow conception of artistic efficacy (which also insisted that art function primarily as a tool for advancing social goals) as a means of legitimizing the elimination of public funding for arts practices that did not conform to this limited and limiting framework. Could the Prison Project develop aesthetic forms of social engagement that might incorporate activities beyond fundraising or the advancement of particular policy initiatives, prescriptions that tend to be associated with “authentic” social action as opposed to the “artificial” work of aesthetic representation? How might the Prison Project encourage socially and politically responsible practices of art-making while still maintaining Intersection’s commitment to supporting artistic freedom?

While the discussions and debates that arose in response to *51802* and other Prison Project events and processes were never resolved, and while they certainly exposed the limitations of the Prison Project's mission, they do help to illuminate the complex interdependencies between the context and the form of its artistic interventions—a relationship that a narrow conception of artistic autonomy would otherwise seek to disavow. Throughout the year, participants grappled with how the structures underlying the Prison Project—the artists hired, the money raised, and the political initiatives advanced—were not part of some external social context, but were rather integral to the form of the art itself.¹⁹ To further probe these interdependencies, it may be helpful to return to Deborah Cullinan's insistence that the Prison Project's overarching mission was to cultivate a culturally and socially engaged aesthetic exploration that would be “neither *that* nor *that*”—neither a narrow conception of “art” nor a narrow conception of “activism. Following Cullinan's call for the development of “new language,” I propose that greater attention to the conversations that emerged throughout the Prison Project may shed light not only on the limitations of the work, but also on the opportunities that arose from the activation of these very tensions. This perspective brings into focus how the Prison Project explored the problems and possible solutions to California's prison system by simultaneously engaging in a relentless public dialogue about what art is, what art does, and who art is for.

Performing Dialogue: Confronting the Prison's Public Secrecy

Intersection's commitment to fostering public dialogue resonates with a set of principles advanced by a growing number of contemporary art experiments. Under such monikers as “community-based performance,” “arts-based civic dialogue,” “new genre public art,” and “relational aesthetics,” these diverse social practices strive to incorporate dialogue into their very form. In other words, rather than encouraging conversation and reflection about an artistic product before or after the moment of viewing, these works incorporate dialogical processes into the art itself. Such performative practices, as Grant Kester argues, enact a long-term commitment to mutual exchange. By facilitating interactions that are both aesthetic and social/political, the “ritualistic context of the art event” may open up space for new forms of interaction and identification beyond the confines of their usual rhetorical conventions.²⁰

If we shift our attention to the aesthetic-political conjunction of dialogical performance, we may bring the Prison Project into focus not as a series of discrete “little worlds” of art-making that were punctuated by some socially engaged public conversations, but rather as one yearlong community-based performance. Instead of equating community-based performance with a socially subservient, formally simplistic, and critically lacking art form, this conceptual framework shows how—in the spaces between such performances as *51802* and the Open Process event—the Prison Project fostered aesthetic forms of social and political engagement as well as socially engaged forms of aesthetic innovation (that included, but were not limited to fundraising or the advancement of any one particular policy initiative). From this perspective, the

¹⁹ In *Social Works*, Shannon Jackson “explore[s] the social aspirations of socially-engaged projects, less as the extra-aesthetic milieu that legitimates or compromises the aesthetic act, and more as the unraveling of the frame that would cast “the social” as ‘extra.’”

²⁰ Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 2.

debates that occurred throughout the year—the arts audiences who advocated for aesthetic transcendence, the prison activists who demanded that artists take more social responsibility, Intersection administrators who insisted on supporting artistic freedom—can all be seen as integral components of the art itself. Whether in the form of a community workshop, an interactive art piece, a theatrical event, a post-performance discussion, a newspaper review, an informal conversation within the gallery, an argument within a planning meeting, or a public protest, the larger umbrella of the Prison Project cultivated an ongoing process of public conversation and collaboration that expanded well beyond the duration or location of any one particular art event.²¹ As a result, Intersection’s practices of art-making became increasingly enmeshed throughout the year with its processes of social justice organizing, enabling the Prison Project to animate an inclusive community in a creative process that did not preclude, but rather required a dynamic process of conversation and contestation. As I will show, this process of public activation came to serve as a, if not the, defining feature of the Prison Project’s abolitionist aesthetic.

By fostering a sustained public conversation between a diverse group of artists, activists, and community members who were differentially positioned in relation to prison walls, the Prison Project effectively intervened in what Sharon Daniel describes as the public secrecy of the prison system. *Public Secrets*, an installation that was displayed as part of one of the Prison Project’s two main visual art exhibitions, helps to show how a dialogical performance process can contribute to a horizon of abolition by drawing public attention to some of the prison industrial complex’s most insidious operations. Unlike Shuch’s *51802*, which was a live performance that, as Peggy Phelan has suggested, “became itself” through its ephemerality, Daniel’s *Public Secrets* existed before the Prison Project began and continues to circulate (both temporally and spatially) beyond that project as well.²² As such, it flags some of the diverse approaches to art-making and social justice organizing that were brought together within the Prison Project’s wide net. Whereas Shuch insisted that her work be viewed as a form of art rather than activism, Daniel defines her project as a both artistic and activist intervention. *Public Secrets* thus offers a different kind of example of how the Prison Project enabled and encouraged participants to navigate within and also possibly to restructure the aforementioned tensions. Like *51802*, *Public Secrets* also explores how the prison system is bolstered by the illusory boundaries between “outside” and “inside,” “citizens” and “criminals,” “Us” and “Them,” however in contrast to *51802*, which focused on bringing one woman’s personal story to life, *Public Secrets* maps the relationship between multiple women’s stories and the systems of power with which they intersect. Daniel explains that this polyvocal approach allows her to function as a “context provider” who facilitates performances of social networking that bring disavowed systems of power to light.²³ Viewing *51802* and *Public Secrets* less as separate works of art and more as different acts within one larger performance enables us to see how that larger performance also emphasized polyvocality, social networking, and the provision of context in order to illuminate systems of power that may otherwise masquerade as invisible.

²¹ This concept is largely informed by Shannon Jackson’s work on social practice. For further discussion, see “What is the ‘Social’ in Social Practice?” and *Social Works*.

²² Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 146.

²³ Sharon Daniel, Author’s Statement, *Public Secrets*

<<http://www.vectorsjournal.org/projects/index.php?project=57&thread=AuthorsStatement>> (accessed June 5, 2010).

Sharon Daniel draws from Michael Taussig to define the concept behind *Public Secrets* as follows:²⁴

There are secrets that are kept from the public and then there are “public secrets” – secrets that the public chooses to keep safe from itself, like, “don't ask, don't tell.” ... The injustices of the justice system, the existence of the prison industrial complex – its pervasive network of monopolies and its human rights abuses – are extremely well documented yet wholly submerged and repressed. Everyone knows, and knows they know, but then, “How could things be otherwise?”²⁵

The project explores how the public secrecy of the prison has been secured by the prevention of sustained public dialogue and exchange, not only among those on the “outside” of the prison system, but also between those on the “outside” and those on the “inside.” As we have seen in the case of Arts-in-Corrections, these silences were largely effected when the state repealed many of the policies from the 1960s and 1970s that had enabled greater interaction between prisoners and the public sphere. For instance, the California prison system (in conjunction with numerous other states) instituted a media ban in its institutions in 1993 making it illegal for journalists (and incredibly difficult for anyone else from the outside) to interview prisoners in person, for prisoners to speak confidentially with representatives of the media, and for anyone to use cameras, recording devices, or even writing instruments while conducting interviews inside. As a result, even though images of and discussions about “criminals” circulate widely within the public sphere—in the form of political debates, news stories, movies, TV, and music—those images and discussions often serve to further cover up the experiences of criminalized individuals and communities.

To counter the violence legitimized by these paradoxically verbose silences, Daniel has developed a series of ethnographically based new media art experiments that use technology to give voice to marginalized individuals and communities, and in the process to facilitate conversation among diverse groups of people positioned both within and beyond prison walls. She developed *Public Secrets* in conjunction with Justice Now, an abolitionist organization committed to supporting women who have been impacted by the prison system. Because she entered the prison as one of Justice Now's legal advocates, Daniel was able to circumvent the prison's strict regime of secrecy by bringing a recording device into penal institutions and speaking with women incarcerated in the California Correctional Women's Facility (CCWF), the largest women's prison in the world, about their personal experiences and social critiques of the prison. These interviews—which she conducted with about twenty women during a four-year period from 2001 to 2005—constitute the core of an interactive virtual public art installation.²⁶ While, in the context of the Prison Project, *Public Secrets* was displayed on a screen in Intersection's gallery, its positioning on the internet does not require a museum or gallery space

²⁴ Michael Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

²⁵ Sharon Daniel, “The Public Secret: Information and Social Knowledge,” *Intelligent Agent* 6.2 <www.intelligentagent.com/archive/Vol6_No2_community_domain_daniel.htm> (accessed September 27, 2009).

²⁶ For more on the process behind the project, see Daniel “The Public Secret.”

for it to be shared with the public.²⁷ Through information technology, Daniel aims to build what she terms a “social, institutional, and technological infrastructure” that may enable marginalized subjects to both participate in and shape the public sphere.²⁸

When viewer-participants first enter the *Public Secrets* online database, they hear the sharp sound evoking that of a gate locking or unlocking. A white screen appears with a black geometric shape emerging in the window’s top left corner. The black section extends toward the middle of the screen as it morphs into a series of continually expanding and retracting rectangles reminiscent of bars. A voiceover by Daniel begins as a quiet drum beat marks a steady rhythm with the staccato locking/unlocking noise keeping time as it repeats at every tenth interval.

A three-million-dollar razor wire fence separates California Correctional Women’s Facility from the middle of nowhere. Its site is an agri-business desert between Los Vanos and Chowchilla where there are three prisons within thirty square miles. Past the metal detector, through two electronic gates, under the gaze of the gun towers, there is an uncannily suburban, perfectly manicured lawn. Between the fence and the visiting room I follow a rose-lined path surrounded by razor wire glinting in the relentless heat...

Throughout this opening sequence, the perspective on the screen shifts with every locking/unlocking noise, the black turning suddenly to white and the white turning suddenly to black. Like the database itself, the razor-wire garden that Daniel describes constitutes a liminal space between the prison and the public sphere, a space in which, as Daniel notes (drawing from Giorgio Agamben), the seemingly stark division between inside and outside “in-determine” each other.²⁹ The inside of the prison, she explains, where visitors never go, is a “bare” and “tree-less” desert filled primarily with poor people of color who must contend with daily and systematic human rights abuses; the area immediately outside of the prison is also a desert filled primarily with poor people of color struggling to survive in a depressed rural area; and the urban centers that lie further beyond this particular site are filled with poor communities of color that are being torn apart by the expanding prison industrial complex. Within this larger context, the carefully cultivated entryway that Daniel describes exposes how the prison is called to stage the state’s false promise of “safety,” “security,” and “justice.”³⁰ As such, this prison garden functions as a form of “perception management” that extends well beyond this one particular location.

As viewer-participants navigate the online database, which includes recordings and transcripts from numerous interviews with incarcerated women juxtaposed with quotations from

²⁷ Follow this link to enter the Public Secrets online database <<http://vectors.usc.edu/issues/4/publicsecrets/>>.

²⁸ Sharon Daniel, “The Database: An Aesthetics of Dignity,” in *Database Aesthetics: Art in the Age of Information Overflow*, ed. Victoria Vesna (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 175.

²⁹ Agamben envisions the potential of a political space that “would coincide neither with any of the homogenous national territories nor with their *topographical* sum, but would rather act on them by articulating and perforating them *topologically* as in the Klein bottle of in the Möbius Strip, where exterior and interior in-determine each other.” *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 25.

³⁰ Angela Davis notes that “the prison is one of the most important features of our image environment.” The saturation of images of imprisonment the news, documentaries, and dramatic movies and TV series makes it “virtually impossible to avoid consuming images of the prison.” *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, 16.

Sharon Daniel and critical theorists such as Giorgio Agamben and Michael Taussig, their cursors may cross over the Department of Defense’s definition of “perception management,” which defines the term as a field of practice that has shaped domestic as well as foreign policy throughout the past decade. The management of perception entails the careful dissemination of information designed to manipulate the “emotion, motives, and objective reasoning” of a target group.³¹ While the “no man’s land” that Daniel describes in the opening sequence offers a clear example of perception management in action, the paradoxical image of roses surrounded by razor-wire may also serve as a “counter-site” that, as Agamben suggests, “perforates the space of the state.”³² In other words, Daniel posits that by dwelling in the spaces between the inside and the outside of prison walls, we may enhance our perceptive capacities, thereby exceeding the limits of our carefully managed image environments.

During the opening sequence, the screen is smeared by a series of blots that vaguely mar the text and images presented throughout the rest of the installation. When viewed directly, these blots are reminiscent of fingerprints; when viewed from the bottom corner of the screen, they take on a deep brown hue reminiscent of dried blood; from above, the vague hint of a human figure may or may not be detected. As viewers navigate the database’s various pathways, the screen remains smeared, reminding all who interact with it that this installation is a mediated form of representation that does not offer a singular “truth,” but rather enables multiple shifts in perspective. As such, the picture *Public Secrets* paints functions as an anamorphosis, an image that has the potential to reverse “one’s reading of the symbolic order” of the picture that is presented—both on and off the screen.³³

By engaging the intersections—and, in turn, by blurring the boundaries—between the “inside” and the “outside” of the prison, as well as between the combination of “secrecy” and “publicity” underlying the institution (as well as its perpetual expansion), *Public Secrets* shows how the management of public perception surrounding the contemporary prison industrial complex constitutes a defining feature of neoliberalism’s punitive approach to governance.³⁴ Cassandra Shaylor, co-founder of Justice Now and collaborator on the project, calls attention to the contemporary infrastructures of feeling that enable carceral geographies to disappear when she explains that:

By administering prisons as closed institutions and situating them in relatively isolated locations, the state attempts to create a geographic, political, and psychic distance between inside and outside... Together, political rhetoric, law, media, and popular cultural representations structure the mainstream vision of prisons and the people in them as over there, some distance away. Simultaneously, these representational and rhetorical practices assail us with images and ideas that

³¹ Original Source: DOD Dictionary of Military Terms
<http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/dod_dictionary/data/p/6118.html> (accessed June 5, 2010).

³² While these quotations directly reference Agamben’s work, they are taken from the *Public Secrets* website. For more on Daniel’s use of these terms see “The Public Secret.”

³³ This quotation is from Daniel’s opening monologue and is also repeated and developed in “The Public Secret.”

³⁴ “Punitiveness,” Micaela di Leonardo explains, “is the flip side—the real cultural logic—of neoliberalism.” Introduction to *New Landscapes of Inequality: Neoliberalism and the Erosion of Democracy in America*, ed. Jane L. Collins, Micaela di Leonardo, and Brett Williams (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2008), xiii.

reinforce a sense that segregation and distance are needed between the prisoner and the populace at large.³⁵

Shaylor's analysis marks the central role that the prison industrial complex has come to play in the neoliberal imagination. The ever-widening distance between "prisoner" and "populace" has both shaped and been shaped by the neoliberalization of the public sphere wherein the privatization of the media and elimination of dissent contribute to a privatized model of citizenship in which the concept of the "social" has become thoroughly debilitated.³⁶ As we have seen, the segregation of those within prison walls (as well as those within criminalized communities that are technically positioned outside of the prison) from other sectors of society marks a social formation that is distinct from that of any other period in U.S. history.³⁷ Certainly, no contemporary politician, prison administrator, or member of the mainstream American public would dare invoke—or likely even be able to imagine—Clinton Duffy's popular mid-twentieth century insistence that prisoners are our neighbors and that they belong to our world. The late twentieth and early twenty-first century moral panic around crime and criminality that has both stimulated and been stimulated by "law and order" policymaking relies upon a strict division (that is simultaneously imagined and materially constructed) between "outside" and "inside." The razor wire fence that is represented in *Public Secrets* serves to uphold and also potentially to destabilize the corresponding divisions between "good guys" and "bad guys." Opening up new fields of dialogic action and interaction not only about the prison, but also between those on the outside and those on the inside of the prison, as the radical prison movement of the 1960s and 1970s so powerfully demonstrated, has the potential to fundamentally disrupt the culture of fear that has helped to constitute the neoliberal turn to punitive governance.

The women who speak throughout *Public Secrets* work to transform this culture of fear by reflecting on what it would take to "build a world without prisons."³⁸ Jane Dorotik, for instance, explains that she is committed to generating conversations with both prisoners and guards about envisioning a society in which the current system would be rendered obsolete. In so doing, she aims to enact her vision that the prison industrial complex may be dismantled through a radical transformation that is simultaneously political, social, cultural, and psychic:

A world that doesn't rely on prisons would require a culture shift and social, behavior changes. Our society is pretty much choked by fear and domination – and this mindset is simply magnified in prison. We need to shift toward an underlying culture of partnership and trust and away from a culture of domination.³⁹

³⁵ Cassandra Shaylor, "Not Light But Fire: Gender, Violence, and Strategies for Prison Abolition, Diss. (University of California, Santa Cruz, 2007), 21.

³⁶ For further discussion, see di Leonardo, "Introduction," xiii.

³⁷ This "divide and conquer" approach, constitutive of neo-imperialism, is also implemented within the penal system where prisoners are segregated by race. While prison administrators maintain that the enforced segregation is to protect prisoners from gang violence, they fail to account for how such policies perpetuate and even produce the divisive racialized violence that they seek to ameliorate.

³⁸ This is a quote from Marie Bandrup on the *Public Secrets* site.

³⁹ Jane Dorotik is quoted both on the *Public Secrets* site and also in "The Public Secret."

The transformation that Dorotik envisions opens up space for what Daniel (drawing from Frederic Jameson) describes as “a utopian imaginary.”⁴⁰ A utopian imaginary, Daniel suggests, would expose the limits of our infrastructures of feeling and enable us to radically reshape those structures on levels that are both material and perceptual.⁴¹ Because they invite viewer-participants to develop an anamorphic perspective of the prison and, in turn, to view the prison itself as an anamorphosis that exposes the pervasiveness of state-sanctioned and extralegal forms of violence, Dorotik, Daniel and the other women who speak through *Public Secrets* facilitate a collective process of utopian imagining.

By not only representing visions of utopia in its content, but also by enacting those very visions in its form, *Public Secrets* engages the worldmaking potential of performance. As José Muñoz explains, “the concept of worldmaking delineates the ways in which performances—both theatrical and everyday rituals—have the ability to establish alternate views of the world.” These performances “produce these vantage points by slicing into the façade of the real that is the majoritarian public sphere.”⁴² Just as the prison’s razor-wire fence slices into the façade of the prison’s performance of justice, so too does *Public Secrets* slice into the façade of the carefully managed sphere of mainstream public perception. When it is viewed in terms of utopian worldmaking, we can see how *Public Secrets* performatively gestures toward an abolitionist aesthetic—an art form that facilitates a radical re-imagining not only of the prison industrial complex, but also of the interlocking systems of oppression buttressing that system. From this perspective, an abolitionist aesthetic may engender not only a process of radical imagination, but also a “culture of partnership” that is dependent upon community-based approaches to art-making and social justice organizing. This simultaneously utopian and pragmatic approach to the artistic process allows for a broad continuum of aesthetic, social, and political engagement as it reaches across the existing and also perpetually toward the not-yet-here and not-yet-now of an abolitionist horizon.

While *Public Secrets* should not be conflated with the overarching Prison Project in which it participated, its artful networking operations do provide a framework through which to understand the Prison Project’s efforts, more generally. Like *Public Secrets*, the Prison Project facilitated a dialogical performance that activated the public sphere not solely through a kind of Habermasian reliance on rational argumentation and debate, but more crucially through an aesthetic engagement that allowed for a sensuous and sensual interaction with one another and with the world that we both shape and are shaped by. Prison abolition, as Daniel and Dorotike demonstrate, depends not only on changes in policy, but also on radical transformations in our ways of thinking, feeling, seeing, and speaking. From this perspective, the artist’s affective labor—in partnership with a wide array of formal and informal social networks—could serve as integral to the kinds of support systems needed for a radical re-mapping of the carceral landscape. Aesthetics, in this context, need not be confined to the art object (or to corresponding conceptions of autonomy), but rather may be opened up to account for intersecting processes that

⁴⁰ Daniel, “The Public Secret.”

⁴¹ For more on developing a utopian imaginary, see Frederic Jameson, “Politics of Utopia,” *New Left Review* 25 (Jan/Feb 2004).

⁴² José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 196.

establish connections between the artistic process and the people or communities engaged with that artistic process; and politics, in this context, need not be limited to fundraising, legal action, or policy campaigns (although it may certainly include such practices). Instead, it may be widened to a sphere of social practices that enable a radical revision of the relationship between differentially positioned individual and social bodies. By establishing pathways of conversation that would otherwise have been foreclosed and by making an extended durational commitment to facilitating a broad spectrum of cultural, social, and political practices, Prison Project participants thus carried their “social burden” by exploring how artists, in conversation and collaboration with diverse community participants, could craft figurative and material cultural spaces from which multiple, intersecting processes of abolitionist imagining might occur.

Building Cultures of Partnership

During the year, the Prison Project focused on building a “culture of partnership” among an ever-expanding group of participants. Through multi-disciplinary forms of public conversation and collaboration, the Prison Project worked, as Cullinan notes, to “challenge traditional barriers—between ‘inside’ and ‘outside,’ between ‘professional’ and amateur,’ between institutions and people—and to bring marginalized and misunderstood stories to light.”⁴³ In the process, the Prison Project encouraged its diverse participants to collectively *manage* their own perceptions of the prison system, thereby engaging and potentially altering the infrastructures of feeling underlying that very system. If we understand the Prison Project’s abolitionist mission to have been fundamentally utopian, however, then we must account not only for the project’s radical potential, but also for its inevitable constraints. Because participants sought to dwell in a potentiality that is, by definition, not-yet-here and not-yet-now, their utopian imaginary, as Muñoz notes (drawing from Ernst Bloch), was likely to be disappointed.⁴⁴ The support structures that enabled artists, activists, and members of the general public to collaborate with one another on this joint art project certainly limited the character of that collaboration in some disappointing ways. When viewed in relation to one another, however, such endeavors as the formation of the community advisory network, the staging of Campo Santo’s *A Place to Stand*, and the facilitation of the Mutual Aid Pen-Pal Project help to demonstrate how the Prison Project pushed and pulled against those very constraints as it engaged both the impossibility and radical potentiality of cultivating an abolitionist aesthetic.

The Community Advisory Network

As we have seen, Intersection for the Arts sought to foster a culture of partnership primarily by encouraging conversation and collaboration between its resident artists and a diverse group of people committed to prison related activism. Through the formation of the Community Advisory Network, Intersection sought to establish a formal structure through which such partnerships could be established and strengthened. Community programs director Rebecka Rodriguez explains that this network was intended not only to help Intersection’s artists and staff better understand and respond to the California prison system, but also to help community-based artists and grassroots activists across the state combat the atomization with which many of them

⁴³ Deborah Cullinan and Kurt Daw, Foreword, *Prison/Culture*, 7.

⁴⁴ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 9.

contend. “People get involved in what they’re doing and they don’t get a chance to look up or breathe,” Rodriguez explains.⁴⁵ Ideally, the Prison Project could provide a forum for individuals and organizations that might otherwise operate in isolation to make connections with one another, connections that could extend throughout, and possibly even beyond the Prison Project’s fourteen month duration.

To build these relationships, Rodriguez and a small group of volunteers started out by contacting people working in and around the prison system that they found through web-based research and word of mouth and inviting them to join the Prison Project’s Community Advisory Network. Once they agreed to serve as advisors on the project, Intersection invited their new partners to send in brief descriptions of their work as well as short notations of any requests they might have for volunteers, donations, or other forms of engagement. Volunteers and staff then posted this information on the Prison Project website and in a print resource guide that they made available to all Prison Project audiences and participants. Rodriguez also took the lead in coordinating the quarterly Open Process events in which advisors were invited to share information about their work in a public venue. While Intersection did not pay these groups for their participation, it did split the minimal house proceeds with each participating group as a token of appreciation. Advisors were also invited to attend each of the Prison Project’s productions and exhibitions free of charge. In addition to these three relatively modest forms of interaction, Intersection artists and staff asked their community partners to brainstorm with them about other possibilities for exchange.

It quickly became apparent, however, that the kinds of collaboration that the Prison Project wished to foster were quite limited. Often, partnering organizations—many of which were staffed by just one or two volunteers—did not have the organizational capacity to email descriptions of their work to Intersection in a timely fashion let alone answer phone calls, attend performances, or prepare presentations. For the Prison Project’s digital and print resource guides, Rodriguez and her small team of volunteers often ended up piecing together information that they found on the internet, writing the descriptions themselves, and then asking their community advisors for permission to post that information on Intersection’s website. This approach had the effect of staging a collaboration that, in practice, tended to be nominal, at best. Building a culture of partnership, as it turns out, is not cheap. In order to more thoroughly enact the Prison Project’s collaborative mission, it would have been necessary to alter the structures supporting (and simultaneously constraining) the organizations involved. For example, one community advisor suggested that some of these limitations could be overcome if Intersection were to host weekly or monthly meetings where resident artists, staff, and advisors could come together to discuss the project and to brainstorm opportunities for further exchange. Such a structure would have enabled far greater collaboration between the project’s participants and undoubtedly would have enabled deeper engagement with the concerns raised throughout the year about social and political responsibility. However, while Intersection (as a nonprofit arts organization) had resources, and a corresponding mission, to pay artists for the creation of original work, it did not have the resources to pay its community advisors for their contributions. Because many of the organizations with which the Prison Project sought to partner were staffed by small numbers of

⁴⁵ Interview by author, March 7, 2007.

people who were already overworked and underfunded, those organizations did not have the capacity to commit to yet another unpaid endeavor.

The limits to partnership were further drawn by concerns about who exactly owned, or could take credit for, the Prison Project. “It’s great that they [Intersection] are doing this project,” one community partner noted. “We’re happy to be a part of it, but this is *their* project, and we’ve got our own stuff to worry about.” Because the Prison Project was created (and funded) primarily by and for Intersection for the Arts, the project’s collaborative ethos could only extend so far. Even the Prison Project’s website, which staged the project’s commitment to social networking by grouping all the community partners together in one (albeit virtual) space, was ultimately published as part of Intersection’s domain. In order to more thoroughly foster the culture of partnership that Prison Project participants envisioned, it would have been necessary to find or build structures that could have supported that very participation. The representations of the Community Advisory Network that circulated on the website and in the print resource guide ultimately came to stage a wish for an infrastructure that could enable such a diverse group of participants both to collaborate with one another and also to support one another in that collaboration. While that wish would never be fully realized within the confines of the Prison Project, artists and activists did work together throughout the year to creatively maneuver within the project’s various constraints.

A Place to Stand

When it premiered in March 2007, *A Place to Stand* served as the Prison Project’s first major art event. Adapted and directed by Campo Santo’s Sean San Jose, the production interwove contributions from resident jazz artist Howard Wiley, hip-hop artist Tommy Shepherd, and choreographer Erika Chong Shuch. Drawing from the writings of Jimmy Santiago Baca and Ntozake Shange, the production developed from a six-year process of workshops and readings among its diverse artistic collaborators.⁴⁶ The interdisciplinary production incorporated poetry, prose, music, and dance to present a kind of dreamscape of the physical and psychic toll that processes of criminalization take on America’s minoritarian communities. Throughout the production, the theater itself created the feeling of a prison that confined not only the characters, but also the play’s audiences, which were invariably packed into the theater’s sixty-six seats. A cell door installed on a track along the upstage wall punctuated Intersection’s small black box performance space. As it repeatedly slammed shut throughout the production, the sound reverberated between the theater’s exposed concrete walls. This closed-in space heightened the

⁴⁶ *Prison/Culture*, 7. Campo Santo is a theater company dedicated to the creation of original performance experiments of and for San Francisco’s immigrant and racially marginalized populations. Since its establishment in 1996, the company has brought together a growing community of writers, performers, and audience members who regularly attend and/or collaborate on its productions. Whereas regional theaters operate on a strict schedule that is often limited to a brief production planning period, auditions, three to four weeks of rehearsals, and a month or so of public performances, Intersection’s commitment to nurturing experimental artistic processes has enabled Campo Santo to develop a process-centered approach to the creation of original work. The company’s New Play Development Program, for instance, provides a forum for performing artists to work in close collaboration over an extended period of time not only with one another, but also with playwrights, fiction writers, and poets. Regular literary collaborators include Philip Kan Gotanda, Jessica Hagedorn, Naomi Iizuka, Denis Johnson, and Octavio Solis.

performers' representations of rage, fear, and grief, giving audience members a sense of the devastation caused by situations from which there appears to be no way out.

Whereas most theater productions—especially avant-garde experiments adapted from literary texts—attract regular theatergoers who tend to be white, highly educated, and from middle and upper middle class backgrounds, *A Place to Stand* welcomed into its intimate space a very different kind of audience. At one performance, a group of art students sat next to women from the Walden House drug treatment facility, the director of the Larkin Street youth center sat across from the Medea Project ensemble, and Danny Hoch watched from the next row with a group of Mission hipsters separating him from residents of the Delancey Street Residential Care Foundation who shared a row with Ntozake Shange and her family. The performances, which all sold out according to a sliding pay scale and a generous complimentary ticket policy, helped to constitute a unique sense of community—perhaps even *communitas*—within the audience.⁴⁷ In *Utopia in Performance*, Jill Dolan reflects on those fleeting moments at the theater where audience members “feel themselves allied with each other, and with a broader, more capacious sense of a public.”⁴⁸ The formation of these temporary publics, Dolan argues, enables audiences to envision, if only for a moment, how they might continue to engage with one another beyond the theatrical event.

While *A Place to Stand* certainly provided audience members with the opportunity for such fleeting sensations of togetherness, the larger umbrella of the Prison Project also offered them concrete opportunities to come together as a more lasting public. The Prison Project encouraged greater public engagement by asking audiences to view *A Place to Stand* as one of the first events among many and to approach their relatively passive role of spectators as just one possible form of continued participation. This invitation was strengthened by how *A Place to Stand* brought together Campo Santo's regular audiences (who tend to return year-after-year for each of the company's productions) and the Prison Project's nascent audiences (many of whom had never before attended a play). The Prison Project, as an overarching container for this one theatrical event, encouraged those interested in avant-garde performance to continue to participate in Intersection's prison-oriented programming as well as for those interested in issues surrounding the prison to return for events that might otherwise appear to be disconnected from their particular social or political goals.

Intersection sought to facilitate further interaction between the Prison Project's commitments to art-making and social justice organizing by inviting greater exchange between Campo Santo and the Community Advisory Network. To this end, Campo Santo welcomed women from the Rising Voices program, one of the Prison Project's new partners, to present some of their writing before one of its performances of *A Place to Stand*. Rising Voices is a program that, in conjunction with Community Works West and the Sheriff's Department re-entry center, offers creative writing workshops to women who have recently been released from the San Francisco county jail system. When Asia and Anita—two African American women from

⁴⁷ Anthropologist Victor Turner used the concept of *communitas* to refer to moments in a ritual (or other kind of performance event) where participants experience an intense, even spiritual, sense of solidarity with one another. For further discussion, see Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), 45-51.

⁴⁸ Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 2.

San Francisco's inner city—performed their poetry at the opening of the production, they testified to how the artistic process could serve as a powerful vehicle for personal and social transformation. Their writing resonated with the play's exploration of how creative writing and other forms of artistic expression could provide those who have been subject to the prison system's institutionalized violence with a place on which to stand and a voice with which to speak. Like *A Place to Stand*'s primary narrator, an ex-convict who like Baca himself, found a way to “dream a better life, to read and to write a better life,” Asia and Anita also spoke to the personal and political power of artistic expression. By connecting the production to a larger social and political context and in turn by connecting the theater to other institutions throughout the city, these women helped to raise awareness and possibly even to shift the perspectives of some of the people within *A Place to Stand*'s diverse audiences.

Despite the ways in which the Rising Voices performance staged a partnership between Intersection's resident artists and community partners, the performance, like the website and resource guide, also came to perform a kind of wish for an extended, mutually beneficial, collaborative process that was not-yet-here and not-yet-now. Ultimately, the Rising Voices reading came to stand in a problematic tension with the production that followed it. As the audience applauded Asia and Anita for their creative efforts and their courage to publicly perform their work, they also marked that the “community” project was ending and the “theater” project was beginning. Even though the Prison Project's worked to bridge such boundaries, the women from Rising Voices seemed to have been called to provide a taste of “authenticity” as a prelude for the “artful” representation to follow. These women, as prison “insiders” and writing “amateurs,” had, in essence, been asked to provide the raw materials that the “outsider” “professionals” would then shape into “art.” Despite Intersection's best intentions, the Rising Voices performance, when it was juxtaposed—but not thoroughly integrated—with *A Place to Stand*'s theatrical frame, served not only to foster connections, but also to uphold those persistent divisions between “theater” and “community,” “art” and “authenticity.”

As the Rising Voices performance demonstrates, *A Place to Stand* fostered an extended process of interaction between artists and community members who were differentially positioned within and beyond the carceral system while also staging seemingly irrevocable divisions between them. In the course of the following months, the Prison Project would never resolve these persistent tensions, but would rather continue to navigate within their interstices by encouraging an ever-widening public of artists, activists, and community members to engage in dynamic processes of creative exchange.

The Mutual Aid Pen-Pal Project

As the Prison Project developed, the Mutual Aid Pen-Pal Project emerged as one of Intersection for the Arts' more successful attempts at fostering collaboration between the Prison Project's different participants. This project was co-sponsored by Intersection and its community advisor, the BuildingBloc Collective. BuildingBloc is a group of activist artists who use the creative process as a vehicle for exploring issues of social injustice. Given Intersection's overarching mission of supporting the work of emerging artists, BuildingBloc was a particularly compatible organization for the Prison Project. In 2006, BuildingBloc had led its first yearlong Pen-Pal Project, which partnered artists on the inside and the outside to collaborate on joint art projects. The organization had also begun hosting Dance Down the Lockdown, an annual

fundraising and consciousness-raising event that uses music, dance, and spoken word performances to advance the cause of prison abolition and to support the Critical Resistance organization, in particular. BuildingBloc artists wished to host another Dance Down the Lockdown event and to sponsor another yearlong Pen-Pal exchange, but they lacked the space and the resources to do so. As an artist-incubator organization, Intersection was particularly well positioned to serve as a resource for BuildingBloc. Because of BuildingBloc's longstanding relationship with Critical Resistance, the Prison Project's co-sponsorship of the Pen-Pal Project brought Intersection artists and audiences into a sustained, financially supported collaboration with both organizations.

Following the model that BuildingBloc had established the previous year, the two organizations worked together to invite a group of about thirty artists to partner with a group of about thirty incarcerated men and women throughout the state. For twelve months, one outside artist partnered with one inside artist and the two collaborated via mail on a joint creation in the medium of their choosing. Whereas Daniel's work as a legal advocate enabled her to talk openly with incarcerated women, BuildingBloc found that because "art" tends to be perceived as a politically neutral activity, the aesthetic frame enabled participants to circumvent many of the prison system's restrictions on inside/outside communication. All project participants were paid modest stipends for the work, which they often opted to put toward the cost of art supplies. Through a yearlong process of letter writing, the pairs created poetry, fiction, drawing, sculpture, and recorded and written art pieces that addressed the ideas, stories, and experiences that emerged through the process.

The Pen-Pal Project's final showing took place in the same small black box theater in which Campo Santo had performed one year earlier. Whereas the absence of interaction between the Rising Voices performers and the *A Place to Stand* actors had haunted the space of Campo Santo's performance, the inevitable absence of the imprisoned artist collaborators came to haunt the space of the Pen-Pal Project's final showing. As much as both endeavors worked to unsettle divisions between "artists" and "activists," "outsiders" and "insiders," individuals and institutions, they also invariably performed the boundaries that remain and the walls that have yet to be broken down. While it may be tempting to judge the community-based Pen-Pal Project as more successful at creating a collaborative process than a professionally framed theatrical production like *A Place to Stand*, the Prison Project, as an overarching structure, encouraged the two processes to work in concert to create diverse and ever-evolving forms of public engagement. Despite their limitations, these projects succeeded in nurturing ongoing partnerships between those differentially positioned in relation to the prison industrial complex. Campo Santo company members utilized their skills as avant-garde artists to bring together diverse audiences and the BuildingBloc collective drew from those audiences to encourage more active participation in a creative community-based process.

When we view the Pen-Pal Project and *A Place to Stand* in relation to the formation of the Community Advisory Network, *Public Secrets*, 51802, and the Open Process series, we can see how the Prison Project, while invariably constrained, activated the public through a dynamic process of aesthetic engagement. While this fourteen month long community-based performance process never staged a harmonious integration of "art" and "activism," it did invite ever-widening communities of participants to engage the tensions as well as the potential intersections between these seemingly separate spheres. Ultimately, the Prison Project's greatest contribution

lay in how it encouraged participants to both make visible and strive to unsettle the boundaries between the prison and the public sphere, between art and politics, between “Us and “Them,” not only in the fleeting moments of utopian performatives, but also in sustained creative interactions over time. Even when the Prison Project failed to realize its envisioned “culture of partnership,” it nevertheless staged a wish for the kind of infrastructure that would enable a wide-reaching network of artists, activists, and community participants to work together to illuminate, explore, and possibly even transform the expansive carceral landscape.

On the Horizon

On March 1, 2008, five hundred people gathered for the Prison Project’s culminating event. “Prison/Culture: Art, Issues and Dialogue” was a daylong symposium co-hosted by Intersection for the Arts and San Francisco State University. The event, which was free and open to the public, brought together artists, activists, scholars, students, art critics, formerly incarcerated people, families and friends of the incarcerated, and members of the general public. Throughout the day, a series of interactive events took place throughout SF State’s Student Center including, but not limited to, panel presentations, performances and exhibitions, workshops, planning sessions, and formal and informal discussions. Nineteen nonprofit organizations, many of which had joined the project as members of Intersection’s Community Advisory Network, staffed tables in the lobby throughout the day, engaging in conversations with one another, as well as with symposium participants and students who passed through the space.⁴⁹ That afternoon, when Erika Chong Shuch shared segments from *51802* and Campo Santo shared selections from *A Place to Stand*, there was a sense that the worlds their projects had come to inhabit had been significantly expanded without compromising the intimacy of their performances or the integrity of their particular artistic visions.

In her keynote address, Angela Davis suggested that one of art’s major contributions lies in its ability to ask questions that may otherwise be foreclosed. “The difficulty,” Davis proposed, “of imagining communities in struggle, the difficulty of imagining those who have not been included in recorded history, the difficulty of imagining prisoners who are otherwise represented as a vast abstraction,” points to the role the arts might play in this urgent social and political issue. She concluded with a series of questions that artists could take a major role in asking:

What is justice? Can it be something more than revenge, more than eye-for-an-eye? Can we imagine a justice that does not exile those who have done harm to others beyond the borders of community? Can we imagine a justice that does not assume that one mistake should ruin an entire lifetime? Can we imagine a justice that calls for accountability and compensation by the persons who do harm, and patience and perhaps ultimately forgiveness by the persons to whom harm is done? Can we imagine a justice that helps us move forward toward a society free of racism, sexism, homophobia, environmental violence, war? And can we imagine a justice that encourages equality and individuality and creativity?⁵⁰

⁴⁹ For further discussion see the Prison/Culture website, which includes text, video, and sound recordings documenting the event: <<http://gallery.sfsu.edu/criminal/#>>.

⁵⁰ Angela Y Davis, Prison/Culture Symposium, San Francisco State University, March 1, 2008.

Following Davis, I propose that if the contemporary penal system secures its power through its performance of fixity and inevitability, then performances like the Prison Project have the potential to destabilize that system by expanding our sight lines and enabling us to see the infrastructures that lie beneath our surface-level perception. Through a protracted process of community exchange, the Prison Project came to trouble the notion that anyone in the state of California could ever stand “outside” of the prison system and look in on it from a distance. While the Prison Project did not have a quantifiable impact on California’s prison policy or generate a significant amount of money to be put toward prison health care, prisoner re-entry issues, or educational opportunities, the project did work toward cultivating an abolitionist aesthetic—abolitionist in its commitment to pushing beyond the conceptual determinants of the present into a space which is in no way set, or even foreseeable, but rather a complex intersection of elements in constant tension.⁵¹

The abolition movement is guided by a principle that W.E.B. Du Bois terms “abolition democracy,” a concept that calls not only for the elimination of institutions of oppression, but also for the building of new radically democratic institutions in their place. Because our democratic freedoms are defined against those that incarceration denies, an abolitionist imagination would encourage us not only to question the role of the prison in our society, but also the corresponding version of democracy that we have come to accept. Through the Prison Project, Intersection imagined how a modest neighborhood arts organization might come to serve as one such democratic institution. While the project was certainly limited, it did encourage its diverse participants to examine the kind of infrastructure that would be necessary for arts organizations to function as radically democratic institutions. How, participants asked, might we imagine new ways for artists to enter into partnership with a wide array of formal and informal social networks? What opportunities might we create for artists, activists, and community members to collaborate on projects that that broaden our conceptions of “art-making” and “social justice organizing”? And how might such collaborations enable us both to imagine and to enact a radically democratic system of justice?

Even though there is great potential in the Prison Project’s relentless examination of such questions and its corresponding gestures toward cultivating an abolitionist aesthetic, it is also important not to romanticize the work. Ultimately, questions about the Prison Project’s failure to realize a greater degree of social responsibility persisted throughout the project. While participants productively grappled with these issues, they never resolved them. As community partners noted early in the process, the Prison Project would come to an end and many of the artists involved with that project would eventually move on. Even though fourteen months is a considerable amount of time for a performance process, it is only a blink of an eye in relation to the overwhelming force of the prison industrial complex and its corresponding infrastructures of feeling.

At this writing, Intersection for the Arts continues to build the infrastructure to support ongoing and sustainable artistic labor, an intervention that remains socially urgent given the limitations of art funding practices throughout the United States. Resident artists such as Erika

⁵¹ Brandon Woolf helped me to develop my thinking on the productive potential of these activated, but never resolved, tensions in relation to an abolitionist aesthetic.

Chong Shuch, Howard Wiley, Kevin Chen, and Sean San Jose continue to collaborate with one another on new creative experiments while a growing number of artists continue to make use of the institution's incubation and fiscal sponsorship programs. With regard to the Prison Project, however, the organization has ultimately moved on. Unlike Arts-in-Corrections or the Medea Project, Intersection is not a prison-specific organization. As a result, it could only sustain its organization-wide focus on the prison industrial complex for a finite period of time. When I visited the building in the spring of 2009, several of the artists joked with me, "You're still thinking about prison? That was so last year." While they were being self-consciously ironic, I heard in their comment a concern about whether or not Prison Project artists had adequately shouldered their social burden. What an abolitionist aesthetic so effectively illuminates is that the prison industrial complex is not a single-issue problem and as a result it requires more than a single-issue solution. If the Prison Project shows us anything, then, it is the deep and crucial need for artists, activists, scholars, and members of the general public not only to continue interrogating the prison system, but also to continue responding to how that system both shapes and is shaped by multiple and intersecting infrastructures of feeling.

Epilogue Radical Interdependency

In a world where completed men and women stand on their own feet, persons who are dependent—as the buried imagery of the word denotes—hang.

--Daniel P. Moynihan, *Politics of a Guaranteed Income*

We come into the world unknowing and dependent, and, to a certain degree, we remain that way. We can try, from the point of view of autonomy, to argue with this situation, but we are perhaps foolish, if not dangerous, when we do.

--Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*

In January 2010, the Supreme Court upheld a ruling that found the conditions in California's prisons to be unconstitutional.¹ In so doing, it validated the findings of a lower court which had determined that massive overcrowding in the state's penal institutions and grave dysfunctions in the prison healthcare system constitute cruel and unusual forms of punishment that not only compromise prisoners' basic human rights, but that also lead directly to at least one unnecessary death each week.² The federal judges concluded that in order to begin to bring California's prisons up to a level of "care sufficient to prevent the unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain or death," the state needed to take immediate steps to dramatically reduce its prisoner population, which is currently the largest in the world.³ This ruling testifies to the extensive abuses that are regularly perpetrated by the expanding prison industrial complex in California, across the country, and indeed throughout the world. It also presents the public with an opportunity to envision and to take pragmatic steps toward implementing strategies of decarceration.⁴ What new formal and informal social networks would need to be established in order to significantly reduce the number of people who have been impacted by the prison industrial complex? How might we transform our system of criminal justice into a system of social justice?

¹ Kenny Walsh, "Supreme Court Rejects California's Prison Appeal," *The Sacramento Bee*, January 20, 2010 <<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2010/01/20/82635/supreme-court-rejects-californias.html>> (accessed June 7, 2010). See also Kamika Dunlap, "Supreme Court Rejects CA Challenge to Prison Reform Plan," FindLaw.com, Jan 22, 2010. <<http://blogs.findlaw.com/decided/2010/01/supreme-court-rejects-ca-challenge-to-prison-reform-plan.html>> (accessed Apr 15, 2010). The original ruling was made in August of 2009. See Solomon Moore, "California Prisons Must Cut Inmate Population," *The New York Times*, August 4, 2009. A full copy of the report is available for download on the *New York Times* website, as well. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/05/us/05calif.html?_r=1> (accessed June 7, 2010).

² Ralph Coleman, et al. v. Arnold Schwarzenegger, et al. CIV S-90-0520 LKK JFM P (2009). Marciano Plata, et al. v. Arnold Schwarzenegger. C01-1351 THE (2009): 7.

³ *Ibid.*, 6. The ruling required a reduction of 40,000 prisoners—27% of the state's current prison population of 150,000.

⁴ Angela Davis notes that decarceration is a key aspect of an abolitionist project that seeks to "envision a continuum of alternatives to imprisonment—demilitarization of schools, revitalization of education at all levels, a health system that provides free physical and mental care to all, and a justice system based on reparation and reconciliation rather than retribution and vengeance." *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 107.

Instead of addressing such questions, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger responded to this federal mandate by instituting sweeping prison reforms that rely on a program of even greater systemic disavowal.⁵ Rather than reassessing California's mandatory minimum sentencing policies or its three-strikes-you're-out laws, the Governor proposed that the state resolve its crisis by seeking out a less expensive (and in fact, a more profitable) means of expanding its tough-on-crime, law-and-order policies.⁶ "The way we get this done," Schwarzenegger argued in his 2010 State of the State address, "is to find more cost-effective ways to run our prison system and allow private prisons to compete with public prisons." Testifying to the ideological potency of neoliberal market rationality, he justified this plan by asserting that "competition and choice are always good."⁷ Schwarzenegger thus easily elided free market capitalism with a concept of the social good by arguing that the state's responsibility for the prison's "wanton infliction of pain or death" could be best addressed not through decarceration, but rather through increased privatization. Harkening back to Jerry Brown's 1977 decision to remove "rehabilitation" from the mission of the California Department of Corrections and gesturing even further back to California's nineteenth century model of contract prison labor, Schwarzenegger proposed that the solution to the human rights abuses of the twenty-first century penal system lay in even greater abdication of responsibility for that system and, in turn, for the exponentially increasing numbers of individuals, families, and communities caught within it.

The language used to rationalize California's most recent prison reform agenda helps to expose how neoliberalism has been emerging in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries as a mode of governmentality. Attention to the prison industrial complex reveals how neoliberalism advocates for the dismantling of "big government" by paradoxically supporting the development an ever-expanding policing and punishing apparatus. Not only does this model of governance equate the "privatization of everything"⁸ with a warped conception of the public good, but it also produces and polices a privatized model of the citizenry as a disconnected mass of "self-interested," "self-reliant," "self-esteeming," "self-governing" subjects who define freedom primarily in terms of the individual's right to "competition and choice." Within this context, economically, racially, and sexually marginalized subjects who do not maintain the illusion (or who are not granted access to the illusion) of *independence*, must, as Daniel Moynihan presciently warned, be made to hang. To respond to the violence that this ideology

⁵ Schwarzenegger strategically cloaked this privatization agenda in an argument for public education. For further discussion, see Jennifer Steinhauer, "Schwarzenegger Seeks Shift from Prisons to Schools," *The New York Times*, January 6, 2010 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/07/us/07calif.html>> (accessed Apr 15, 2010). This path for this restructuring was laid in 2006 when the governor declared a "state of emergency" within the California prison system. Through the declaration of crisis, the government instituted a "state of exception" which, as Agamben has shown, functions as a law that legitimizes the suspension of law—a "threshold of indeterminacy between democracy and absolutism." For further discussion, see Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 3.

⁶ To view Schwarzenegger's plan for Comprehensive Prison Reform, see <<http://gov.ca.gov/index.php?/fact-sheet/4966/>> (accessed June 8, 2010).

⁷ Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, State of the State Address, Sacramento, CA, January 6, 2010 <<http://gov.ca.gov/speech/14118/>> (accessed April 29, 2010).

⁸ Michael Watts, "Development II: the Privatization of Everything?" *Progress in Human Geography* 18.3 (1994): 371-384.

promotes, it is critical, as Wendy Brown suggests, to develop a “counter rationality” that entails “an incessant reckoning with all forms of power,” be they cultural, social, political, or psychic.⁹

Throughout this dissertation I have argued that penal-welfare performance—as both a body of community-based cultural work and an analytical framework—may enable such a relentless engagement with power. By cultivating an art of *systemic avowal*, penal-welfare performance has the potential to redirect the neoliberal discourses that uphold the prison industrial complex. I have focused on performance practices that not only explicitly operate within systems of power, but also incorporate those systemic negotiations into their very form.¹⁰ If, as Foucault has suggested, there is no “outside” of power, then these performances follow his lead by exploring creative ways of navigating within the power structures in which we are “always already” caught.¹¹ Whereas Arts-in-Corrections operates as part of the California Department of Corrections, the Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women occupies a liminal space both within and beyond the county jail system, and the Prison Project at Intersection for the Arts functions primarily outside of criminal justice bureaucracies, each of these performance practices stages its enmeshment with multiple and intersecting systems of power that have both constituted and been constituted by the penal-welfare nexus. In so doing, they cultivate an ethic and aesthetic of *interdependency* that works to build bridges not only between the prison and the public sphere, but also between the subject and the social world.

As we have seen, the prison secures its power by masquerading as an isolated institution at the edges of society. However, attention to the shifting penal-welfare nexus from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day reveals the ways in which the prison has functioned since its inception as a hub within both the political economy and the popular imaginary. Ruth Wilson Gilmore reminds us that “the common view that prisons sit on the edge—at the margins of social spaces, economic regions, political territories and fights for rights... is a trick of perspective because, as every geographer knows, edges are also interfaces.”¹² I have sought to engage the interfaces between the prison and the public sphere by applying a performance-based approach that illuminates how the institution has functioned since its inception not as the fixed and stable monolith its architecture would suggest, but rather as a constantly fluctuating set of struggles between multiple social actors who have shaped and, in turn, been shaped by that very system.

⁹ Wendy Brown, “Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy,” *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 59.

¹⁰ As I have noted throughout this manuscript, my argument is largely informed by Shannon Jackson’s work on systemic aesthetics. Jackson focuses on a history of arts practices that have “induced infrastructural avowal.” In so doing, they help to situate “‘heteronomy’ as both a socio-political but also an aesthetic-formal question of the openness to contingency, to external rule, to avowing support, to experiments in not being privately self-governing.” For further discussion, see *Social Works: The Infrastructural Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, forthcoming December 2010).

¹¹ As Foucault has noted in this oft quoted passage, “It seems to me that power is ‘always already there,’ that one is never ‘outside’ of it, that there are no ‘margins’ for those who break with the system to gambol in.” *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writing, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 141.

¹² Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 11.

The history of prison performance reveals how the discourse of “rehabilitation” has been differentially mobilized by prisoners, guards, wardens, politicians, journalists, artists, activists, and members of the general public to both reinforce and exceed a Foucaultian conception of disciplinarity. Even though this “correctional” vocabulary has served as a tool of oppressive and repressive regimes, it has also enabled fields of action and interaction that, as Sharon Daniel notes, “in-determine” the boundaries between the “inside” and the “outside.” As we have seen in the case of San Quentin, Arts-in-Corrections, and the Medea Project, “rehabilitative” discourses and practices have encouraged people within and beyond prison walls to imagine and to advocate for the kinds of social restructuring that would be necessary to truly empower criminalized individuals and communities. Despite the liberatory potential of such a nuanced understanding of “rehabilitation,” however, contemporary prison arts programming, and community-based art more generally, risk reinforcing the neoliberal ideologies that have served to rationalize the retrenchment of the welfare state and the mass expansion of the penal state over the past four decades. Just as the prison, as Angela Davis argues, “*disappear[s]* people in the false hope of *disappearing* the underlying social problems they represent,” so, too, do the pervasive discourses of “self-esteem” and “personal responsibility” disguise those social problems as individualized obstacles that can be overcome through self-improvement projects.¹³

Even though they are complicit with the infrastructures (and the infrastructures of feeling) underlying the prison system, each of the arts practices discussed in this dissertation explores alternatives to a (neo)liberal model of subjectivity reliant upon a construction of self-interested subjects free from governmental intervention. In so doing, they animate a vision of subjectivity that situates freedom in terms of mutual responsibility to share power collectively.¹⁴ As the Prison Project demonstrates, penal-welfare performance ultimately gestures toward a horizon of abolition by helping to “rehabilitate” the social sphere and our corresponding conceptions of the public good. My hope is that by opening up the possibility for a community-based understanding of subjectivity, agency, and freedom, penal-welfare performance may offer artists, activists, and scholars a means of moving beyond the pitfalls of the neoliberal ideology of “self-making” that dominates much of the discourse by and about contemporary community-based arts practices and to account instead for the radical potential of the field’s collectivized praxis. Such exploration may go a long way in responding to Judith Butler’s call for us to “imagine a world...in which an inevitable interdependency becomes acknowledged as the basis for global political community.”¹⁵ As the recent Supreme Court ruling suggests, the stakes of such imaginative acts are nothing short of life and death.

¹³ Angela Y. Davis, *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005), 41.

¹⁴ I am drawing here from Wendy Brown’s argument that “What remains for the Left, then, is to challenge emerging neo-liberal governmentality in EuroAtlantic states with an alternative vision of the good, one that rejects *homo oeconomicus* as the norm of the human and rejects this norm’s correlative formations of economy, society, state and (non)morality. In its barest form, this would be a vision in which justice would not center upon maximizing individual wealth or rights but on developing and enhancing the capacity of citizens to share power and hence, collaboratively govern themselves.” For further discussion see “Neoliberalism,” 59.

¹⁵ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), xii.

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Appendix A Images



Plate 2.1 1911 performance of “Alias Jimmy Valentine” starring stage and film star H.B. Warner, Courtesy of the Anne T. Kent California Room, Marin County Free Library.



Plate 2.2 Prisoners may have performed alongside Warner in the 1911 production of “Alias of Jimmy Valentine,” Courtesy of the Anne T. Kent California Room, Marin County Free Library.



Plate 2.3 Four women prisoners perform in “The Creole Belle Quartette” as part of a 1910 San Quentin Minstrel and Vaudeville Performance, Courtesy of the Anne T. Kent California Room, Marin County Free Library.



Plate 2.4 The San Quentin Band, ca 1912, Courtesy of the Anne T. Kent California Room, Marin County Free Library.



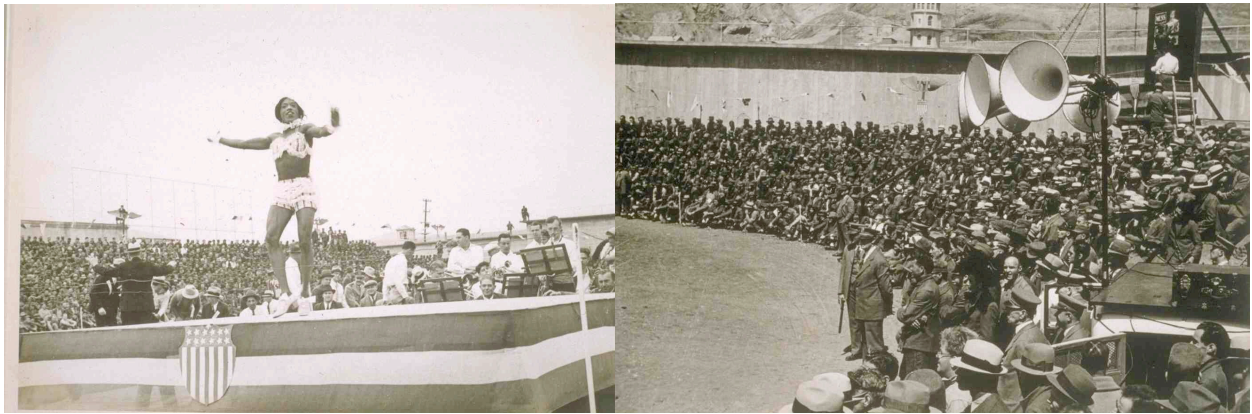
Plate 2.5 San Quentin prisoner in drag performance, ca. 1914, Courtesy of the Anne T. Kent California Room, Marin County Free Library.



Plate 2.6 San Quentin prisoner in drag performance, ca. 1914, Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.



Plate 2.7 Prisoners pose for a photograph while rehearsal for the annual Field Day performance ca. 1925. "At Rehearsal," Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.



Plates 2.8 and 2.9 Throughout the Progressive Era, prisoners regularly performed in drag for thousands of spectators consisting of incarcerated and free men, and even some women. The above images, entitled "Dancers" and "Spectators" are from a Field Day performance ca. 1925, Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.



Plates 4.1 and 4.2 Rhodessa Jones, "Rant from the Jungle," Photo by Pat Mazzera, Courtesy of Cultural Odyssey.



Plate 4.3 Taraina Grant supported by the Medea ensemble, From left to right: Angela Wilson, Felicia Scaggs, Susan Voyticky, Taraina Grant, Fe Bongolan, and Tamika Chenier, Photo by Pat Mazzera, Courtesy of Cultural Odyssey.



Plate 4.4 “The Kicking Dance,” performers from left to right: Fe Bongolan, Gina Dawson, Felicia Scaggs, Idris Ackamoor, Lajuana Decatur, Tamika Chenier, photo by Paz Mazzera, Courtesy of Cultural Odyssey.



Plate 4.5 “The Kicking Dance,” Medea Project ensemble members from left to right: Gina Dawson, Felicia Scaggs, Lajuana Decatur, Tamika Chenier, and Angela Wilson, photo by Pat Mazzera, Courtesy of Cultural Odyssey.



Plate 5.1 Erika Chong Shuch, *5/802, The Prison Project*, Intersection for the Arts, 2008, Courtesy of the artist.

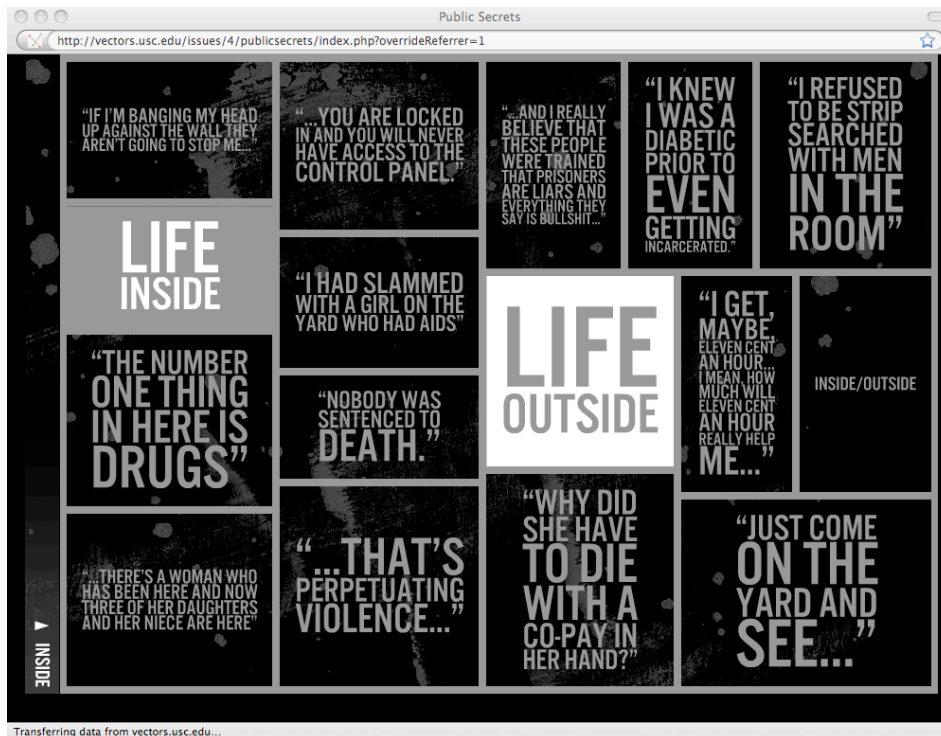


Plate 5.2 Public Secrets by Sharon Daniel, Design by Erik Loyer <<http://vectors.usc.edu/issues/4/publicsecrets/>>.



Plate 5.3 Campo Santo, A Place to Stand, the Prison Project, Intersection for the Arts, 2007, Courtesy of the artist.

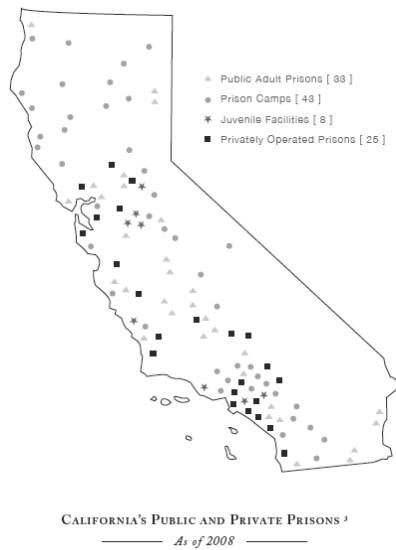


Plate 5.4 Intersection for the Arts with Kelly Beile, Nina Billone Prieur, Bekey Chapman, Ashley Hunt, Chelsi Nakano, Kimberly Olofsen, and Emily Wright, "California's Public and Private Prisons" from *Golden Rules: A Guide to the California Prison System*, 2008, Courtesy of Intersection for the Arts.

Appendix B Prison Arts Resources

*This list includes links to U.S. arts programs in and around the criminal justice system as well as to several websites that offer useful resources on prison activism, more generally. The staff and volunteers for the Prison Project at Intersection for the Arts were instrumental in helping me to gather these resources. In addition, Krista Brune compiled many of these links in her recent book *Creating Behind the Razor Wire* and partnering website <www.prisonarts.info>.*

360 Degrees

<<http://www.360degrees.org/>>

Offers information on the criminal justice system that includes statistics, personal stories, and images

Actors' Shakespeare Project, Inc./Incarcerated youth at Play—Massachusetts

<<http://www.actorsshakespeareproject.org/>>

Stages Shakespeare plays with incarcerated youth

Alabama Prison Arts + Education Project—Auburn University, AL

<<http://media.cla.auburn.edu/apaep/info.cfm>>

Offers arts and academic courses in correctional facilities throughout Alabama

Art Behind Bars—Florida

<www.artbehindbars.org>

Arts-based community services for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people

Art for Justice—Pennsylvania

<www.artforjustice.org>

Supports and exhibits the art of incarcerated people

The Art of Yoga Project—Palo Alto, CA

<www.theartofyogaproject.org/background.php>

Teaches yoga to girls in juvenile detention

Artists Collective for Social Change—Englewood, NJ

<www.artistscollective4socialchange.org>

Facilitates arts workshops in juvenile detention centers

Arts in Corrections Resource List

<www.nea.gov/resources/Accessibility/rlists/corrections.html>

A resource list for art programming in correctional settings

Arts in Prison, Inc.—Kansas

<www.artsinprison.org>

Provides music, writing, drama, visual art, and yoga programs for incarcerated people and their families.

ArtsCorr, part of South Dakotans for the Arts—South Dakota

<www.sdarts.org>

Provides artists residencies for youth in detention and correctional staff training

Artspot Productions/LCIW Drama Club—New Orleans

<www.artspotproductions.org>

A theater company of women incarcerated at the Louisiana Correctional Institute

Artspring, Inc--Florida

<www.artspring.org>

Offers interdisciplinary arts programs for adults and juveniles in the correctional system

Avodah Dance Ensemble—New York

<www.avodahdance.org>

Offers dance workshops at the York and Baylor correctional institutions

Bard Prison Initiative—New York

<www.bard.edu/bpi>

Provides a degree-granting college program in correctional facilities across the state

The Beat Within—San Francisco, CA

<www.thebeatwithin.org>

A publication of writing and art from California's juvenile detention facilities

Beyondmedia's Women and Prison: A Site for Resistance

<<http://www.womenandprison.org/index.html>>

This networking and discussion site offers a wide array of resources on women in prison, including art and writing

Books Through Bars—Philadelphia, PA

<www.booksthroughbars.org>

Provides books to prisoners and presents prison arts exhibitions on the outside

California Coalition for Women Prisoners—San Francisco, CA

<www.womenprisoners.org>

An activist organization that support the rights of women incarcerated in California. Produces The Fire Inside, a newsletter by and for women prisoners

CASES Insight Project—New York

<www.cases.org>

Uses improvisation and storytelling to help incarcerated youth create an original performance and perform it off-Broadway

Cedar Tree, Inc.'s Prison Literacy Project—New Mexico

<www.jimmysantiagobaca.com/projects.html>

Author Jimmy Santiago Baca conducts writing workshops in correctional facilities around the country

The Center for Restorative Justice and Community Arts—Pittsburgh, PA

<www.restorativejusticecommunityarts.org>

Uses art as a vehicle to bridge offender and victim

Center for the Study of Art and Community—Bainbridge Island, WA

<www.artandcommunit.com>

Performs research and training to artists and arts organizations invested in community-based art and art in criminal justice

Changing Lives Through Literature—Massachusetts

<<http://cltl.umassd.edu/home-flash.cfm>>

Alternative sentencing program that uses literature as a vehicle for transformation and rehabilitation

Children's Coalition, Inc—Palm Beach, FL

<www.fyicomminc.com/tcci/tcci.htm>

Multimedia arts center for at-risk youth

Children's Prison Arts Project—Houston, TX

<www.childrenprisonart.org>

Provides programs in visual and performing arts to incarcerated youth

Class Acts Arts, Inc—Silver Spring, MD

<www.classacts.org>

Offers arts programming in jails and juvenile detentions centers

The Community Arts Network

<www.communityarts.net>

An online database that provides extensive resources on arts in and around the prison system

Community Works West—Berkeley, CA

<www.community-works-ca.org>

Provides a wide variety of arts programming to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated children and adults as well as their families

Cornell at Auburn—Ithaca, NY

<<http://cuauburn.arts/cornell.edu/>>

Through Cornell University, this program offers faculty and student led courses in writing and literature at the Auburn Correctional Facility

Corrections Documentary Project

<www.correctionsproject.com>

A documentary film about the prison industrial complex

County Public Library/Write to Read—Fremont, CA

<<http://juvievwrite2read.aclibrary.org/>>

Offers literacy programming for incarcerated youth

Critical Resistance

<www.criticalresistance.org>

A grassroots national activist organization dedicated to envisioning and creating alternatives to incarceration. Offers information and resources about the prison abolition movement and an incisive critique of the prison industrial complex

Dead Man Walking School Theatre Project—New Orleans, LA

<<http://dmwplay.org/home.html>>

An interdisciplinary curriculum for high school students to study the death penalty and justice issues through theater and the arts

Durland Alternatives Library—Ithaca, NY

<www.alternativeslibrary.org>

Through Cornell University, this free and open library provides resources and services on arts and prison

Each One Reach One—San Francisco, CA

<www.each1reach1.org>

Conducts playwriting workshops with adolescents in California's juvenile detention facilities

Education Not Incarceration

<www.ednotinc.org>

Advocates educational programming as an alternative to incarceration

Ella Baker Center for Human Rights/Books Not Bars—Oakland, CA

<www.ellabakercenter.org>

An activist organization that sponsors multiple programs for finding alternatives to prison

Fortune Society

<<http://www.fortunesociety.org/>>

This website offers links to information on the prison system as well as art auctions and writing

Free Minds Book Club—Washington, DC

<www.freemindsbookclub.org>

Introduces incarcerated youth to the transformative power of books and writing

Gateless Gate—Florida

<www.gatelessgate.org/prison/index.html>

Teaches meditation and Buddhism to incarcerated people

Gathering for Justice

<<http://gatheringforjustice.ning.com/>>

Activist organization that promotes justice and an end to the incarceration of children

Geese Theatre Company

<www.geesetheatre.com>

An international drama program for incarcerated adults

InsideOUT Writers—Los Angeles, CA

<www.insideoutwriters.org>

Offers weekly writing workshops to incarcerated youth

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program—Philadelphia, PA

<<http://www.temple.edu/inside-out/IOhome.html>>

Teaches courses inside prisons for both inmates and college students

Jackson County Children's Services Coalition Core Arts Program Evaluation—Jackson, MI

<www.hfrp.org/out-of-school-time/ostdatabase-bibliography/database/core-artsprogram>

An evaluation of the effects of Mississippi's Core Arts Program, which serves adjudicated youth

Judith Tannenbaum

<www.judithtannenbaum.com>

An accomplished writer working and teaching within the prison system

Judy Dworin Performance Project, Inc—Connecticut and New York

<www.jdpe.info>

Offers performance-based workshops in detention facilities

Justice Now

<www.jnow.org>

Provides legal services and supports prisoner organizing efforts that promote health and justice. Also, in conjunction with artist, activist, and theorist Sharon Daniel, sponsors arts projects by and for women prisoners

Legal Services for Prisoners with Children

<www.prisonerswithchildren.org>

Provides advocacy and referrals for men and women who are incarcerated

The Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD)—Los Angeles, CA

<www.lapovertydept.org>

Creates original theater of and for the homeless populations of Skid Row, many of whom are formerly incarcerated people

Kansas Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (KIPCOR)

<www.bethelks.edu/kipco>

Conflict resolution certification that provides intensive training within conflict situations, including Prison Arts placements and internships

Maine Inside Out—Portland, ME

<www.maineinsideout.org>

A performance and creative arts program that collaborates with incarcerated people

The Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women—San Francisco, CA

<<http://Culturalodyssey.org/medea/>>

A theater company of and for incarcerated women

Mississippi Arts Commission's Core Arts Program

<www.arts.state.ms.us/programs/core-artsinitiative.php>

Youth development through art within the juvenile justice system

Music Theatre Workshop—Chicago, IL

<www.mtwchicago.org>

Theater program created for youth in prisons and schools, featuring productions based on the youths' personal stories

Nancy B. Jefferson Literacy and Creative Media Program

<www.freewritejailarts.org>

Provides print and media literacy skills to youth in the juvenile justice system

National ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) Prison Project

<www.aclu.org/prison/index.html>

Handles major class-action suits related to issues in state and federal institutions

North Carolina Women's Prison Writing Performance Project

<www.unc.edu/~cramer/prison>

Workshops in writing and performance for incarcerated women

New York State Arts in Correctional Education Network

<www.nyslc.org/questionsnysarts.htm>

Resources for artists and educators working within correctional institutions

New York State Literary Center

<www.nyslc.org>

A program to encourage at-risk youth to engage in writing, music, and art

Offender Victim Ministries' Prison-Arts Project—Kansas

<www.offendervictimministries.org/program_art.html>

Offers courses in the creative arts to inmates at the Hutchinson Correctional Facility

Outside In—New Mexico

<www.outsideinproductions.org>

Brings artistic presentations into correctional facilities and offers workshops for incarcerated youth

Partners Unlimited—Iowa

<www.partnersunlimited.org>

Provides experiential learning through the arts for at-risk individuals

Patricia (Toni) McConnel--Arizona

<www.tonimcconnel.com>

An formerly incarcerated woman who teaches in and writes about correctional facilities

People and Stories/Gente y Cuentos—New Jersey

<<http://peopleandstories.org>>

Teaches literature in correctional facilities throughout the state

Perkins Center for the Arts—New Jersey

<www.perkinscenter.org>

Engages at-risk youth and incarcerated adults in visual and performing arts workshops

PEN American Center's Prison Writing Program—New York

<www.pen.org/page.php/prmID/152>

Gives writing awards to incarcerated prisoners

Philadelphia Mural Arts Program—Philadelphia, PA

<www.muralarts.org>

Offers mural making programs in correctional facilities across the state and organized the 2007 national conference on Arts in Criminal Justice

Playwrights Theatre—New Jersey

<www.ptnj.org>

Works with juvenile offenders to create and perform plays for their families and peers

Poetic Justice Project—Santa Barbara, CA

<www.poeticjusticeproject.org>

Offers poetry workshops for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people

Prison Activist Resource Center

<www.prisonactivist.org/links>

This web resource contains links to related art and writing about the prison system

Prison Arts

<www.prisonarts.info>

A database containing research by Krista Brune and an extensive resource list on books, articles, and programs about prison arts programming in the United States

The Prison Arts Coalition

<<http://theprisonartscoalition.wordpress.com>>

A network of and for people creating art in and around the criminal justice system

Prison Communities International, Inc.—New York

<www.p-c-i.org/rta.php>

A non-profit organization dedicated to criminal justice issues

Prison Creative Arts Project—Michigan

<www.lsa.umich.edu/english/pcap>

Collaborates with incarcerated adults and youth to strengthen community through creative expression

Prisons Foundation—Washington, D.C.

<www.prisonfoundation.org>

The oldest and most established 501(c)(3) non-profit prisoner art advocacy group in the nation

Prison Performing Arts—Missouri

<www.prisonartsstl.org>

A seventeen-year-old, multi-discipline literacy and performing arts program that serves incarcerated adults and children

Prison Poster Project

<www.prisonposterproject.org/site>

A program in which artists and inmates collaborate on a portable mural that educates the public about the United States prison system

Prison Radio—San Francisco, CA

<www.prisonradio.org>

Exposes the prison industry by bringing incarcerated voices into the public dialogue

Prison University Project--California

<www.prisonuniversityproject.org>

Patten University at California's San Quentin prison offers inmates an Associate of Arts degree in liberal arts

Prometheus Dance—Massachusetts

<www.prometheusdance.org>

A modern dance ensemble with community programs in prisons, shelters, schools, and other alternative settings

Rehabilitation Through the Arts—New York

<www.p-c-i.org>

Runs arts programming as Sing Sing Prison

Restorative Justice Online

<www.restorativejustice.org>

A non-partisan source of information on restorative justice, with a focus on repairing the harm caused by criminal behavior

Right-to-Write Program—New York

<iking@sarahlawrence.edu>

Sarah Lawrence College student team-teach writing workshops to women in the Valhalla Correctional Facility

Sage Writers—Pennsylvania

<www.sagewriters.org>

Gives artistic voice to movements for change by supporting and publishing books of literary and social merit by prisoners

Shakespeare Behind Bars—Kentucky

<www.kyshakes.org>

A Shakespeare company contained within the walls of a medium-security adult male prison

The Shakespeare Prison Project--Wisconsin

<<http://shakespeareprisonproject.blogspot.com>>

Directed by Jonathan Shailer, this program gives prisoners the opportunity to rehearse and performance plays by Shakespeare

The Shakespeare Project--Massachusetts

<www.shakespeare.org>

Juvenile offenders perform scenes from Shakespeare's plays as part of their probation

Southwest Correctional Art Network (SCAN)

<<http://arts.endow.gov/resources/Accessibility/rlists/corrections.html>>

Connects arts groups to work with adults and juveniles in correctional institutions

Speak Out! Women's Writing Workshop at the Larimer County Detention Center--Colorado

<<http://literacy.colostate.edu/speakout.html>>

Offers courses in literature and writing to women in jail

Spoon Jackson

<<http://www.spoonjackson.com/>>

Jackson is a writer serving a life sentence in the California State Prison System. He is a former student of Judith Tannenbaum and a current student and teacher in the Arts-in-Corrections program at New Folsom prison

Storytelling Arts, Inc—New Jersey

<www.storytellingarts.net>

Offers storytelling programs in juvenile detention facilities

Student Press Initiative—New York

<www.publishspi.org>

A student-run publication at Columbia University that offers oral histories of men at Rikers Island

Ten Thousand Things—Minnesota

<<http://www.tenthousandthings.org/>>

Facilitates theatrical exchanges between professional artists and men in women in and around the prison system and other related institutions

Thousand Kites—Kentucky

<www.thousandkites.org>

A national dialogue project addressing the criminal justice system

Transgender, Gender Variant, and Intersex Justice Project—San Francisco, CA

<www.tgijp.org>

A program that seeks to challenge and end the human rights abuses in prisons and beyond

Voices From Inside—Chicopee, MA

<www.voicesfrominside.org>

Offers creative writing workshops for women in correctional facilities

Voices UnBroken—New York

<www.voicesunbroken.org/Home.html>

Gives a voice to under-heard members of the community through writing-based creative arts workshops

William James Association—Santa Cruz, CA

<www.williamjamesassociation.org>

Artist-in-residence programs for the National Endowment for the Arts and the Federal Bureau of Prisons that contracts with professional artists to provide in-depth, longterm arts experiences for incarcerated adults

Woman is the Word

<geocities.com/freedomroad04/mainpage.html>

offers courses in memoir writing for women at the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility

Women and Prison: A Site for Resistance

<www.womenandprison.org>

A website featuring stories of incarcerated women and children of formerly incarcerated mothers

Women, Writing and Incarceration Project—Chicago, IL

Ann Folwell Stanford astanford@depaul.edu

Facilitates workshops between students at Depaul University and women in prison and jail

Write and Rise

<www.writeandrise.com>

Autobiographical writing workshops in jails, prisons, and community and treatment centers

Writers Corps—San Francisco, CA

<<http://www.sfartscommission.org/WC/>>

Partners writers with youth in detention settings

YouthARTS Development Project: Youth Arts Public Art—Portland, OR

<www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2001/07/national_evalua.php>

A study of delinquency prevention in collaboration with the National Endowment for the Arts, the U.S. Department of Justice, and three local artists

Youth Rights Media—Connecticut

<www.youthrightsmedia.org>

A media-based youth advocacy group that promotes teaching and learning for social change