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## Planting Seeds: Life Stories of Awakening Self-Awareness

Aixa Mendez  
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**PLANTING SEEDS: LIFE STORIES OF AWAKENING**  
**SELF-AWARENESS**

by

AIXA MÉNDEZ  
M.A. University of Central Florida 2017

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Theatre  
in the College of Arts and Humanities  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Fall Term  
2017

Major Professor: Julia Listengarten

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## ABSTRACT

Using real-life stories written by female offenders, *Planting seeds - Life Stories of Awakening Self-Awareness* seeks to identify the systematic challenges these females may have faced, that in most cases, are the root-causes of their derailment from the societal norms of conduct. Applying the concepts of community and social justice and equality as a lens, this work will attempt to corroborate, as a universal postulate, that the process of sharing life stories can have transformative effects on the individuals and that theatre techniques, such as theatre games and scripting can help identify those impediments to restoring lives. Key to the transformative component of this work is the exploration of theatre as a mechanism of support and restoration and that the contributions that theatre may offer are the pillars that sustain the well-being of communities, and henceforth society. Using techniques of storytelling and story writing in the process of re-enacting life stories, the participants will be able to possibly recognize issues that may be impeding their growth. In addition, engagement in storytelling, and moreover, story writing can help the participants increase their cognitive skills and the ability to live a communal life. This evidence-based practice can transform lives and society. It has the potential of continuing to other facilities and with other populations, such as incarcerated males, juvenile delinquents, and orphans. It can reach out beyond these institutionalized populations to any community in need of finding itself, and, further its maximum potential. This work seeks to help these females identify impediments for further growth by using theatre techniques such as sharing and scripting their life stories.

I am still an altruist, thanks to oppression.

“Vivir no es otra cosa que arder en preguntas.”

Antonin Artaud

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Throughout my journey, there have been several individuals without whom my life would have been a disaster. Firstly, I want to thank my life partner, Mayra Rivas for her support through this process and for the many hours endured while I was researching, writing, and working inside the confined walls of a jail. To my parents Vladimir and Violeta, who raised me with solid community and societal values and taught me to be genuine, respectful, courageous, thankful, and foremost, truthful to myself. I thank them for their unconditional love.

Much gratitude to my ally, Judge R. Rodriguez (Judge Pepito) for his enthusiasm throughout this project, and for being the central column throughout the development of this work. From the idea to its creation, Judge Pepito was present supporting my work with trust and love. For his input, guidance, and help, I am eternally grateful. Equally, my thanks go to the Orange County Correction Department and its Chief Cornita A. Riley, its Manager Linda Brooks, Assistant Manager Juanita Beason, and Captain Malik Muhammad, Security Operations Division Hostage Team Commander. Special thanks go to Mr. Wilbert Danner, Administrative Supervisor of Inmate Programs Faith-Based and Volunteer Services, who encouraged the viability of this project, and To Ms. Isabelle Klier-Graham, Unit Supervisor for embracing the project with opened arms and for being a titan while making this project a reality.

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This work is dedicated to my readers. I hope it will spark interest in this valuable work.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the book, *Theatre in Prison, Theories and Practices*, editor Michael Balfour argues that when working in a prison environment the practitioners should be moved by “passion, surprise, and doubt”<sup>1</sup> These I will say are the fundamental forces that led me to this work. Passion is the force that imbues my soul. Doubt engenders change and it is the source of my questioning. I spent numerous days and nights thinking about what I was doing, and foremost, why I was doing it. But these three forces, especially the passion that this work aroused in me, were enough to validate the importance of my quest for social advocacy. I had some moments of doubt, but independently and most important was the need to search for justice: the justice that fills my heart. After all, this work is about leaving legacy. Leaving something meaningful behind; something that will positively impact others and that can provide them with a roadmap for change. I did not intend to do the work of a social worker, therapist, or psychologist: instead, I approached this work from the position of a theatre practitioner with a focus on social advocacy. I will continue this work for as long as I have the strength and drive.

My interest in social justice began early in my life. From defending others from being bullied to sharing my lunch with those with hunger, to offering my home for social gatherings. My home was always the meeting place and we all received complete support from my parents. As I grew older, I continued to work with developing communities such as orphanages in hopes of providing help and a place where their voices could be shared.

In this thesis, I intend to reclaim the work once abandoned with an open mind and a warm heart. As an advocate for social justice, I am pursuing my passion towards equality and community as a group of people who work together towards a common goal of justice and equal rights. This passion led me to decide to base my thesis on my work with female inmates. The work aims to cross frontiers traveling outside the confined space of one jail -- as a project that can positively impact society and will certainly enlighten humanity towards gaining self-understanding, which is at the apex of a recovering world, the one an altruist envisions.

The United States of America correctional system does not provide alternatives other than to be judged and to be locked-up. The roots are not being examined. Economy is the main force that drives this system based on punishment. In subsequent chapters, I will examine several correctional theories and will provide facts that supports my claim that the economy drives this system based on punishment. I will discuss the economics of punishment. Moreover, I will discuss the performativity of punishment in order to attach the notion that punishment is (could be) performative to the field theatre.

For *Planting Seeds: Life Stories of Awakening Self-Awareness*, I worked in the confined walls of a jail with a group of females who were incarcerated in a correctional facility located in Orange County, Florida. After meeting with Lisa Klein-Graham, Unit Supervisor and Captain Malik Muhammad, Security Operation Division Hostage Team Coordinator, and because of scarcity of time and space, the workshop had to be

conducted during a four weeks period. Its purpose, as I pointed out earlier, was to examine the effect that story telling can have on the lives of inmates, with the overall aim to investigate the transformative power of theatre. The workshop intended, to quote Judge José Rodriguez, Orange County Judge for the State of Florida “to chart these females’ journey into themselves; to pull out what may save them as well as what must be cast out and that holds them back.” During these workshops, it was my hope that the participants could find Poetic Justice – by culminating one moment of their journeys and restoring their self-esteem, and ultimately awakening to a happier life. This type of work has been the subject of study of theatre practitioners and theorists, sociologists, drama therapists, psychologists and others who have devoted their efforts to prison theatre. It has proven to be effective and we find evidence in theatre groups such as *Shakespeare Behind Bars* (SBB)<sup>2</sup>, *The Actors’ Gang*<sup>3</sup>, created by actor Tim Robins, *Prison Performing Arts*<sup>4</sup>, and *Poetic Justice Project*<sup>5</sup>, to mention a few. While each one of these endeavors is essentially different, hitherto they aim towards the same: assuring that this population receives the right to be heard and the opportunity to reintegrate themselves into society.

Using the ideas of community- a feeling of mutual welfare- and the concepts of social justice, and equality as a lens and by contemplating questions derived from my experience and observation of various communities, I have worked with, I will examine, how the participants’ interpersonal transaction can potentially improve through-out the process? How is a community built? Will these females’ social interactive skills within a community increase? Will they fully engage in the work? To evaluate the process and the

results, I used two measurements: observation and data collection. For the first, I observed the inmates sharing personal stories with one another. I examined the participants' commitment and responsibility to the work by asking them to write on their own time and bring their writings to class. I documented the effectiveness of theatre in institutions by asking the women to write comments on their experience at the end of the workshop. I will share those comments in the conclusion of this thesis.

The Crime and Justice Institute initiatives research regarding the use of evidence-based practice in prisons states that “models for integrating principles of ... organizational change, and collaboration ... reduce offender risk and subsequent recidivism and therefore make a positive long-term contribution to public safety.”<sup>6</sup> This evidence-based practice can transform lives and consequently society. This practice has the potential to travel to other facilities and with other populations, such as incarcerated males and juvenile delinquents. It can reach out beyond institutionalized populations to any community in need of finding its maximum potential.

In this thesis, theatre as a valuable mechanism of support and transformative effectiveness was measured by documenting the participants' engagement, comments, and efforts throughout the process. The application of theatre techniques with confined communities, and any other communities outside of those walls, adds another avenue of support and exploration, which increase (beyond any reasonable doubt) self-awareness and ultimately produces change.

## Statistics

My interest in working with inmates, or any population that is enclosed, is fueled by the huge number of women, men, and children incarcerated in the United States. It is considered the nation that has the most incarcerated individuals in the world. Its justice system is based on punishment and not on rehabilitation. Prior to speaking about theatre in the prison system, I would like to provide a brief history of prisons and jails in the US and abroad. In the introduction of the *Encyclopedia of Prisons and Corrections*, editor Mary Bosworth claims that in the USA

[a]s an increasing number of men, women and children are being lock up ---- the prison, the jail, and the detention centers are becoming part of many people's lives. The collateral effect of incarcerating more than 2 million is enormous. Many of us now know someone behind bars. More than that, however, prisons are part of the collective cultural imagination.<sup>7</sup>

In this passage, the author posits a genuine concern. Looking at some statistics, it becomes clear that the prison situation is alarming. What alternatives, if any, do incarcerated individuals have to restore their lives? Is the system designed to provide rehabilitative opportunities, or is it just made to judge and punish? Are prisons in the United States becoming a business model? In the 1980s several prisons were privatized, beginning with the Hamilton County jail. Bosworth asserts that states' governments began to handle "entire penal establishments to private companies, first to run on their behalf, and soon ... to build as well"<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, the author asserts that businesses "underpin national webs of commerce, particularly in the economically fragile hinterland, as well as global markets that spreads far beyond the country's borders"<sup>9</sup>. I argue as well that the United States economy, besides individuals' taxation, has been built upon wars

and punishment. In the same way prisons are businesses for profit. The businesses' costs are transferred to taxpayers, which in the end are the ones carrying the weight of the government's affairs. Rehabilitation is clouded, and orchestrated by corporate bureaucracy and greed.

In the *Encyclopedia of American Prisons*, editors Marilyn McShane and Frank P. Williams III echo these concerns by stating that “over one million people are incarcerated ... [t]he money spent exceeds that allocated to higher education in many states”<sup>10</sup>. For me, as a theatre artist concerned with education, this data is alarming. It is almost impossible to rehabilitate or create self-esteem or self-awareness in any community without education. Further, Mc Shane and Williams III claim that in the next ten years the amount of prisons will increase by the 100s and consequently, the moneys allocated will also increase. Why is it that in this self-proclaimed most “advanced” country in the world, hunger permeates and poverty walks the streets like a neighbor in the house? How come no solutions are found other than to incarcerate people? Money is at stake. It is known that wars provide a huge influx to the USA economy; equally, I argue that prisons are part of this scheme. In the voice of Mc Shane and Williams III, “prisons continue to haunt ... [the] American dream”<sup>11</sup>. In the correctional facility in which I worked, the inmates must pay \$2.50 a day for they stay. They call it “the rent.”

The latest population survey conducted in 2014 by the *Bureau of Justice Statistics* (BJS) indicates that the incarcerated population amounted to approximately 6.5 million. Lauren

E. Glaze and Danielle Kaeble, BJS Statisticians report that the number of females under the jurisdiction of the state or federal prisons grew by 21% between 2000 and 2010, compared to about a 15% increase in the number of male prisoners.<sup>12</sup> In addition to the increasing number of females who are incarcerated, statistics show that white males were the population with the least increase; On June 30, 2006, an estimated 4.8% of black men were in prison or jail, compared to 1.9% of Hispanic men and 0.7% of white men. More than 11% of black males -between the ages of 25 to 34- were incarcerated. Black women were incarcerated in prison or jail at nearly four times the rate of white women and more than twice the rate of Hispanic women.<sup>13</sup> In accordance with data from the BJS site, a slight number of adults incarcerated in the United States decreased in 2014. Although a minimal number of inmates decreased in 2014, scholars and theorists still believe that the United States needs to come up with another form of rehabilitation that will produce reorienting results. As it is, recidivism is persistent. Bosworth emphatically avers that

[a]t year-end 2008, the U.S. was incarcerating more than 2.4 million men, women, and children in 5000 or so institutions scattered around the country. Over one and a half million (1,595,034) ... [s]till other were incarcerated by immigration services or under military supervision. Though such figures are large, they pale by comparison with the far greater number of people who move in and out of penal institutions over the course of each year.<sup>14</sup>

The prison population is still growing. The questions I posit are: what can the arts, and specifically theatre, do for this population? How can we create for a productive space for self-awareness for these females who are incarcerated, and how can we provide them with an opportunity for change that will help to reduce recidivism? According to the data from the BJS, “[a]mong state prisoners released in 30 states in 2005— About two-thirds (67.8%) of released prisoners were arrested for a new crime within 3 years, and three-

quarters (76.6%) were arrested within 5 years. Within 5 years of release, 82.1% of property offenders were arrested for a new crime, compared to 76.9% of drug offenders, 73.6% of public order offenders, and 71.3% of violent offenders. More than a third (36.8%) of all prisoners who were arrested within 5 years of release were arrested within the first 6 months after release, with more than half (56.7%) arrested by the end of the first year. Two in five (42.3%) released prisoners were either not arrested or arrested once in the 5 years after their release. A sixth (16.1%) of released prisoners were responsible for almost half (48.4%) of the nearly 1.2 million arrests that occurred in the 5-year follow-up period. An estimated 10.9% of released prisoners were arrested in a state other than the one that released them during the 5-year follow-up period. Within 5 years of release, 84.1% of inmates who were age 24 or younger at release were arrested, compared to 78.6% of inmates ages 25 to 39 and 69.2% of those age 40 or older.”<sup>15</sup>

Looking at these statistics, I question whether the current system works.

Common ground to all the artists, theorists, guards, and scholars who are referenced in the *Theatre in Prison, Theory and Practice* book, is the understanding that we are working in dangerous places, not only because of the population therein, but also because of the systematic policies needed to circumvent the system and to obtain a “visa” to get inside, as Paul Heritage categorized it<sup>16</sup>. In my heart, there is hope for Poetic Justice, a notion that is hanging from a thin thread between my artist’s consciousness and the confined rigid walls of a prison or jail. This “visa” is a devil’s advocate license. Per Balfour, it can open the doors to the rigidity of the space, but can also curb the creative

process of theatre and performance. He further cites scholar Baz Kershaw <sup>17</sup> who writes that "... the theatre practitioner is often forced into a duplicitous position, caught on "a knife edge between resistance to, and incorporation into, the status quo" of the criminal system."<sup>18</sup> Artists are there as visitors -- intruders who are being carefully watch. They become prisoners. Balfour avers that the prison practitioner needs to appear to be beneficial. In his words:

the language used to justify artistic activities in prison becomes functional, for example drama may become "social skills"; performance may become 'life-skill rehearsal'; the arts are justified as tools of the prison to increase self-esteem and team-building – everything must be justified in pragmatic, physical terms. <sup>19</sup>

The language used in the proposal that I submitted to enter the unbending walls of a Florida correctional facility was a language that seems to be hanging between my inner reality and the outside reality of politics. The correctional world is hardheaded; results need to be measurable and specific. The language I used had to be understood by the prison administrators, supervisors, and guards in control. After many revisions and reviews of my proposal by the jail administrators, the decision was made to amend the original intent of my project, changing the focus from life-stories that the incarcerated woman would write as part of the proposed work to more general creative stories. For the correctional facility that I was proposing to work in, this new language seemed to protect the well-being of the incarcerated, particularly their mental status.

## CRIMINOLOGY

Before discussing the details of *Planting Seeds*, I will review some of the criminology theorems that govern the criminal system. As Balfour emphasizes, the theatre practitioner must consider the development of criminology theories to picture what and where we, as artists, are entering. These theories attempt to understand the reasons underneath criminal behavior, which accordingly are political, financial, and, biological deterrents. <sup>20</sup>

The question as to where a theatre practitioner fits within the discourse of criminology is at the core of this thesis. As Balfour points out, the practitioners will be seen having a certain point of view, and “will be judged as operating from a particular theoretical viewpoint” <sup>21</sup>. In my view, I am entering with a carefully crafted skepticism about working with people who are incarcerated, a view construed by those narratives presented in the media, books, and other common narratives. However, and most important, I entered this dominion with a humanistic and honest concern for the welfare of this population and a social justice perspective, which is at the center of my theatre practice and expertise -- a point of view that may present a challenge in the eyes of the criminal institution. The evidence of this tension is the time that it took to get this work approved. I spent almost five months of exchanging information with the correctional facility administrators, debating on what to include in the proposal and what language could be understood. This language I needed to use so that the facility administrators would understand the work I was proposing. This language was dancing between the intersection of the criminal justice system and my own desire to work with a group of

inmates to have them write compelling stories. After months of patiently waiting, the workshop was approved on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January of 2017. The waiting period was exhausting and I could not comprehend the reasons the administrators had for not accepting the work I volunteered to produce since all over the world artists have been creating amazing narratives with inmates and producing exceptional results. Those questions found answers in politics and economics. Perhaps for the criminal justice system they are justified, but not for an artist trying to bring out the voices of those silenced and under constant surveillance. After all, it is not a matter of punishment alone, we need to seek alternatives and what better way than to give the inmates a productive space full of trust and care where they can express themselves, which will conceivably foster their process of self-understanding and recovery. In *Performing New Lives Prison Theatre*, editor Jonathan Shailor mentions that Curt L Tofteland, the creator of the program Shakespeare Behind Bars (SBB) at the Luther Lockett Correctional Complex (LLCC), made a significant impact. Through the programing he was changed Warden Larry Chandler perceptions on the effect that theatre in prison programs have on inmates. Tofteland writes that after witnessing the program the warden attested that he now “believes it was programs, and not punishment, that changed the human heart.”<sup>22</sup>

It is for this and other reasons that I analyzed those criminology theorems that inform us - the artist activists -- how the judicial system dicta the relationship between “what is right” and the “criminal” who breaks the established societal norms. In addition to discussing what Balfour and other experts in the field posed, I will briefly reference

author Jocelyn Pollock's<sup>23</sup> explanation of criminology based on how different male inmates are from female inmates as she writes in the book *Women's Crimes, Criminology and Corrections*. I will also discuss perspectives of other female writers, Frances Bernat, *Gender and Law* abstract, and Stephanie S. Covington & Barbara E. Bloom, *Gendered Justice: Addressing Female Offenders*. Following this discussion, I will briefly discuss several criminology theorems in hopes they can help those theatre practitioners willing to enter confined places to understand the connection between how these theorems describe those who deviate from the established societal conduct and the reasons behind their actions, and the "whys" they are incarcerated. I will connect this discussion specifically to work in a jail in Orange County, Florida. In this thesis, I am exploring alternatives to recidivism; therefore, I must understand why the system is merely designed upon punishment instead of rehabilitation based on qualitative theorems and not individuals.

## CRIMINOLOGY THEOREMS

### Paradigms

Two paradigms persisted during the last 100 years of the study of criminology. Balfour calls them “the images of the criminal actor.”<sup>24</sup> In his book *The Use of Drama in the Rehabilitation of Violent Male Offender* he lists those “criminal actors” as one who is a debauchee and by his own will decides to break the “rules of consensus” and the other who is predisposed to commit crimes “by forces within or external to him or her, (for example, possessed by demons, psychologically ‘sick’ or hereditary criminal personality).”<sup>25</sup>

### Voluntarism

Classicism, conservatism, and humanistic reformism, according to Balfour are characterized by the belief of the willful offender- in other words the subject commits the crime on his or her own accord. Briefly, classicism definition of crime is based on a contractual agreement that maintains the social order and thus crime is a violation of the consensus.<sup>26</sup> Although Canals<sup>27</sup> in his essay *Dei Delitti e Delle Penne* (An Essay on Crimes and Punishment), claims that it can be traced to Cesare Baccaria, as the leading manifesto for the ideology of penal classicism, with a fundamental request for equality among all men as a major premise. Canals wrote:

[the] Classical School, true to its humanitarian origin, was instrumental in toning down the harshness of former punishments. Not only did it oppose the infliction of capital and infamous punishments on the ground that Man is possessed of an

inherent dignity which the State cannot violate, but it also restricted punishment to the culprit himself...<sup>28</sup>

Conservatism, in the eyes of Balfour, “differs from classicism ... and maintains that the social order is essentially a moral and traditional consensus ... and [the] threats to the social order may be considered a crime.”<sup>29</sup>

The following is an abstract from the *Criminology Theory: Context and Consequences* book published in The National Criminal Justice Reference Service website which presents us with a different view:

A review of early efforts to explain criminal behavior focuses on attempts to posit crime causes in individuals: in their souls, their wills, or their bodily constitution. These theories were followed by theories which reasoned that crime causes were not rooted in individuals but in the characteristics of the socioeconomic system. Some scholars asserted that the seeds of crime were in the fabric of slum life; others reasoned that the very nature of American society was criminogenic.<sup>30</sup>

The fundamental argument, explains Balfour, is “that the proper amount of punishment is enough to deter crime.”<sup>31</sup> Regarding the humanistic reform, he claims the same opinion as the aforementioned; in addition, Balfour claims that, “an act of crime breaks a social contract and as a result society has the right to redress the wrong-doing”<sup>32</sup>.

### Positivism

Both Canals and Balfour state that positivism regards the individual’s behavior as determined by internal and external factors. Canals claims that “the individual plays the major role in the judicial tragedy; therefore, his personality should be the main concern of

criminal science.”<sup>33</sup> Central to the theory of positivism is the point of view that the individual is born rather than made. However, a more modern view adds another layer: the individual development.<sup>34</sup>

### Social Democratic Positivism

Although this theory holds a specific view on behavior, it adds the external forces that moves the individual to behave in a certain manner. Balfour claims that part “of a widespread ... consensus [is] that one of the causes of crime was impoverished social conditions.” In addition, the theory holds that crimes are rooted in poverty, deprivation, and absence of education and that those who commit crimes are victims of poverty, lack of hope, alienation, family disorganization, racism, and other social problems.<sup>35</sup> These theories have evolved making no individual alike and adding multiple causes for derailment. Balfour adds, “it is ... a function of a varied number of social, psychological, or environmental factors, with not two sets of factors ... exactly alike.”<sup>36</sup>

### Female Gender

Scholar Jocelyn Pollock, explains that these criminal theorems present bias because they are construed through the lens of masculine behavior. She claims that much critiques of conventional criminology exists among feminist activists who claim that such stereotypes make no justice to females, who by the same bias are categorized as docile, submissive, and less prone to commit crimes than males are. Pollock avers that “... early theorists confused stereotypes with facts ... accepting time and culture specifics views of women,

minorities, and economic class as truth.”<sup>37</sup> The word [fe]male by itself is a schemed status. It is composed of the prefix [fe] and the adjective male.

Beside this possible disparity as presented by Pollack, females are treated differently than males in the face of the law. Accordingly, author Frances Bernat, in *Gender and Law* abstract, states that despite “the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, coupled with equal rights amendments in many State constitutions ... Judges with broad discretion in sentencing continue to mete out different sentences to male and female defendants convicted of the same type of crime.”<sup>38</sup> Studies found, she continues that although males are harshly sentenced for more serious crimes, females get harder sentences for *petite*, or less serious offenses. Male inmates tend to be released earlier (perhaps for the overcrowded population, she claims) than females. The author goes on to assert that:

States have recently begun to confine or punish women for certain behaviors during pregnancy. In some States, a woman can be confined (hospitalized) under court order if the court determines that she is not taking care of herself during her pregnancy, such that the fetus may be harmed. Women may also be criminally prosecuted as child abusers for taking drugs in their third trimester of pregnancy. The invidiousness of gender bias in the legal system is in the perpetuation of traditional female gender roles that fail to take into account the realities of women's lives in patriarchal social and legal systems.<sup>39</sup>

In *Gendered Justice: Addressing Female Offenders*, authors Stephanie S. Covington & Barbara E. Bloom, remind us that “[u]ntil recently, criminological theory and research focused on explaining male criminality, with males seen as the normal subjects of

criminology. Historically, theories of female criminality have ranged from biological to psychological and from economic to social.”<sup>40</sup>. These authors suggest that reviewing female circumstances can improve the wellbeing of these females. They conclude that:

A review of women’s life circumstances and of the backgrounds of female offenders in the system makes clear that there are more effective ways to prevent and address women’s criminality than are currently in use. Criminal justice practice could be improved by addressing women’s pathways into the criminal justice system, their differences in offense patterns from the patterns of male offenders, their experiences in the criminal justice system, and their responses to programs.<sup>41</sup>

Pollock posits a genuine question, “... why assume that a theory must have perfect predictive powers?<sup>42</sup> How can we generalize a predisposition to any behavior? A mix of variances is displayed when dealing with criminals (as categorized in the judicial system) behavior. Race, gender, and socio-economical variances are at stake. These theorems as presented in this study, do not give justice to these variances. Their posture is universal treating every individual the same, independently of their circumstances. It is an archetype in criminology theories. As Pollock, further argues “[t]his paradigm colors the exploration of the criminal theory: ... a theory must ... explain all behavior ... otherwise is not a valid explanation of all behavior.”<sup>43</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Independently of all criminal theorems, what is at stake is that the criminal justice system is based on punishment and not rehabilitation. Focusing on the performative aspect of the criminal system, James Thompson states that the “criminal justice system is, ... a space that has a complex relationship to performance ... prison and punishment are performative.”<sup>44</sup> It is tied to economics and power. It pleases the populace and makes those in power win their trust., and moreover, in modern times, their votes. Agreeing with his position, I will present several examples of this kind of performativity, which will support his contention. For example, the Roman Empire is a historical period that has been well documented and that colors this notion of punishment as performative. During the Roman Empire (27 BC to 476 AD), gladiators fought to death, Christians were killed, and offenders were the spectators’ bliss . It was a mere feast. In the arena, the spectacle of “justice” and punishment joined efforts to entertain the audience. This kind of spectacle offers evidence for what Thompson claims: the criminal system is made of performance and it grew to be the performance of punishment. The human satisfaction is paired with what the system qualified as justice, or I would take it further, as merely a spectacle of punishment. The satisfaction that punishment produces can be explicitly seen when ceremoniously a prisoner, sentenced to death, is executed in front of others. This can be seen as both acts of performance and justice; henceforth, a gory justice is served. Civilization have changed the cruel characteristics of the Roman Empire system of justice; however; it is still pleasurable for some to see how others show their judicial

power through execution. In modern times, when a prisoner is sentenced to death and then executed, there are invitees, spectators called witnesses to the murder.

The article, *1757: Robert Francois Damiens, disciplined and punished* references the book by philosopher Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment, The Birth of the Prison*, in which the author vividly recounts an execution that happened in France on the 2nd of March 1757, and presents us with a clear spectacle of punishment. The executed, Robert-Francois Damiens, was the last victim of the horrible practice of “drawing and quartering” according to Headsman’s article published in the ExecutedToday.com. The condemned was sentenced to this horrific punishment for attempting to murder Louis XV, although the latter just experienced a shallow dagger cut. According to the article, Foucault in *Discipline and Punishment*, described the spectacle as following:

On 2 March 1757 Damiens the regicide was condemned ‘to make the amende honorable before the main door of the Church of Paris\*, where he was to be ‘taken and conveyed in a cart, wearing nothing but a shirt, holding a torch of burning wax weighing two pounds’; then, ‘in the said cart, to the Place de Grève, where, on a scaffold that will be erected there, the flesh will be tom from his breasts, arms, thighs and calves with red-hot pincers, his right hand, holding he knife with which he committed the said parricide, burnt with Sulphur, and, on those places where the flesh will be torn away, poured molten lead, boiling oil, burning resin, wax and Sulphur melted together and then his body drawn and quartered by four horses and his limbs and body consumed by fire, reduced to ashes and his ashes thrown to the winds’<sup>45</sup>.

We may argue that this passage agrees or disagrees with Thompson’s theory that prison and punishment are performative; still, we must concur on the spectacle nature of punishment. We could also mention examples of bloodletting performances in the burning of witches, the hanging of blacks in the South, the electrocuted prisoners in those

states, like Texas, and presently Florida, which still practice the death penalty. Thompson further claims that the rehabilitative system uses theatre techniques of:

rehearsal, public presentations, and role play” ... [and] by analyzing a practice that uses many of the theoretical and discursive markers adopted by prison theatre ... while ... operating within a system that is strongly retributive, the fine line between theatre in prison and punishment as performance can be explored.<sup>46</sup>

The history of punishment shows that the exercising of public condemnation was both Thompson continues, “actual and symbolic”<sup>47</sup> and attempted to have an impact on the audience. Further, Thompson co-relates two streams, “the liveliness of the historical death penalties enactments, and the liveness of the theatre project that invites the public into prisons to witness prisoners in plays.<sup>48</sup> He further argues ‘that prison theatre is allowed and then understood within the wider performances of punishment.<sup>49</sup> I argue that it is important for me, and for the theatre practitioner wanting to enter the rigidity of the prisons’ walls to understand that performance has been inherently present in the criminal justice system and that by using performance and presenting alternatives through theatre, we can change the focus from punishment to rehabilitation. Exploring historical views on how punishment directly relates to theatre may broaden the views of those wishing to pursue this kind of transformative work.

A judicial case broadcast in Florida that mirrors the theory of punishment as spectacle is *The State of Florida vs Casey Anthony*. The television station ratings skyrocketed, people made lines to get into the court, the court session was bursting with the audience in jouissance expectation waiting for justice to be served, and Casey Anthony became the circus star. And moreover, following all the media coverage and public expectations

waiting for the verdict, Casey Anthony was acquitted. Is that not performative? This is a case that supports Thompson's assertion that the "best performances have conflict, tension, strangers and demons, and this is therefore what the politicians and commentators offer."<sup>50</sup>

The performance that exists in a prison or a jail is conducted by those who set the rules. Inmates need to abide by the rules in a constant staged mode of the life therein. For example, Balfour states that, the life of the juveniles detained in the *Marlin Orientation and Assessment Center in Texas*, where Thompson conducted his research:

... have to do as they are told and not question it. All have their heads shaved, crew cut army style. All are given bright orange smock top and loose-fitting orange trousers. They all have to march in single file everywhere they go, with their hands tied behind their backs (added from p. 67: this is supposedly so they "couldn't wage gang signs) and their chins touching their chests.<sup>51</sup>

For Thompson, the institution de-individualized [detainees] by "strip[ping] the self ... and then re-socializ[ing] it..."<sup>52</sup> Independently of whether there is a juvenile, a female, or a male inmate, the same may occur. They must walk in lines, dress the same, act the same. Thompson avows that the most utilized rehabilitation intervention strategies are "in some form of cognitive behavioral".<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, Thompson asks "[d]o theatre projects turn the objective of rehabilitation into a performance of justice being done, or do they, 'contribute' to the process of rehabilitation?"<sup>54</sup> Behind "was a performance of brutal, numbing control".<sup>55</sup> It is my belief that theatre in prison should release the pain, not increase it. The foundation of the correctional system in the USA is rooted in that the criminal needs to be judged and he or she has committed a crime, thus is a bad citizen. As

the Conservatism Theorem, which supports the status quo, theorizes that their derailment leaves no other possible remedy than the use of punishment.

To enter the rigid walls of a correctional facility -the performative stage, the play that we will be taking part of, the game that the correctional system has become, the theatre practitioner -- who is willing to bring alternatives for rehabilitation -- needs to understand the historical development of the system called Criminology. Not only does he or she need to understand the presumptions under which it operates, but they also need to know how to circumvent it. The theorems presented in the introduction may serve as a framework for what he or she will be facing. The language, the “visa” to enter the walls also needs to be understood. These premises will either help us succeed or make us just a puppet of the system. In the end, all we want is to understand the reason for their behavior; the unconscious or conscious reasons for being incarcerated, the whys, the impulses, the motives for their actions. Whether it is based in the Classicist theory of the willful offender; the breaking of the social contract; or in the Positivism theory according to which “the individual plays the major role in the judicial tragedy, therefore his personality should be the main concern of criminal science.”<sup>56</sup> These individuals have the right to be heard. Even if it is under the latter view of Positivism, which further stresses the notion that crime is a result of cause and effect of environmental influences [I will add that is a momentum of place and time], the essential idea is to help this population find within themselves what caused them to derail in hopes of making significant changes in their life that will result in opportunities to incorporate themselves

back to society. As a theatre artist, I can only help them find those causes for themselves. In the process of writing their life stories, not only the inmates can find solution and perhaps closure to issues that may be impeding their full realization, but also the criminal system will find alternatives for rehabilitation that can lead to reducing recidivism.

## THE BEGINNINGS

This thesis work began with my desire to do something different and of value. Most importantly, leaving my legacy. I believe that when something is there and ready to be, it will happen if we passionately wish and quest for it. It was not a coincidence, more of causation that Judge Jose (Pepito) Rodriguez and I met at a Spanish Theatre workshop in downtown Orlando on a rainy Saturday morning on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of April back in 2016. We both got there very early and, as if we were two people who have been friends for many years, we just began conversing. Once in the theatre, we found out our mutual relishes: he as a Judge who had work with juveniles using theatre as a mechanism of support, and I as a theatre artist who was wanting to use those well-developed theatre skills to create compelling stories with inmates. It was truly a fortune, a bash of serendipity. After that day and for the next four months, we continued brainstorming the project: where could I work? What space will be available, and furthermore, accepting the idea of creating life stories with the inmates housed in their correctional facilities. On a bright day in August, I received a call from Judge Pepito letting me know that he got in contact with Mr. Wilbert Danner, Administrative Supervisor of Inmate Programs Faith-Based and Volunteer Services, at the correctional facility known as the 33<sup>rd</sup>, who showed interest in housing the project. And on an even perkier day, precisely on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September 2016, Judge (Pepito) Rodriguez, Mr. Danner, and I met at the Citrus Club in downtown Orlando. Over a dining table at the 18<sup>th</sup> floor of the Citrus Club, Judge Pepito, Mr. Danner, and I, blessed the project and the *Seeds* began to sprout.

Thinking all was settled, my future work started to take shape as I happily began to put my thoughts in place. I developed the program I thought was going to soon begin. But life sometimes can take turns and multiple obstacles began to appear. Getting inside the system is a game of power and someone always has to have control over the process. It took the additional five more months to get inside the constrained walls of the jail- back and forth emails; breaking through the words in the proposal, and writing it according to their standard. The major predicament was the use of “life stories” -- whether sharing their “life” stories will cause the inmates to have emotional episodes, etcétera, etcétera. Lastly, it was concluded to change the words “life stories” to “creative stories” to avoid these females have a fractious behavior. Sharing their life stories, the realities of their actions, the administrators argued can cause the inmates to recall dark moments that can emotionally hurt them. Instead, they continued to contend that if they just wrote creative stories out of their imagination they might be shielded from emotional distress. Those so called emotional episodes never happened as intensely as the jail personnel predicted. There were some harsh instances, but the power of the environment, sealed with love and the trust, the one I created throughout the process (mostly, by allowing them to talk without judgment) calmed the tensions and the workshop ran beautifully. It went beyond my expectations.

The product created was the work I initially intended – to write their life stories, their inner distresses, including writing stories of things that happened to them as a result of their upbringing, or choices made throughout the course of their lives, which possibly led

to their confinement. The inmates wrote poems, raps, short and long stories about themselves with a touch of imagination. Moreover, to conclude the workshop, they wrote reflections attesting to the values of the work. I edited the stories and converted them into an Ethnodrama script created from historical data, comments from others, inmates' reflections, and some of my notes taken throughout the project. The comments, personal notes, and historical data will be heard in the voice of a character name *Editor*, *Narrator*, *Judge*, *Guard*, *People*, and *Reporter*. Chapter four of this thesis will offer the Ethnodrama script titled, *The Play*.

One important change, a highlighted achievement was not only that inmates were introduced to this work but so too were the prison officials, who dictated what can or cannot be done inside their domain. In the process, they were challenged to think differently. They understood that what I do as an artist proves vital in helping individuals find those inner obstacles allowing them to change. In the thank you letter I received from by Ms. Isabelle Klier-Graham she said, "programs like yours are so important to restore broken communities and their positive outcome on society as a whole are often underestimated." I was invited to conduct other workshops. Despite the change from life-stories to creative stories, once the workshop began, in the language of the inmates' stories it became evident that they were willing and eager to talk about themselves. Some fiction was created, as for example a short story called *Nudist Hippies*, but the majority of their writing spoke about their inner wounds within the context of an imagined realm.

To protect the identity of the females, I used pseudonyms chosen at some point because of their physical appearance and sometimes based on their character. There are: *GoldJ*, *PlayfulS*, *CoolJez*, *RedR*, *RosieTea*, *RootK*, *RaisingA*, *Sunshine*, *LovableL*, and *Onyx*. To the best of my knowledge and capability, I made sure these pseudonyms were not traceable. They were discussed and all agree to be named this way. *Lovable L* left the workshop at an early stage, I believe by the second week, because [ironically] in her words she was making “too much money to listen to sad stories.” On their own accord, these inmates began questioning the reasons why they were incarcerated and how they wish they had made other choices. *Sunshine* wrote:

It’s really hard to think clearly enough to write stories or poems in jail. It makes me upset because I used to write really good poetry in High School. I miss being in high school, I miss being younger. Why did I make the choices that put me here? I had so much potential and I acted as if it didn’t mean anything to me.

The above lines reflect that the work is vital. These females, ranging from 20 to 50 years old, are searching for the reasons they derailed and are observing themselves from the inside out. They are confined because of systematic oppressions and because of an instant that changed their lives. Without judgment, I brought them an opportunity to search and move inside their inner selves through the medium of storytelling and story writing. *Sunshine* was released shortly after the workshop began. I am not able to continue reading her prose and poetry. I hope she finds what she is yearning for.

## ENTERING THE WALLS

*There is a community of the spirit*

*Join it, and feel the delight*

*Of walking in the noisy street*

*And being the noise*

*Drink all your passion...*

~Rumi

The focus of this thesis project is on facilitating the inmates' process of writing poetry, raps, and stories about themselves, and along the way, finding comfort through this workshop. Therefore, and with due respect to my readers, I found it necessary to add my own poetry. In the next chapter, the academic language is adorned with my thoughts in the form of free verse. Using the idea of poetic license, I converted into stanzas some of the words spoken by the lead guard -- in convergence with my thoughts -- while listening to the correctional restrictions and rules. Those stanzas will appear as well later in the play.

After five months of negotiating the language of my proposal, I entered the jail and began the work. I had to postpone my thesis writing and defense because of the time it took to gain entrance. Furthermore, a training was mandated before I could start the work. On said day, I walked into the training with great expectations. The first thing that caught my attention, beside the huge spiral metal rings, the barbed wires, the razor wires on top and bottom of the fences, was the requirements to let us in, the enumerated restrictions,

specially: not to [even] smile at the inmates (?). I wonder, how can we create rapport in an unknown space? Independently if we agreed or not, those were the commands.

*Our world can become static. Immobile. Dry.*

*Awaked.*

*Door slam.*

*Wires towering from the sky*

*I am in.*

*In where? In a dream. In the imaginary world of a jail. The one thought influenced by the media. By corporate's interest. The one that got me so concerned. Now I feel safe. Mental genocide.*

*Cooling,*

*puffing,*

*dreaming*

*smiling*

*alive.*

*In with them. Equality entangled in their own world, in my own mind. Freedom is an illusion is a metaphor said many times. Nada Nuevo se dice. All repeat. La carne se enfria allí, la vida pasa sin dejar de pasar. Life is stagnation inside... a mole a seed a parasite a vampire. Mental genocide.*

*Let's make the impossible, Sancho Panza<sup>57</sup>*

*Change. Charge.*

*Embiste como toro acorralado*

*I am an altruist thanks to oppression.*

### Mandatory Training

The rigidity of entering the cold, discolored, brownish brick walls.

After passing through the beeping scanner a group of volunteers and I entered an open space with tall fences with barbed wire. We stopped for a one-time authorized bathroom break. We sat in the lobby with the lead guard, heads counted multiple times. “All right, let’s get to work” said he. The volunteers and I entered a mechanical door. Beige. We continued through a hall that took us to another heavy metal door. We crossed it and another heavy metal door was waiting inside. Double doors. Heavy and painful. We walked through a hall,” walk on the right side”, said he, but no one did. We all walked looking to the sides and to him and to one-another. We entered a large room that smelled as if they had, recently, attempted to clean it. Yet the odor was not pleasant. It smelled something between disinfectant and mildew. Wet and rot. The rugs, a brownish dirty color. The seats resembling those of a rural church. He stood on the podium. A booklet was passed on. We were asked to go to the booklet section – *Volunteer and Service Provider Handbook*. Beside the lead correctional guard on the podium, there were two other guards standing tall on each of his sides

*Watching.*

After, three signature paper logs to record our names, a provider agreement was passed specifying that we will need to abide by the correctional rules. No cell phones, no technology, even smart watches (modern times) were prohibited. And prohibitions began.

And the training began. A Lieutenant stepped up to a computer and turned on the big screen at the front of the room to begin a power point. First slide “Welcome to Orange County Corrections Department Volunteer and Service Provider.” The lights were dimmed. Still quite bright.

“Security issues. How long until I enter the facility”, I thought.

*Pen cutting tool.*

*Dangerous.*

*Inmate manipulation They will test you.*

*Be fair but consistent.*

*Stay in your box, stay in your lane.”*

*The officer ruled, “if no, is no”, he said.*

*“What happens in county jail stays in county jail.” He joked.*

*“Street smart, we cannot compete at that level.” He added.*

*Really?*

*“Can’t put a smile on your face... they will fish for weakness.”*

Truly misguided. At least what I experienced was different. I met a group of kind, educated women who were trapped in their own narratives. Perhaps this is not the norm, but this is my experience, or is it the way I see things? (Poetic license concluded.)

## THE WORK

Contrary to statistics that claim “[b]lack women are incarcerated in prison or jail at nearly 4 times the rate of white women and more than twice the rate of Hispanic women”<sup>58</sup> I was surprised to find a group of white females. In this place, the females were white except for Onyx, the only African American woman on the team. Once again, the narratives conceived by the media, the government, and the church disintegrated in front of my eyes. Perhaps this institution is outside the norm, but what I saw was not expected in any way. I thought that maybe they selected them this way, but looking at other wards, most of the population was white. Another surprise, a dear surprise, was when they began to write. I realized they were academically educated females. Some have attended college and earned their bachelor degree.

The workshop began with the usual meet and greet and with some of the inmates looking perplexed and others in distrust. Others played the teacher while still others were just there to be. I asked, what do you think a Puerto Rican female with an accent is doing here? I do not recall any answer; the question was a rhetorical one. It was just an opening statement to let them know my roots. One thing it did cause was laughter. I thought, “a good first impression is always opportune.” We played the game I call *Show Me your Name with a Movement* and then repeated everyone’s name and movement. On the first day, we mostly played games to build team and trust not only between them and I, but between themselves. As one said, “I have not interacted with any of these jailed girls before, I do not know them.” The first day went smooth, no issues to report.

The most important aspect of working with inmates, or with any group of individuals deprived of their basic rights of freedom and self-expression, is to create a space built upon trust and care. This is the first step toward a healthy partnership fundamental for the collective creative process. During the first week, all we did was get to know each other purposely and to create an environment that could set the workshop in motion.

Observation was the key to understanding where each of the inmates stood. Once a sense of team was created, I began asking them to tell and share stories, personal anecdotes and analyzing the facts of those stories. We created deliberations taking sides and defending each other's point of view. This exercise created a wonderful dynamic and they began to open up. In the name of fairness and for the sake of the female inmates (not to mention the constraints and rules of the jail asking to keep the females anonymous), much of what was said during these occurrences will be kept in confidence. I will share those stories they agreed in writing to be published as part of this thesis, and use their writing in any other way I deem appropriate, such as publishing the play, or converting the Ethnodrama script into an Ethnotheatre piece.

During one of these debates, I was confronted by RedR. She raised her hand and respectfully asked permission to ask a personal question. I agreed. She took some time choosing her words carefully and asked me if I was there because they were criminals. To this I responded that I was there in true honesty because I wanted to hear the side of their stories and broadcast them to the outside world. I also made sure they understood that we

are all trapped in some way or another. Most importantly, I was there to give them a space where they could give voice to their inner realities. RedR was the most doubtful participant of the group. She claimed to be a writer, yet she did not want to share her stories. However, she never missed a class. After I responded to her question, to our next meeting she brought a small, four lines poem and gave it to me. I noticed she was constantly writing, perhaps more than the others, but hid her work inside her notebook methodically closing it at the end of every class. By the end of the workshop, she had produced more stories, poems, and raps than the rest of the participants. She did not want the work to end and during graduation she said that when out she would not be *Planting Seeds*, she would be “planting trees, big trees.”

Another inmate that gave some resistance to write and participate in the work was Onyx. She was a rebel and had arguments with me and the other inmates. In one of the beginning exercises, *Walking the Space*, I asked them to walk with different attitudes including colors, speed, and personas. When walking like a Queen, I say to her “you walk like a real queen, tall with a beautiful demeanor.” She took it so wrong and said it was “not nice to pick on people and that I was picking on her.” All the other women stood by me, defending me as she was coming to close to me. The next class, she came in early and sat in her preferred space with her head half-way down to her neck. I did not address the issue -- did not find it healthy. She presented emotional troubles and I do not feel equipped to deal with them. Perceptions can be the source of misunderstanding and sometimes words, though unintentionally, can cause divergences among the group. Onyx

did not want to sign the copyright release form. Her stories will be missed in this document. She left the correctional institution before the commencement ceremonies.

To create a fructiferous writing atmosphere and to help them structure their writing, I started using prompts. As I recall, it happened at the end of the second week. The writing prompts were: *Here, There, Entangled, Dis-entangled*. To have the participants think on a more deeply level, and to have them reflect about their life, I used philosophical quotes from *Rigoberta Menchú, Aristotle, Anne Frank, Plato, and Buddha*. (These quotes will appear as the title of their narratives in the play). In addition, I used poems from *Rumi* to inspire some of their work. These were examples that helped them follow a writing format. For the *Collective Creation*, I used the well-known technique of writing one line on a piece of paper and passing it to the next writer, who in turn adds a written line and passes it on and so forth. Finally, they were asked to reflect on the philosophical quotes and other readings, which helped them to write their own realities.

This work went beyond my expectations. I went inside with eagerness and keenness hoping that I could inspire these female to write enough stories to create an Ethnodrama script. They wrote so many stories that the space on these pages cannot hold them all. At the end of every day, they gave me dozens of notes, which I arranged as monologues and sometimes as soliloquies, and dialogues, but, foremost, trying not to lose their writing's originality. The results were amazing. I ended up editing their stories and adding rhythm

and variety by mixing those intense stories with lighter ones in order to create movement and syncopation.

In the next chapter, *The Play*, you will read their stories; an infinite amount of information about these inmates, who are enclosed not only physically. I am sharing their stories in hopes they can bring some understanding about these females, as a group representative of incarcerated populations, beyond the obvious: that they are inmates. As well, my intention is that this work will provide a platform of opportunities to change misguided narratives about incarcerated populations perpetuated by the system through the media. Those narratives referring to the incapacity of the “criminal mind” to observe themselves, to look at other realities, and that they can change. Those perpetuated narratives are filled with bias and impediments to understand the inmate’s lives beyond appearances. Here are their stories: the results of this work called *Planting Seeds*.

## THE PLAY

By RedR, CoolJez, GoldJ, RosieTea, RookK, RaisingA, and PlayfulS  
Edited by AixaMe

The title of this Ethnodrama script is still in debate. I may title it *Planting Seeds*, or *Dramatizing the Dance*, *Dancing the Words*, or *The Play*. I am inclined to name it *The Play – Dancing the Words*. This title is hanging in my mind from an invisible filament.

This play is based on the female inmates' stories written during the workshop I facilitated in an Orange County jail zip code 32839. While all writings are original, in some cases, I added lines under the character's name Editor to set the tone or to establish the situation. I lightly edited a line or two of the stories, poems, raps, and reflections, added a title to others, and arranged them to resemble a monologist conversation at times and in others a moment on their own, perhaps a *soliloquio*. The lines are transcribed directly from the hand-written stories, poems, raps, and reflections as they were written, including all typos and any grammatical error such as missing comas, or misspelled words, which will be written in *italics*. I wanted to preserve their writing unbroken. Whenever they wrote their real name, a red line will appear instead. Whenever a word is unreadable a blue line will appear. The stories written are real life stories based on these female's experiences and in some, the writer added colorful imagination. Other sources were used to inspire the inmates to write; such as poems from Rumi, philosophical quotes, and prompts such as Here, There, Entangled and Dis-entangled. At the end of some of RaisingA's writing, she wrote a reflection on the day's experience. That reflection will appear at the end of her writings preceded by the capitalized word, NOTE.

I have created a world where all is happening at the same time or that one thing follows the preceding one. Where at times, the conscious speaks to the unconscious, where soliloquies and dialogues embrace each other. I am calling this work style - *Dramatizing the dance*. Each written piece will be accompanied by a choreographed dance. Through their writing, the woman within the prisoner will appear vulnerable in front of our eyes to let us know her real self, or her reality and further, her reasons, her predicaments. The inmates' actions may not be excusable in the eyes of the law, but their writing shows humanity. It shows us that there is a *Seed* that is yearning to sprout.

#### Stage directions

*At curtain, the stage is lit by electric candles held by each of the seven female actors shadowing their faces, and an eighth one sitting in darkness. In the background four curtains hang long coming out of the proscenium to the floor in front of the first line of seats. Behind the curtains, the shadow of eight dancers are seen in the same position as the actors on stage. They will move along with the actor(s) as they speak. When there is collective speech they all dance a mixture of classical Ballet, Modern Dance, and Afro Caribbean dance. The movements can agree with the words or be in contrapunto. On stage, there will be eight three-legged tall and skinny stools, seven forming two lines at each side of the stage and one center right. On the one center stage right, sits the other character (Editor, Narrator, Judge, Guard, People, Reporter, and etcétera) portrayed by one actor that must be quite versatile. The lighting... should be passionate at times, cold*

*at others... it needs to create a sense of stagnation... entrapment... cloudy... humid. This is an almost all-female cast, except for the one playing various male characters.*

### Prologue

The opening is a poem/rap written in collaboration between RedR and CoolJez. This poem was written at night when they were lying on their bunks. *They are sitting on the stools up-stage. Their faces lit by the flicker of electric candles. They are having a casual conversation back and forth. Behind the curtains, the dancers speak their words in movements.*

### *Untitled*

RedR – Silence is golden but duct tape is silver

CoolJez – Don't speak unless is the truth you can deliver.

RedR – Inside what lies are you *constricted*, inside what world do you feel secure?

CoolJez – Lying in transit with all these life lines blurred.

RedR – Keep up with your stories or your fault lines will be slurred.

CoolJez – Where do we go from here? Where to start?

RedR – Can we put ourselves together before we all fall apart? What do you see when you look inside your heart?

CoolJez – Trying to get back to a place we belong. A love we once had longed.

RedR – Searching everywhere for hope, longing for a love to cope this heavy slope.

CoolJez – How do I change the course of time seems I been searching forever in which to find.

RedR – Find the noise inside the silence, be the voice to stop the violence.

CoolJez – Depart from me sadness, let me become enveloped otherwise in the madness.

RedR – For truth is the letter to make the chaos better but denial will murder your smile, we must take the time to go the extra mile.

CoolJez – So be still hear my truth and tell me exactly what *ya* feel

RedR – For all you feel is all that is real so pick up the pen and begin to heal.  
Know that you can live a life where you don't need to steal.

CoolJez – And when the pain overwhelms let the rain wash you there your distain.

RedR – Just as in the shower your tears fall down the drain, lead a life that isn't so plain so you may be sane choose to live the game knowing that nothing will ever be the same.

In the next session, the writings are the product of a distinctive prompt. The first prompt I used was *Here*, followed by the next *Entangled* and finally by *Disentangled*.

*Here*

CoolJez – These stone walls and metal beds are hell. What if from the top bunk I felt? Would anybody care? As I'm stuck in here. Get me out is what I used to *beg*. But now just leave me alone the last thing I said. My mind was a prison, I thought, in itself, *But* this barbed-wire fence is now keeping me

out. Here behind these walls we are stuck in this place *cause* this is where the true trouble I have faced. Away from temptation away from my life.

RedR – Here is where my body is. Here is not where my mind is.  
Trap in a cage with so much rage. Here is a prison and I am a slave.

People

Places

Things

Here is unseen. Here is not clean. Here I scream.

But I rather be on a beach with my toes in the sand.

RaisingA – I'll give anything not to be on 33<sup>rd</sup>.

GoldJ – Why am I here, I'm trying to break free of this darkness, this endless void.  
When did my life become such an abyss?

RootK – Here is jail lots of emotions, c/o some are bitches then you have your *inhouse* snitches. Not a dull moment goes by when *your* trapped here inside, bunk to bunk side by side. Nothing but females nowhere to hide.  
Take one day at a time. Get out don't commit another crime *cause carma's* a bitch.

### *Entangled*

RedR – I am entangled in... the walls of jail. The chain link fences. The tangle of shackles. A good book. Anger. My hair. Nature. Smoke.

RaisingA – I am entangled in worry and anxiety, especially ... Thinking about what my p ... me, when I was only in ... she told me that if ... the minimum I

am facing is ... it'd bad enough to ... time here on 33<sup>rd</sup> – but ... to go down the road ... this change, the guilty *ones* property but not.

GoldJ – I am entangled in a web of complex thoughts feeling emotions. My mind is ingrained with the things I was taught as a child, don't speak ignore no communication was this wisdom or laziness *cause* I've always picked the wrong guy no matter how much I loved him or he loved me I knew it would end badly.

RootK – I am tangled up all in a molt. I feel like the in is so tight I can't breathe. I need to mutate so I can feel at ease. Close my eyes, take a deep breath, let the energy flow as you let go the weight on your shoulders will surely go and let ease with no pain.

RosieTea – I am entangled in, I feel twisted up and tied in knots.

CoolJez – I am entangled in this giant web of lies. Can't live like this anymore I decide. Save me from my own worst enemy. It's a sea of *self hatred* that bleed. I have done to myself for the healing to begun. What a new start could actually hold.

### *Dis-entangled*

RaisingA – I am disentangled out of it... I will be what I gain back.

RedR – This entangle me... my hands the lawyer *goo* 4 comb end as 2 book & pat

RootK – *Intangled* me out of handcuffs in chains. I will never commit another crime. My kids are grown up. They lost so much. They lost their mom to

drugs money hustle. I am so ashamed. Street life in fine wine. Spiraling out of control like a cheap *whole*. Rollin gin the dough.

GoldJ – I am disentangling myself from this hurtful destructive path.

RosieTea – I am now untangled. I am at peace of mind; my body is relaxed. I am deep in thought.

### Scene 1

*The male character speaks the next lines. He must switch on stage from one character to the other without any change other than his physicality and voice. (Perhaps a small prop, such as a handkerchief or hat). The same ritual will happen every time the male character sitting on the eighth stool portrays more than one character on stage.*

Editor – The “criminal justice system is, ... a space that has a complex relationship to performance ... prison and punishment are performative” says James Thompson author of *From the Stocks to the Stage Prison Theatre and the Theatre of Prison*. Considering history, specifically during the Roman Empire (27 BC to 476 AD) and the circus therein, gladiators fought to death, Christians were killed, and offenders were the spectators’ bliss. It was a mere feast. In the arena, the spectacle of justice and punishment came to turns. The human satisfaction is paired with what the system qualifies as justice, or better I would classify it as merely a spectacle of punishment. The satisfaction that punishment produced can be explicitly

seen while ceremoniously a prisoner sentenced to death is executed in front of others to see, henceforth, a gory justice is served.

*Changes to:*

TVAnchor – What alternatives, if any, do incarcerated individuals have to restore their lives? Is the system designed to provide choices or just to judge? Are prisons in the United States becoming a “for-profit” business model? These questions are explored by our correspondent, The Reporter.

*Changes to:*

The Reporter – The businesses’ costs of maintaining a prison are transferred to taxpayers, which in the end are the ones carrying the weight of the government’s affairs. In 2014, the last correctional population survey, the incarcerated amounted to approximately 6.5 million. A Bureau of Justice Statistics report informs that the number of females under the jurisdiction of state or federal prisons grew by 21% between 2000 and 2010, compared to about a 15% increase in the number of male prisoners.

### *The Rent*

CoolJez – In here,  
we pay \$2.50 per day.  
We call it the rent.  
What I want to say?  
How can I put on paper in words everything I should say?  
Not enough trees to make enough paper  
Or ink in pens  
I feel I can write for ever

The stuff I've seen  
The pain I been thru  
The memories I have  
Like a flood of words  
Purging myself for everyone  
Or should I hide myself  
A moment longer  
To keep from being known  
Don't know how to feel  
About what I want to say  
Putting down my pen  
Until I'm ready to open  
My soul  
To all.  
One day I up and decided to  
to my stripping career at 19 to Las Vegas.

People – The United States is considered the nation that has most incarcerated individuals in the world. Its justice system is based on punishment and not on rehabilitation. All efforts point to judgment.

*Changes to:*

Judge – To chart these females' journeys into themselves... to pull out what may save them as well as what must be cast out that holds them back.

*Changes to:*

People – In a country where hunger permeates, where poverty walks our streets like a neighbor in the house, why is it that in the most self-proclaimed "advanced" country in the world, -full of poverty, lack of resources, and

inequality- no other solutions are offered other than to incarcerate people?

Money is at stake.

*Collective Creation*

All females – (*Al unisono. The director will work on assigning lines, if al unisono does not work*).

In my country, the palm trees are awesome

I wish I was on a boat

Or a plane in the sky

Or swimming in the deep blue sea

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall

Don't worry be happy

Roses are red violets are blue

My reflection just dusty *reminents* of what could be

In the window there is a hairy smelly dog

In the darkness of the night

Don't take it personal

Men are always more scared of spiders

I just want a chocolate mint chip ice-cream cone from Baskins Robbins

Still looking for my hole, like hobbits

God is a good god

Go with the flow

Am I who I'm supposed to be

The mask consumes my face

Scene 2

*A panel of females, RootK, GoldJ and RosieTea are discussing why a male guard*

*professor belittled his students. Collectively created in response to an issue I brought to*

discussion: *professor X belittle his students by always arguing in favor of his opinion.*

How will you resolve the issue?

*Untitled.*

GoldJ – How did he became a professor when he's so closed minded???

RootK – He should be more considerate.

RosieTea – Who the hell does he think he is?

GoldJ – We need to figure out a way to get past his masochistic opinions + nasty comments.

RootK – Opinions are like assholes everyone has one.

RosieTea – I say put a lock in a sock and bit the hell out of him.

GoldJ – Good idea but let's not go to prison for him. We're proving his point, actions speak louder than words. What are we going to do?

RootK – We will get him to change the way he is. Let's just turn him into a woman then see how he feels.

RosieTea – Hell he already looks like a fagot what an ass-hole.

GoldJ – Come-on we are women we can argue any man to death. I say we start him off on one of his men are better rants + prove they're not. This man is driving me insane. Give me an idea to fight this.

RootK – All right I say to vote to get rid of his ass.

RosieTea – Right on let's end this shit for all its worth.

GoldJ – OK I'm with you guys but if we go through with this its lime + desert/swamp for him I'm not fitting to get caught. Lock and sock is too

messy blood = evidence, let's plan this for real for real. And everyone needs to keep their mouth shut.

Right, right?

RootK – Im all for it Right no body say a word he disappears tonight.

*Lights change.*

*Next to this panel another one formed by CoolJez, RedR, PlayfulS, and RaisingA. They are discussing the same issue but came up with another solution.*

RedR – Opinions are like assholes everyone has one

CoolJez – Yea but some opinions are shit

PlayfulS – Don't most people argue in favor of their own opinions?

RaisingA– You don't need to belittle someone in order to support your own opinion.

RedR – We should disprove his theories and show him his not always right

CoolJez – No one is always right there *has* to statistics to prove that

PlayfulS – Can't he argue his opinion while keeping an open mind. I am not sure that he is belittling. I don't see the problem here.

RedR – And neither do I. I really think *hes* a good teacher but we should feed him to dinosaurs tomorrow in class if he doesn't change his teaching habits.

CoolJez – He's belittling *cause* he's not being open minded, he shuts everyone down and sees only his way.

PlayfulS – Can't he argue his opinion while keeping an open mind?

RaisingA – That's a man for you?

RedR – That’s not a man that’s chopped liver and I already called my friend with his pet T-Rex. Watch him argue his opinion with \_\_\_\_\_. T-Rex! T-Rex! T-Rex! Maybe break out the *Valasa* Raptor. Then \_\_\_\_\_ can make out with him after the dinosaur is done with him!

### Scene 3

The Reporter – In addition to the increasing number of females who are incarcerated, statistics shows that white males are the population with the least increase; On June 30, 2006, an estimated 4.8% of black men were in prison or jail, compared to 1.9% of Hispanic men and 0.7% of white men. More than 11% of black males age 25 to 34 were incarcerated. Black women were incarcerated in prison or jail at nearly 4 times the rate of white women and more than twice the rate of Hispanic women.

Editor – Contrary to statistics, it surprised me to find out a group of white females. Here, the women that were incarcerated were white except for Onyx, the only Afro American girl in the team. Once again, the narratives conceived by information provided by the system statistics, the media, the government, and the church disintegrated in front of my eyes. Perhaps this institution is outside the norm, but what I saw was not expected in any way. I thought that maybe they have chosen them this way, but looking at other wards, most of the population was white

The Reporter – Accordingly to data from The Bureau of Justice Statistics, there was a slight decrease of adults incarcerated in the United States in 2014. Regardless of the minimal number of adult inmates decrease, scholars and theorists still believe that the United States needs to come up with another form of punishment that will produce rehabilitative results. As it is, recidivism is still persistent.

*Collective poetry*

*All females unless we need to assign lines for better effect. (or maybe small groups...)*

All Females – Right now I've got something to say  
One day at a time  
My soul I will find  
We choose to do it  
When you know better you do better  
Home is becoming a scary prospect  
Home is where your heart is  
Where your treasure is, there your heart will also be  
This is too shall pass  
I might just want to kick his ass  
Always pissing me off  
So decided to just walk it off  
Some people can be a mess  
Boys will love their mothers no matter what  
The grass isn't always greener on the other side  
I'd give anything for a fresh slice of pizza  
One day at a time  
This poem is running out of lines

I don't understand where the day went  
My god how do I get this forgiveness  
Interesting thing out there  
Up in the sky  
Stop  
Drop and roll  
Stop your roll  
Respect yourself and others  
This morning I had tea with the Mad Hatter  
This day is going slow  
How can we get it to go?  
Destination rocket you  
Unity  
Hammer time  
I just love music  
Families that pray together stay together  
Down the rabbit hole we go again  
Play that funky music  
White boy  
Character makes you strong  
Is this an Alfred Hitchcock movie or the *twilight* zone doo doo doo doo  
Then the bell rings and the trees sing  
I want some chocolate  
Pray with ceasing?

*Locked*

RedR – Imagination is the key to the fruits of freedom  
A lock is on your brain and your heart  
Trap inside this cage at first you may only feel rage  
I encourage you to hold tight and turn your page

Know that this moment of your life is just a stage  
Free the locks that destroy you like a plague  
To your mind you truly are a slave  
Imagine your freedom like the walls of a cave  
They are rugged and coarse like the tombs tone and graves  
Though for a moment turn to god and you may be saved  
Imagination is a dead bolt to the door of opportunity  
Pick this lock and make I your last invasion  
Step onto the road less traveled and to your glory  
Take time to forget the bible  
Watch as your new world begins to unravel  
And like the legend on that ap  
Be the key to free your soul from this trap  
We know what we've done, we can't take back  
So imagine a world free of wrath  
And as you place each footprint on your new path  
Learn to walk again like a calf  
You can grow no matter what you lack  
Like a flower, your imagination is  
The fruit of your staff.

### *Torture*

CoolJez – This place is torture. This food isn't fit for human consumption, says so on the packaging ...

People – What are they if they are not humans? Is funny how we categorized incarcerated people as such – how the imagined narratives of jails play a crucial game on the aesthetics of prison.

*Changes to:*

Guard – They are prisoners, dogs, puppets of the system. That’s all.

CoolJez – ... never get off your bunk. Don’t talk. Don’t use the restroom, up against the wall, strip your bed, beans, beans, beans, gas, gas, gas - when can I go home. *yes* I have a bond but no one to bail me out calling my pd but for what, what difference will it make I’m still in jail.

*I love to hear the little children laughing and playing*

RosieTea – We sit on a bench at Barnett Park by the Fairgrounds watching our little one’s laugh and play. The sight of them playing on the swings see-saw monkey bars make us smile. There’s a little birthday party going on at a picnic table near *bye* the parents are gathered together laughing and talking grilling hot dogs on a table – top charcoal grill, everybody is at peace not a worry in the world the children are getting tired their faces are red & sweaty they have had *there* work-out for the day the sunset slowly and darkness creeps in letting us know is time to go. The children yawn great & big as we pack up, we know they’ll fall asleep by the time *where* half way home. This is the way every family should spend time together.

People – But you are locked in

*My Own Prison*

GoldJ – I don’t like drugs but the drugs like me  
The loss of reality  
The ghetto can be white middle class.

I wish I could take back that first drag of cigarette at 9, that first taste of alcohol at 11, that first hit of marihuana at 12, and that first line of heroine at 14, let alone the first injection. If I had never experienced any of those things my life would be a complete 180° from what it is now. I never would have been blamed for a murder I have nothing to do with, named as a motive instead of a convenient excuse. I would never have put myself in the position of being rape + beaten all because the prospect of being dope sick seemed so much worse at the time. The terror I felt the night my kids were taken away to a home owned by the unknown in the worst part of the city, wouldn't have occurred. The confusion + anger of being told my daughter may have been molested, the blame of it happening being put on my shoulders because I was getting high + not looking after her properly, wouldn't have been experienced. The fear I felt when I saw Joe die right in front of me, leaving me helpless, + alone to fight + live this life without him would've been a nightmare and nothing else. Drugs have taken everything I had, my choosing to start doing them took away everything I could've been. That's okay though because I've survived the experience + the day has come to leave that wicked little town setting myself free. I'm breaking the old these little blue bags, brown powder + countless syringes have over me. I know the day will come when I can walk tall and unashamed. For the first time, look someone in the eyes instead of their

chest, hands, or feet because I am afraid of judgment disappointment +  
disgust. I will get better, minute by minute, day by day, year by year.

CoolJez – I wish I could take it all back to before that first bag of dope  
From smoking to snorting to shooting up  
I could of swore that dreams were made of that stuff  
The higher I got the more I faded away  
yet blind to the consequences I'd eventually had to pay.  
Nodding out with a needle in my arm  
Telling myself that it's doing no harm  
A child so young she can't even speak  
*Hugh* as a kite with her in the backseat  
Life fading away as I lay and die  
*A last minute* revival only to ask why  
Better off without me is what I would say  
I wish I could take it all back and make it last  
I wish I wasn't always haunted by my horrible past.

*Bottled Down (Rap)*

RedR – Another bottle down soon. I'll watch my mom hit the ground.  
I try to sleep but all I can do is weep.  
I call for her but she's not around  
Turning the music to drown in the sound  
Will she ever hear me?  
I wanted her to see me but she's just a clown

I'm hoping tonight she doesn't leave me and skip town  
Sometimes I fear and the last thing I want is her near  
Try not to be a bother so I don't end up with an elbow to my ear  
Praying to god she doesn't get in the car and I have to steer  
Wishing she could see clear and I would mean more than her beer

*End of rap. Continues*

But she was taken from me and I was left with white walls to stare  
Now trying to cope, put down the rope and my reality compare  
Maybe she would change with the pain of not being there  
But I was wrong again she came home and grabbed the gin.  
Pleading and begging *everyday*, I realized I'd never win  
I guess some worries just wear you thin  
So she skipped her classes and I skipped rocks  
hoping she would learn a lesson as the clock trick tocks

*Rap begins again.*

As I walked around trying to hide the holes in my socks  
*wishin* I could find the keys for all these locks  
turning myself the streets instead of blocks  
nothing is enough you should've went to the talks  
Now I wear these shoes while my mind walks  
You could've saved yourself for us before it was too late  
Now I 'm just wiping tears looking at you on the other side of the gate  
You should've tried harder my life shouldn't be a debate  
But now I'm grown and for you to be sober I still wait.

### *One Foot in the Mailbox*

*This is the format PlayfulS wrote her story. I decided to keep it intact.*

3/2/17 OCCD Day 70 "Playful"

*The actor should say the columns downward and then to the right and downward.*

I was (this)	I was (that)	You left me
Wife	Loyal	locked up
Lover	Loving	tainted
Best friend	Honest	broken
Confidant	Rider	alone
I am all this.	I am all that.	You left me.

We're going home when we get out of here baby. I promise. Home. Huh? Home left me far behind. Behind steel and concrete and plexiglass doors.

*This section should be performed reading to the right, line by line.*

Hard	Where it was	Soft
Bare	Where it was	Cozy
Cold	Where it was	Warm
Immovable	Where it was	You

My new home gives me what I need and prepares me for my next home. The cost is high. The payment hard earned. All he ever gave me was debt.

She said. Be prepared to lose everything.

We say.

Everything

Family – Tryn. Mads. Mom. Bren. Justin  
 Friends – Josh, Andrew, Scott, Joey, Shed  
 Structure – motel, apartment, house, trailer, shed  
 Job – Fraud, hustle, burglary, theft, sales.  
 Necessities – Food, clothing, shelter, air, you

Lost

*Untitled Rap*

RootK – The girl next door  
 Ain't nothing but a whore  
 Posts up at the bus stop

Right by the corner shop  
So after her date  
She can grab a cook pipe and a rock  
The girl next door  
Got tricks knocking at her door  
Back page credit glove  
Her brain isn't working right anymore  
She wants more than anything to stop  
But she doesn't know how to  
So she stuff her feelings with a shot  
The girl next door  
Everything she loves gone  
The pipe takes all she got  
Another knock at the door  
Now its a cop  
The girl next door  
In handcuffs  
And blues  
The judge saying it's time to pay your dues

#### Scene 4

*The dancers perform the ritual as it is described in the next monologue.*

Judge – “On 2 March 1757 Damiens the regicide was condemned ‘to make the amende honorable before the main door of the Church of Paris\*, where he was to be ‘taken and conveyed in a cart, wearing nothing but a shirt, holding a torch of burning wax weighing two pounds’; then, ‘in the said cart, to the Place de Grève, where, on a scaffold that will be erected there,

the flesh will be tom from his breasts, arms, thighs and calves with red-hot pincers, his right hand, holding he knife with which he committed the said parricide, burnt with Sulphur, and, on those places where the flesh will be torn away, poured molten lead, boiling oil, burning resin, wax and Sulphur melted together and then his body drawn and quartered by four horses and his limbs and body consumed by fire, reduced to ashes and his ashes thrown to the winds' ... Finally, he was quartered.”

*All applause.*

#### *Soliloquy*

*The actor is having a conversation back and forth with herself. She will change from one persona to the other. Behind the curtains, we see the shadows of two female dancers.*

This piece was written after the inmate took a pen from my personal box. All others were angry at her. She returned the pen next class after she was confronted. I added the beginning lines to establish the situation.

*As indicated by PlayfulS the characters on stage are: Lancelot, D'Artanon (this is how she named him), Mordred, King Arthur and Morean.*

*Only PlayfulS speaks to her other self.*

*The Setting: Castle Practice Yard.*

Editor as King Arthur – Kingdom, my trust has been betrayed. Someone has stolen one of my swords. Speak, or all will be blamed. Be truthful to your actions, have the courage to admit the wrongdoing.

*Lights on PlayfulS, as if she were in an interrogatory room. She is looking at a mirror that speaks at The Other back to her.*

PlayfulS – Stealing the sword is disrespectful to the Queen as well as the Kingdom. It has nothing to do with anyone else but me. I acted alone.

The Other – Why are you in training to be a knight if you're just going to continue your ways?

PlayfulS – I don't *intent* to continue my filthy ways. I've been living this life for decades. It's going to take a lot of time and effort to change. It doesn't typically happen *overnite*.

The Other – You're such a liar. You swing your sword and talk about changing but you still do the same things.

PlayfulS – I am not a liar. I have said in numerous occasions that I am having a hard time choosing the right path and that *its* very difficult for me to envision myself on the straight and narrow.

The Other – I told the last time you had a sword and he was going to hang you but I told him not to.

PlayfulS – He wouldn't have been involved *is* you hadn't told him. It was just a sword. Everyone acts so dammed self-righteous in here when others do something wrong. Judgmental and hypocritical. If this is something that truly upsets everyone, why not confront me personally instead of talking behind my back and then attacking me as a group.

The Other – We do things my way here. I'm the boss. Don't you forget it. Next time you step a toe out of line, we're going to string you up. Now kneel before me and apologize to us.

PlayfulS – I realized that the issue is not the sword but the effect that my actions have on others. Inmates and Lancelot, our instructor. I apologized for my poor judgment. After having some time to reflect upon what all of you had to say, I realized how my actions affect us as a whole. I appreciate your feedback and opinions even though I didn't like to hear them at the time they were provided. I guess the truth hurts. I honestly meant no harm in taking the sword. I just wanted to admire it for a little while I swear I'll leave all swords in the practice yard until I get the right to pull it from the stone.

### Scene 5

The next scene is formed of poems, raps and short stories partly inspired by Rumi's writings. After reading and dramatizing the poems, they wanted to explore them deeply. I made copies of some of the poems and gave one to each one of them, I asked them to write a poem inspired by one of Rumi's and bring it back next class. Other anecdotes are inspired by philosophical quotes from Rigoberta Menchú, Anne Frank, Aristotle, Plato, and Buddha that we studied in another of our gatherings; those will have the title of the quote followed by the author of the quote as the title of the writing. Others, they just wanted to share. These are the results.

*Open Yourself*

GoldJ – Embrace the new existence  
Life starts anew for you  
Let yourself be vulnerable  
Be free  
Be happy  
Don't wait + see  
Stop building that wall  
Climb over the top  
Give in without fight  
When you are still your fight is at an end  
When you make better choices you don't have to hide from yourself  
Your thoughts become actions

*You feel me?*

RosieTea – I have been there  
I have lived on the streets  
I have drank and done drugs  
You feel me?  
I've lied, and I cheated  
But that wasn't me  
It was the drugs living my life  
You feel me?  
I went through a time  
Where, I almost lost my son  
It was all because, I passed out  
And he found my gun  
When he took that shot  
But his memory is scarred

He has not forgot  
I needed a *wake up* call  
I thought this was it  
The more I continue to use  
The deeper it gets  
I was raped, I was beaten  
I was left there to bleed  
I then realized it wasn't worth it  
You feel me?  
When, I say "you feel me"?  
I hope you understand  
No more extended stay in A-Quad  
So when life knocks you down  
And you need strength to proceed  
Remember this poem  
"You feel me"?

*Let's Speak*

RootK – Come let's speak to each other Of our souls  
Let's Even Hide from our dark side  
Our ears and eyes

*Cosmic Heartbeat*

RedR – From the great beyond  
you have transcended  
Inside the space-time continuum  
you are my interstellar alignment  
Radiant, a raw rarity from unparalleled universe,  
you have been kissed by Aphrodite's image.

Every connection you make allows a  
reformation of an entities' code  
trivial downfall, danger and Fear  
diminishes in your light  
you surround all in grace  
to be the student and the teacher  
the servant and the master.

You rearrange nature's call  
with your stance.  
Peril cannot break your love's glance  
For you create cosmic combustions with  
just a glance.  
The lantern in the storm  
you are the sun, the moon and all the stars  
all four elements, you are the 1<sup>st</sup> trip to Mars  
Existing in all you do, the world is swayed with your tune.

Through your anchor you are the tide and the ocean  
All that is known becomes unknown.  
Every footprint is washed with the current  
The mouth of poison is filled with passion  
The broken are brand new  
And the reason is you  
Of breath and bounty  
you are the sound of every melody  
Nothing is everything  
and everything is nothing  
Your cosmic heart beat conquers all

Love stand tall  
for in your arms I fall

*From a Rumi Poem*

PlayfulS – Why is pain all you think about?  
Why do you think about all of the people that hurt you  
constantly?  
All of this means nothing in the end.  
You won't have to think anymore.  
You'll have complete freedom and complete peace  
Don't speak. Don't think. Be free now. Be at peace now.

*Electoral Vote*

RaisingA – I am running for the first women President. I will create free health care  
for all residents born in the United States of America. I will also cut taxes  
expenses by half. I am extremely loyal and passionate in what I believe in.  
I was *raise* in poverty, so I am not spoiled, And very down to earth. I  
understand people of all classes because I have been there. I feel that  
people who are wealthy should pay more in taxes. Because they have  
more.

All – Yes, is just fair.

RaisingA – And anyone using (food stamps) EBT cash won't pay taxes at all.

All – yes, yes.... (comments ad lib).

RaisingA – Prescriptions that are need when A person becomes extremely ill will be  
free of cost when a poverty level person needs them.

All – Hurray.

RaisingA – All a person will need to do is show their EBT card (with ID) at all Wal-Mart, Publix pharmacies counters. We are The United States of America. We make sure the kids in Third World Countries are taken care of, but forget about the children here in The States. It's absurd + if you make me President – I will eliminate it. I love people of all races and I've lived in upper class areas but I've also lived in the hood. I also don't discriminate against the LGBT Community, since my twin sister is 100% feminist lesbian. And I feel for all of you sincerely watching my sister be attacked for just being who she feels she is. I don't judge a book by it's cover, but focus on people's personality and the person they are on the inside. Please make me President & you will see how my motto is Love, Peace and Happiness.

All – Uh uh uh uh yeahhh yes, hurray, (and etcétera).

NOTE: Today I realized I have great writing skills.

*Little Girl*

CoolJez – Little girl, little girl *are*  
you out of your mind?  
You can't turn all your  
corners in life blind  
when all your time is spent  
searching for the next high  
kiss the rest of a good life bye  
all your life behind the dope you hide  
next time you look in the

mirror your no longer a kid  
that beautiful face and perfect  
smile has disappeared  
now on the street turning  
tricks like you feared  
little girl, little girl where  
did you go  
trust me a loss of innocence  
is something I know

*Ultimate (RAP)*

RootK – Growing up in the hood  
Always gonna be misunderstood  
Never taking a day for granted  
but never living like you should  
Wanting more than anything to succeed  
Always being told you never will  
Your last name determines your fate  
Always being judged by your parents mistake  
But you ever get a change to live in the child's place  
Have to grow up at a young age  
You go to school and do what your  
while your parents are doing drugs at home  
Even with the house full ya all alone  
Everybody in town knows what's going on  
but doesn't say a word  
because there's nothing more to expect  
when you are growing up in the hood.  
So you work hard to prove everyone  
your much more that where you come from

*When I write, I shake off all I care ~ Anne Frank*

GoldJ – When people are exposed to trauma, abuse + neglect as children they develop bad habits growing up to justify or run away from themselves. Addiction is a deadly disease with many factors, like any disease genetics also comes into play. On top of abuse + neglect in the home, seeing your family use constantly in front of you leads you to your doing the same. Whether it because you want to try it, connect with your mother or father better or just something that happens or is forced on you depends on the individual and their circumstances. One thing that is definite + inevitable is the downward spiral it will lead to. Jails, institutions + death (whether your owe or someone close to you). When in treatment writing/journaling is a technique proved to work. While writing down your thoughts + feelings you start to discover yourself. You also can go through the process of letting go of your past + sorting through your trauma. It can also be a great escape from anxiety + depression, a creative outlet. Writing can be anything you want it to be; read it, share it, keep it private, write + throw it away; your thoughts are yours to do with whatever you want. No one can take that away.

*The Ultimate Value of Life Depends Upon Awareness and the Power of Contemplation  
Rather than Upon Mere Survival ~ Aristotle*

PlayfulS – She stood upon the edge of the blade of a sword.  
She gave her reason for saying no.  
He gave his reason for saying yes.

This was the last time she used her power until she was locked away.  
Away from him. Away from them. Away from everything they owned.  
At midnight, they were stopped and separated.  
All comes screeching to a painful halt.  
She is aware now. She is contemplating another month and a half in jail.  
Anew  
She is contemplating a new life a new life without him.  
A new life without bars.  
A new life on the straight edge of the sword.

*Turning*

RosieTea – Inside snow, a hard ball is made  
the stars brighten the sky.  
We live in a warm ocean  
What are these waves  
You have spoken quietly  
I am who I am  
Actions speak louder than words  
with warm feelings  
I have no name for who I am.

*I wish I could take it all back*

RaisingA – I wish I could go back to the night I decided to go shoot up heroine. (On West Central). Then I wouldn't have to go to O.M.R.C. because someone thought I overdosed. Then I wouldn't have to went wondering though neighborhoods in a state of confusion and ultimately been charged for what I'm here in 33<sup>rd</sup> for. And now I relive that experience almost *everyday* in my thoughts. But what's done is done. And [... names

omitted] all had heard that I was dead. And they were shocked to see me.

The funny thing is (really not that funny) I was in the same area where two dead bodies *were* found & I was using the same heroine + (possibly) and crack cocaine that they were using, but God saved me once again. That's the only explanation I could find.

NOTE: Today was a little too close for comfort. (We massaged each other). On this day, we practiced *Circle Massage*

### *The You*

CoolJez – Lying deep & *stagnant*  
Unknowing to ourselves  
Waiting for the right time  
For eyes to open  
for us to see  
the you  
that resides in me

*This World is not Going to Change Unless we are Willing to Change Ourselves*  
~ Rigoberta Menchú

RootK – It was another day of shopping without paying for the merchandise out of the store, a girl I knew would take Michael Kors purses etc, and sell them to get money to get high, This person now has changed, in many ways, overcoming addiction and recovery also going to theatre class, has taught me how to write out my pain in thoughts and helps it really has helped to heal a lot of my pain, This person was arrested put on probation for shoplifting Grand Theft charge 1 month later violated probation on driving

on a revoke license and fleeing in \_\_\_\_\_ with lights This person has learned a lot since being incarcerated and waiting to be released and live in recovery.

### *Nudist Hippies*

RaisingA – It's a beautiful day in the hills of Pennsylvania. Peaceful + calm. Beautiful country alongside the *Anish*. \_\_\_\_\_ and I are planting cucumbers, tomato, onions, lettuce, potatoes, and tomatoes. While listening to the Grateful Dead. \_\_\_\_\_ says "we are going to have such a delicious salad come harvest time." \_\_\_\_\_ says "Yeah, I can't wait." Then they decide to wonder and enjoy the scenery smelling the flowers and picking them to put in our hair. There's sunshine + a nice breeze blowing. So we found free and liberating, no need to wear clothing. Since our *next door* neighbors are miles away. So in our travels we discover an amazing waterfall that falls almost crystal clear & so we decided to take a dip. And we had so much fun. And since we were feeling so good, they decided to come out of the water and smoke a joint. So then \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_ starting giggling carrying all about the craziness in the world. Thanks God were away from the hustle and bustle in the yuppie world. So since we smoke the munchies started setting in, they decided to go back to the house and make ice cream cones with strawberry ice cream with real strawberry chunks in them. So it's time to play soft tunes and light incense + candles and just relax in the evening and watch the fireflies, as we chill on the porch.

NOTE: Today I realized how much we all can relate to one another.

*When you move focus from competition to contribution, life becomes a celebration. ~  
Buddha*

RedR – Every step, every stride this young woman took was in an effort to prove her worth. To prove herself worthy to everyone around her because she was so lost on how to not compete with herself. A constant battle she fought to find real friends and a healthy environment. Though without proper focus she only became more lost than she ever was found. By not contributing positively to her life she gave way to negative influence from the wrong crowd and ended up in the wrong environments. This woman could've took time to focus on her contributions to allow herself to live a life of joy and celebration. If she had taken the weight of competition off her shoulders she would be able to still have her freedom instead of being locked away. One day at a time this lady redirects her focus to contribution to the positive outlook of her life.

*Innocence*

CoolJez – I've never been more scared than I was that night.  
Never been more incapable to put up a fight  
The innocence of a child I  
still held within  
*Til* the darkness of a night in came  
My daddy's best friend  
Don't cry or scream he quietly

told me  
It'll be a fun game for us just  
wait and see  
I instantly knew when started  
it was not right  
As I buried my face and gripped my  
Pillow tight  
My racing tears *controlled* me  
none  
Nine years old just young for it  
to be done  
My own daddy the one who have to  
catch him in the act  
Ready to take his buddies life  
and that's a fact  
Still I ask why he got there too  
Late  
When he was always my hero  
Minus the cape

*Human behavior flows from three main sources: desire, emotion and knowledge ~ Plato*

RaisingA – She designed the ultimate high so she shot up snack which let her to some crazy emotions, but now she's here in this "theatre class" & new beginnings to make difference in her life (sobriety). And learning deep with my soul & living (eating) healthy.

*How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve  
the world ~ Anne Frank*

CoolJez – She shouldn't *of* rushed along her life not living for nothing but her-self. If  
she had done things different she could *of* changed herself and the world.

*Inside*

RedR – Where does truth begin and the lie end?  
Where is your mind when your strength grows thin?  
Nothing hold you back more than yourself  
Look in the mirror to see your true wealth  
What is the bird on the window to your soul?  
What is the fortune in the window who is old?  
Is the fight on your heart sold?  
Do not fall into life's mundane mold  
Do not listen to all you are told.  
Inside what borders to you fold?  
A tale as old as time  
A song as long as rhyme  
I will grow into an aged fine wine  
For the truth is wisdom  
and the proof is a forbidden fruit  
We must challenge the doors of our limits  
We must conquer the weakness that break us  
Hold fast and stand tall  
For the world waits to see you fall  
So stand above the clouds my love  
You are a star amongst this galaxy  
Look into the power of *your* of your pure reality  
No matter your nationality

You are a divine being of mystery  
Take all you knew with all that is unknown  
Run from nothing that is hide  
Break a moment in time

*Spinning*

RootK – Spinning out of control like a wheel on a roll, of on a stroll. How far will I go before I dig myself in a deep hole, oppressing in aggression. I must learn to use my own aggression, I felt I was in the dark. I grew into a deep depression. I finally found my way out without a doubt. I got the courage to get on my knees. As I kneeled down on my knees that's how *Im* able to tell my story. Now I feel I have a true reason for living so I must continue on giving. So *lets* be real we must be true to *ourselvf*. *Im* to others.

*Flee*

CoolJez –  
– police flee & eluding  
– followed out of friends  
– lighted up, but kept going  
– turned around  
– cop blocking  
– waved & pissed cop  
– drove thru  
–within 24hrs *revocked* \_\_\_\_\_  
– came for her  
– here now for it  
– never afraid

*Embiste*

Editor – Our world can become static. Immobile. Dry.  
Awaked.

Door slam.

Wires towering from the sky.

I am in.

In where? In a dream. In the imaginary world of a jail. The one thought influenced by the media. By corporate's interest. The one that got me so concerned. Now I feel safe.

Mental genocide.

In with them.

Equality entangled in their own world, in my own mind. Freedom is an illusion is a metaphor said many times. Nada Nuevo se dice. All repeat. La carne se enfría allí, la vida pasa sin dejar de pasar. Life is stagnation inside... a mole a seed a parasite a vampire. Mental genocide.

*Changes to:*

Judge – The architecture of the prison of my mind is on my own doing.

*Changes to:*

Editor – Cooling, puffing, dreaming smiling alive.

Let's make the impossible, Sancho Panza.

Change. Charge.

Embiste como un toro acorralado.

I am an altruist thanks to oppression.

### Epilogue

*There*

RaisingA – Akins, OH is like the twilight zone. It's like the radio's stations never change no matter how much time passes. The \_\_\_ Red, Red Hot Chili Peppers and the \_\_\_\_\_ scene never ends. They have Roller Derby Girls that are pretty but brutal. Then there is Quarter Square, that still makes

Quaker Oats Oatmeal Cookies fresh for 50¢ and since my twin sister lives there it really feels like home. They bake fresh pies too. It's such an awesome smell along with the smell of coffee + scented candles. Akins, OH is where A.A. all began and ironically my twin and I both have the initials A.A. Isn't that funny?

RosieTea – There once was a time I was a small child afraid to laugh and afraid to cry, there were a father that drink, and there was a mother full of fear, there were times I would hide under my bed afraid of my father, there were never no hugs, there were loud voices that cause me to cry.

CoolJez – Here is where I seem to be. There the only solution I can ever see. So distant from me now I can't get close. Not seeing that light not feeling the hope. The hunger for what's there digs deep within. No longer the chance to see where to even begin. Just a glimmer of what was there from what other have shared.

RedR – There's where I really am. Somewhere \_\_\_\_\_ and growing thin. Not on vacation but living on a pin. Surrounded by people someone claimed they have sinned. But I see a world there where we care, where we all win, where we are "there."

GoldJ – When I was free out there I never really appreciated anything. I would literally get upset when someone said it's a beautiful day. I was a very negative person. I'm going to have fun out there for once. Take the kids to the playground, go to the Chinese New Year, take walks in parks. I can't

wait. No need to run around driving myself crazy without any reason.  
Peace in my heart love in my chest *its* what I'm looking forward to. The  
goal of everyday will be to \_\_\_\_\_ light to my children's eyes, especially  
Lucy cause she has that beautiful glint in her big blue eyes that put a shine  
in my life.

*Full Length Mirror*

PlayfulS – I approach the full-length mirror with trepidation and anticipation. Every  
nerve in my body is tingling. All of my senses alive. I reach my fingers  
tentatively to the cool glass which gives way life fresh dough at my touch.  
It took the blue pill, you see, and am about to journey down the rabbit  
hole. On the other side, everything is reversed. *Im* on the outside looking  
in again and what a thrilling, *scaryfeeling* it is. As I stand and dust myself  
off, I see my feet are planted firmly on the ceiling. Ok, \_\_\_\_\_, keep it  
together, this cannot be what it seems. I can't just stand here so I plant one  
foot in front of the other until I find an unlocked door. I brace myself as I  
fall at the floor, and am shocked to find a downy chair to land upon.

*Rap*

RootK – I was out there dealing in the streets.  
Hustling day and night  
always trying to feel just right  
you can only get too high.  
So times friends and family dies  
Try to escape day by day

Loosing time as you get yourself ahead of your game  
you get a rush in your feet your fame,  
don't take life for granted cause it *ain't* no game.

*The actors on stage "rap." Slowly, the stage lights-up with neon lights. As in a dream. Psychedelic. Flashing. All dancers come on stage and join the actors. Lights stop. Sudden change to white, bright light. The actors and dancers stop in the center forming a mass. The music begins, while in groups they begin to dance to a different type of dance (Ballet, Afro-Caribbean, Modern, etc.). They dance to the same music. I would like to give a sense of individual liberation. Joyful, although enclosed, they have found themselves. That is liberating.*

Finito

## CONCLUSION

Throughout this work, I successfully got answers to the questions that initially drove this workshop -- questions such as: will the participants' interpersonal transaction improves through-out the process? Will their social interactive skills increase? Will they continue to work during the time outside the class? Will they write? How is their community built? Were they engaged beyond the class time with each other? On the latter, the class time was not enough to write all the stories they shared, therefore, they wrote at night and brought their work to class the next day. During the short four weeks we spent together, we became a team; the inmates gained trust in others and with themselves; they worked together; they grew. They learned how to respect other's point of view, how to have a discussion, "democratically", how to listen to others and understand their predicaments. They moved out of their centered world. This growth is evident in their reflections at the conclusion of this thesis.

Whether this group of inmates continues to live a healthier and productive life, one that will allow them to be a part of the community, is out of my control or out of the control of any of the theatre artists who elected to provide a space for self-awareness to these communities deprived from freedom. What ensues -- we may not see. Independently of the artists' reasons for working in prison, or with developing communities, most important is to do the work. The results of my work can be seen in the inmates' writings and in the comments at the end of the program.

Approaching this workshop with a kind and warm heart helped built the trust and camaraderie needed to go deep into these inmates' souls. I accomplished the desired results, at least those that are visible: camaraderie, community, self- understanding, and engagement. Moreover, I became a better person, a better artist equipped with resources and understanding to continue my quest for social advocacy. A major challenge faced was how to use the correct words. How to speak to them in a way that enabled trust -- the trust that is the key in this work. I spent at least two weeks working on gaining their trust before asking them to write. The second challenge was helping them to write compelling stories. They began writing light funny stories. That was when I decided to bring philosophical quotes and have the females reflect on them. That was the sparking moment. From there on, they wrote deeply. Their stories are full of metaphors, but, overall, they are speaking about their realities -- realities they confronted from a young age to adulthood. Following is what they wrote during the last exercise given, included here, to reflect on the time spent together. Again, I have kept their voices intact, including typos, missed words, or punctuation.

### Reflective Narratives

As mentioned before, an important question that drove this thesis was to examine and measure the effectiveness of theatre in confined communities. Having this in mind, at the end of the workshop, I asked the women to write a reflection on their experiences. Here is what they wrote.

~ I have learned very much from this movement called “Planting Seeds.” From the very *First* day this class indeed planted a large seed in my heart that continues to grow. Today that seed is a beautiful creation of nature that longs for more water and sunlight to quench its thirst and aid its *grow*. I have always struggled with trusting anyone in this world or believing in the true intentions *of others*. Very early on in this program I gained not only respect, but an immense level of trust for our mentor miss Aixa Mendez. I have fallen in love with this theatre class and all the joy it has brought me during this extremely difficult time in my life. She has opened doors to my mind I did not know existed and helped me to further my potential and levels of my artistic abilities. I am forever grateful and remember her and this class. I can only pray and hope others may have the honor to be touched and moved as I have. Every single class during this time was very helpful, meaningful and driven with pure intent to give a voice to the silence in this world. I would like to thank the instructor for all she has done and for all she will continue to do. I definitely have become a better person in the light of my hardship by attending this class. It has to be hands down one of the best things I volunteered for in a long time. This class restored my hope and faith in myself and my work. Everything I have learned I will use for a lifetime and I will continue to grow as a beautiful creature of the art world, all thanks to Miss Mendez. At times, human find difficulties in relating to others without offense; she has worked a way into my heart that I will respect forever. ~ *RedR*

~ I’ve decided that I loved the breathing (exercise) techniques that we used at the beginning of class. The exercises that taught us how to work as a team or imitating each other (like follow the leader). I enjoyed lots of things we did in class. And even though

the writing bugged me from time to time after I would start, I usually got into it. Because I realized I'm pretty good at it. And Ms. Aixa gives a lot of inspiration. She has a lot of excitement for what she does (teaching us this class) she really listens to our stories & that really matters. ~ *RaisingA*

~ I loved this class. Helped me learn to open up. Forced me to think and write. I had writers block at the end but due to my own racing thoughts. But Miss Mendez was awesome, fun, & openly caring. I couldn't *got* to where I have without her. I hope this encourage me to do future writings as well. ~ *CoolJez*

~ I really enjoyed this class. Without it I would not have started writing again. I believe *its* very positive, helpful & different. Not for everyone. The writing exercises were fun, creative & expressive. I was shocked to find out I actually still had ideas. I believe the class would've gone better if it was fully explained what was going to happen in it so the people who didn't want to participate in the activities wouldn't have signed up, leaving people who are more open to the experience to join. I loved it. Thank you very much Ms. Mendez!!! ~ *GoldJ*

~ I often came to Theatre feeling sleepy and cranky. I always left feeling cheered and energized. Our troupe faced quite a few challenges together and came out closer and stronger. I really enjoyed this class and would love to pursue theatre classes on the outs with my daughter. Thank you. *Xixa*. ~ *PlayfulS*

~ Try to be the best woman I can be, I have learned how to write out my problems, emotions and pain *The* theatre lady is awesome, compassionate. Very respectful of our feelings in are private I would love to get out and be able to volunteer to help her. It has

been very rewarding she taught us how we all need to stick together as one. I hope that you allow this to continue with this work is Beautiful. What we have learned from this class. That we don't deal with our past. It will come back to haunt us so you write out all that bothers you. This class Taught me that you Can do whatever you put your mind to that were all capable of reading writing in acting. It has been very inspirational. This teacher is awesome. We all appreciate her time in hard work in the heart in soul she puts into it. She is a winner all the way. I learned *theres* lots of pain That drives each prisoner insane cause each woman has so much shame as each woman stick together They grow stronger day by day believe in the lord makes each day brighter cause the grass is always greener on the other side what doesn't kill us makes us stronger for are days we will live longer. ~ *RootK*

I am here to tell my story and share my testimonies, I have changed a lot, I have gotten older and wiser. I'm willing to lead by example. I'm ready to challenge society again. ~ *RosieTea*

### Final Thoughts

*As Planting Seeds – Life Stories of Awakening Self-Awareness* ended, equally the inmates and I were not ready for it to end. The work produced was just enough to make this thesis a document reminiscent of the kind of work needed in every prison, jail, reformatories, orphanages, in any institutionalized population, and beyond the walls into the outside world. As noted in the book *Performing New Lives, Prison Theatre* in the chapter “*The Keeper of the Keys*,” Curt L. Tofteland, the founder of the program *Shakespeare Behind*

*Bars* wrote, Warden, Larry Chadler commented "...it was programs, and not punishment, that changed the human heart."<sup>59</sup> Programs like *Planting Sees* can restore these populations' emotional wellbeing, and can help them reincorporate themselves back into society.

In this work, I decided not to use previously written narratives, such as written plays. Without diminishing its value, other endeavors of prison theatre such as for example, *Shakespeare Behind Bars*, use already known plays purposely to "... allow [the inmates] to develop life skills that will ensure their successful reintegration to society."<sup>60</sup>

Although this work is valuable, I decided instead to circle the work around the inmates' writings furthering their self-awareness that could hopefully allow them to possibly reincorporate themselves into society. In such, I did not attempt to recreate history, but to create new narratives in modern times. Without a doubt, history repeats itself. For me bringing theatre to prison was not about recreating what we all have read, but to encourage to express their perspectives about the circumstances in their lives., specifically addressing the question of what brought these inmates to act in deterrence to the norm?

While researching theorists and scholars who guided my work, I encountered Thompson and his theory that punishment is performative, which made me question the correctional system. Is punishment created to secure power? Is it a practice for private economical gains? I concluded by calling it the performance of punishment because research as

punishment as spectacle demonstrates that correctional punishment is indeed performative. In this connection, Thompson posits a valid question, "... whether prison theatre can avoid becoming part of this performance [of punishment]: a performance that not only dehumanizes the prisoner ... but one that has led to a huge rise in incarceration..."<sup>61</sup>. To this concern, I have found answers: instead of producing already known plays, instead of recreating those known stock characters, I inspired these females who were incarcerated to speak their mind and to use their experiences and imagination to create further images and narratives and thus producing change in terms of the already misguided conceived narratives; narratives orchestrated by politics and reproduced in the media; narratives that only induce to judge and punish instead of looking into the roots of the problem. In having the inmates write about their experiences and the motifs of their derailment, I can possibly produce change -- change within themselves; change that can transfer to others, who in turns, read their stories. In this work, the commentaries at the end of the project demonstrate that during the workshop the females reflected upon their life's experiences. It is my hope that this experience produce changes in their perception about the world and about themselves. I gained inspiration from many artists who are devoting their time and effort to work in confined environments. However, the one who truly touched my heart was Jean Trounstein for her writing is full of personal passion and truth. In her book *Shakespeare Behind Bars. The Power of Drama in a Woman's Prison*, specifically in the prologue, she reaffirms the power of our work. She states that "[w]hile it is true that prison is a repressive environment, the one who offers hope in the classroom has the potential to

effect change".<sup>62</sup> Creating change is the reason for this work. The time spent with these inmates was too short to go deeply into their soul, but it was enough to validate this work and gave me the impulse to continue my quest not only for social change, furthering interrogating the paradigms of humanity -- those models society lives by and that are filled with bigotry and prejudice.

For those who choose to continue this legacy, I would like to offer personal advice. I learned the following lessons by failing at the beginning of the workshop. Language is what will help you succeed. These communities endured plenty of unconstructive criticism inherent in the conditions surrounding their upbringing -- some because of poverty, some because of lack of education, others because of inbred conditions. Whichever the cause may be, they are oversensitive to criticism. Some are not emotionally fit to deal with it. Others are insurgents without a cause. Their skin is hard. Therefore, because of the amalgam of personalities you will find, it is somewhat challenging to find the right words. However, commonality is found when we speak with compassion and from our hearts. Do not judge -- that will become your worst enemy. These people have learned to read others. They are masters in unearthing those who they feel are not truthful. They are street slick. Speaking to them with kindness and empathy is key to a fructiferous work. Choose your words wisely. Choose how to dress in a way that they don't see you as above them. Even how you look at them may cause divergence in the group and may negatively impact the major purpose of your work. Community is built upon the sense of sameness. And that includes us.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Michael Balfour. "Theatre in Prison Theory and Practice. Ed. (16).
- <sup>2</sup> <http://www.shakespearebehindbars.org/>;
- <sup>3</sup> <http://www.theactorsgang.com>;
- <sup>4</sup> <http://prisonartsstl.org/about-ppa/>;
- <sup>5</sup> <http://www.poeticjusticeproject.org/>
- <sup>6</sup> (<https://s3.amazonaws.com/static.nicic.gov/Library/019342.pdf>).
- <sup>7</sup> Bosworth, Mary. "Introduction: Explaining U.S. Imprisonment." Encyclopedia of Prisons and Corrections, 2005 ed.
- <sup>8</sup> Bosworth, Mary. "The Punitive Turn: Laying the Foundations for Mass Imprisonment." Encyclopedia of Prisons and Corrections, 2005 ed.
- <sup>9</sup> Bosworth, Mary. "Introduction: Explaining U.S. Imprisonment." Encyclopedia of Prisons and Corrections, 2005 ed.
- <sup>10</sup> Mary McShane and F.P. Williams, eds. Encyclopedia of American Prisons. 1996, eds.
- <sup>11</sup> McShane and F.P. Williams page 9.
- <sup>12</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics. Correctional Populations in the United States, 2013. [www.ojp.usdoj.gov](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov).
- <sup>13</sup> U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs Bureau of Justice Statistics. Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2006 Bulletin. [www.bjs.gov](http://www.bjs.gov).
- <sup>14</sup> Bosworth, Mary. "Introduction: Explaining U.S. Imprisonment." Encyclopedia of Prisons and Corrections, 2010 ed.
- <sup>15</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics. <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=4986>
- <sup>16</sup> Paul Heritage is an artist who developed "programmes from HIV/DS Human Rights Performances via Shakespeare with juvenile prisoners" in Brazil. Heritage qualifies and uses this word as the "process involved when applying ... into the prison world" (44)
- <sup>17</sup> Baz Kershaw is the Chair of the Department of Drama at the University of Bristol. He is the author of "Pathologies of Hope in Drama and Theatre."
- <sup>18</sup> Balfour (45).
- <sup>19</sup> Balfour. (7).
- <sup>20</sup> *Theatre in Prison*. Intro. Ed. Michael Balfour (4).
- <sup>21</sup> Balfour (3).
- <sup>22</sup> "Performing New Lives. Prison Theatre." Ed. Jonathan Shailor (222).
- <sup>23</sup> Pollock, Jocelyn. "Women's Crimes, Criminology, and Corrections" (2).
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