

Bodily Instruments:

Somatic Metaphor in Prison-Based Research

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This analysis uses a critical race framework from African-American literary studies (Morrison 1993, McBride 2001) to locate discourses of whiteness circulating between the texts of prison-based scholar-practitioners and their imprisoned counterparts, considering how those rhetorical economies risk marginalizing prisoners in an already vexed space. Recognizing the role of affect and bodily ritual in shaping those economies, the analysis then turns to Jennifer LeMesurier's account of somatic metaphor (2014) as a storehouse of rhetorical knowledge, and what John Protevi describes as, "a personal political physiology [capable of shaping] institutional action" (Protevi 2009, xii) to explore how such bodied knowledge scales from the personal to the political. This revised sense of the continuum between affect, ritual, and the political might, in turn, provide prison-based scholar-practitioners with a new vocabulary for understanding our own subjectivities as they shape our carceral encounters, our activist impulses, and the scholarship that ensues, in a way that avoids retrenching discourses of whiteness, and painting prisoners as what Toni Morrison might call, "some suffering thing" (Morrison 1993, 3-4).

Prison. We've seen the movie, read harrowing tales about life on the inside, and dutifully studied our Sloop and Foucault; we recognize tropes of constraint, redemption, and suffering in the pop-cultural carceral landscape, even as we're caught in the gravitational pull of those appeals. Like many fellow teacher-scholars working in prisons, I too felt a seismic jolt as I moved from *marquis*, top-billing *prison* in the popular imagination to mundane, everyday prison, inhabited by those I would learn from, write with, and root for in the coming years, robed in dim, antiseptic light, punctuated by the clang of metal and the squeak of standard-issue sneakers on a cold floor, razor wire ever idling at the corners. Those memories mark affective experiences shaped by time spent in prisoner advocacy and dissertation research, amplified in gatherings with other prison-based rhet-comp and community literacy scholars sharing their own stories, mirrored in a body of scholarship rife with like descriptors of that singular space. Whether mobilized as metaphor or an account of the physical environment, the pervasiveness of such language suggests the primacy of affect in shaping broader practitioner discourse in prison contexts. If, as Brian Massumi (1995) suggests, "skin is faster than the word" (86), then it's worth thinking about how bodily intensities shape the rhetorical economies that animate our scholarship, sponsorships, and curation of prison-based writings for different audiences.

I focus on language not because I wish to dismiss fellow scholar-practitioners' experiences or amplify the already prominent teacher/savior narrative. Work in critical prison studies (Rodríguez 2002; 2010) and rhetorics of whiteness (Ryden and Marshall 2012)¹ caution us against recentring the white, liberal, antiracist scholarly narrative at the expense of stories by prisoners themselves, on their own terms; that concern is echoed in service-learning education research (Mitchell et al 2012) and prison-based community literacy scholarship², which acknowledges prison education research's tendency to focus on teacher experience (Berry 2018a, 198; 2018b, 68), and recognizes the need to interrogate teacher/savior narratives (Jacobi and Stanford 2014, 3) as well as the deficiency model they promote (Reynolds 2014, 110). Yet, a close reading of that larger body of work, using critical race scholarship in literary studies (Morrison 1993; McBride 2001), reveals discursive patterns that nevertheless risk marginalizing prisoner voices, thereby undermining even the

most mindful scholarship and literacy sponsorship in an already vexed space.³

This paper aims, then, to help assess our language in new ways so that we might hold our scholarship more accountable to the rhetorical economies we employ when we write for different audiences. The first part is listening to African American literary criticism in order to recognize the discourses of whiteness circulating between scholar-practitioners' texts and their imprisoned counterparts. The second part is acknowledging the role of affect and bodily ritual in shaping those logics and the extent to which such bodied knowledge scales from the personal to the political; here I turn to Jennifer LeMesurier's (2014) account of somatic metaphor as a storehouse of rhetorical knowledge, and what John Protevi (2009) describes as, "a personal political physiology [capable of shaping] institutional action" (xii). This revised sense of the continuum between affect, ritual, and the political might, in turn, provide prison-based scholar-practitioners with a revised vocabulary for understanding our own subjectivities as they shape our carceral encounters, our activist impulses, and the scholarship that ensues, in a way that avoids retrenching discourses of whiteness and painting prisoners as what Toni Morrison (1993) might call, "some suffering thing" (3-4).

(ENSLAVED) BLACKNESS, KNOWING, ABOLITION

The juxtaposition of white citizen-subject and black slave has pervaded both literary and expository writing since the inception of the American project; As Toni Morrison (1993) observes in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness in the American Literary Imagination*, writers have employed the figure of the black/enslaved body as a means of exploring white subjectivity from Poe's Gothic romance (31-32, 83) to Stein's use of Malanctha to experiment with character (14)⁴. Dwight McBride's (2001) *Impossible Witnesses: Truth, Abolitionism, and Slave Testimony* situates that discursive tradition in the context of abolitionism, where the troping of enslaved bodies by abolitionists and slave testimonies alike reinscribed the whiteness of Enlightenment subjectivity. And though literary criticism has elsewhere noted this kind of *chiaroscuro* as a stylistic feature of Gothic (Riquelme 2000, 610) and Victorian texts (Ridenhour 2012) untethered to race, Morrison's and McBride's findings reflect a broader Enlightenment

project of defining knowledge in the face of an (enslaved) Other: white subjectivity opposed to a conflation of darkness and the beyond, and consciousness as a move from darkness to light. Here, then, we see the origins of a rhetorical economy in which the enslaved (black) Other represents both a frontier and the metaphorical darkness that precedes formation of the citizen-subject; in so doing, Morrison and McBride provide a framework for recognizing the extent to which contemporary prison literacy scholarship draws on a longstanding rhetorical tradition reliant on a troping of darkness and light that Morrison (1993) terms, “romancing the shadow” (32-58). And although U.S. prisons’ racial and ethnic diversity resists one-to-one correspondence with the distinctly dyadic racial logics of American slavery,⁵ the disproportionality of black prisoners—incarcerated at 5.1 times the rate of whites (Nellis 2010, 4), owing to a confluence of racial attitudes, court decisions, and labor policies dating from slavery⁶—suggests that the imprint of both slavery and abolitionism continues to shape the prison *topos*.

McBride’s project helps explain the circulation and durability of white discourse in prison literacy contexts, but also how those tropes are taken up by prisoners themselves, forming an ongoing circuit of authentication between sponsor and recipient that, at best, renders imprisoned writers complicit in a discursive economy that perpetuates the institution, and, at worst, undermines the logic of writing as conduit for agency. This difficulty bears out what Joy James (2003) warns about the dual nature of prisoner narratives: “(Neo) Slave narratives emerge from the combative discourse of the captive as well as the controlling discourse of the ‘master’ state” (xxi-xxii).⁷

Prison-based community literacy scholar-practitioners recognize the axiological difficulty James describes, having written extensively on the ethical, social, and political implications of their sponsorship, including complicity (Hartnett et al 2011; Jacobi 2011; Sutcliffe 2015) with the institutional discourses that privilege notions of individual transformation (Rogers et al 2017); the practical necessity of ideological compromise (Curry and Jacobi 2017, 6, 9); and the extent to which instruction in that dominant-discursive context reduces likelihood of political or social change (Sutcliffe 2015, 18, 30)—even with the most progressive of intentions (Reynolds 2014,

101).⁸ As if to reiterate Rodríguez's (2010) critique of the university as a partner in the American carceral regime (9), Laura Rogers calls attention to how professional identity has come to depend on this dynamic (Rogers et al 2017, 82).

At the same time, sponsors' complicity—whether strategic or unintentional—orbits within a larger prison *topos*, wherein prisoners' writings are already overdetermined. Curry and Jacobi (2017), for example, observe the difficulty women prisoners themselves have in interrupting those representations and the “pressure to produce and publish certain forms of prison writing”⁹—an issue they propose resolving through joint sponsorship (11).¹⁰ These pressures articulate prison-based literacy scholarship's place between a rhetorical rock and a hard place: how to simultaneously establish genre credibility in dominant-discursive spaces—and galvanize various publics to action, while maintaining an ethics of representation that enables imprisoned writers to speak on their terms? Even as scholar-practitioners maintain a sober disposition regarding the im/possibilities of literacy sponsorship in carceral space, there remains a tacit desire for prison literacy to move beyond the therapeutic to a more tangible political or social emancipation that might culminate in the project of prison abolition.

Jacobi (2011), for example, posits teaching counternarrative as not only a conduit for “more ardent activism,” but one bound specifically to abolition (41), a disposition shared by Hartnett et al (2011) in their call for pedagogies of resistance toward empowered citizenship (332-333). Cory Holding reiterates prison literacy programming's abolitionist potential as a rearticulation of relationships (Rogers et al 2017, 83), while Sutcliffe (2015) aligns his queered pedagogy with Angela Davis's abolition project towards “a shared vision of lasting alternatives to detention and surveillance” (20). Now, these scholar-practitioners do proceed cautiously onto abolitionist terrain; Jacobi clarifies that, in *SpeakOut!*, only some participants reflect on power relations, others being motivated by emotional release and boredom (2011, 45-6),¹¹ and that “[t]he introduction of potentially revolutionary writings and ideas, critical literacy practices, and methods for promoting alternatives to socially constructed identity narratives of incarcerated writers must be navigated with care”

(2008, 80). So, too, do Hartnett et al (2011) argue for an abolitionist disposition that expands scholar-practitioners' conceptions of "what counts as political engagement" beyond narrowly radical definitions (333). Nevertheless, that a number of texts yoke prison literacy explicitly to the prison abolition project suggests that the discursive genealogy between nineteenth-century abolitionists and present-day prison literacy sponsor/scholars merits examination. Even as tropes like literacy as a move from darkness to light originate in affective encounters with the prison itself, the overdetermined nature of racial discourse in the American context demands that we recognize moments when our language inadvertently traffics in rhetorics that have historically served to valorize advocates over imprisoned/enslaved subjects.

The troping of darkness and light evokes a borderland between known and unknown, but also the rich network of conversations around borders, contact zones, and margins in rhet-comp more broadly.¹² So, too, is the prison, by virtue of its function as a site of forced displacement, necessarily a borderland—where communicative activity serves to situate, dislocate, and relocate interlocutors—as well as break down very real barriers of understanding and ability. The extent to which the repeated troping of the prison as a site of danger and invitation to knowledge, however, invites comparison to Morrison's (1993) "romancing the shadow" (32), wherein prisoners occupy stage dressing to sponsors, center-stage.¹³

A definitive publication in prison literacy scholarship, the 2004 special issue of *Reflections* offers three instances of prison-as-frontier, giving teacher-scholars and general readers alike a sense of bodily stakes in prison literacy, broadly conceived. Kerr's (2004) "Between Ivy and Razor Wire" invokes a perilous encounter with the beyond through synecdoche, following threat of bodily injury with an account of "teaching and learning in the long, dark and highly charged shadow of law and order ideology" (62)—a dramatization evoking the gothic villainy and haunted spaces Morrison describes. So, too, does Jacobi's (2008) "Slipping Pages" focus on the danger of razor wire, framing it as a frontier for social action, and those that conduct prison literacy work in terms that evoke heroism, transgression, and bodily peril:

To slip through the razor wire is to challenge the system. To slip through the razor wire is risky, whether you are trying to slip contraband in—or make it visible to the rest of the world. And to slip through, under, or around razor wire with language—written or verbal—I suggest, is the work of social justice and a growing number of scholars in composition and rhetoric who are motivated by such issues and the possibility of change (67).

This sense of frontier creates excitement exhorting the reader to not only continue, but be moved to action, presumably receptive to Coogan's (2006) call for public writing to perform social inquiry towards social change. Doing so makes rhetorical sense, given that SpeakOut! programming aims to cultivate learning opportunities for undergraduates, as well as encourage other literacy scholar-practitioners to "acknowledge the possibility" of such spaces. Yet, the passage's deliberate cultivation of suspense inadvertently positions scholar-practitioners as the primary agents of struggle.

That danger and suspense culminates in Pompa's (2004) "Disturbing Where We Are Comfortable" (24–34). Rather than cast the edition as an isolated rhetorical event, Pompa's piece affirms the rhetorical force of the prison-frontier figuration, having been republished in (Deans et al 2010) and cited by multiple venues aimed at community literacy audiences—a success that echoes the discursive circuitry McBride (2001) describes in his account of codes deployed by abolitionists and mirrored by slaves. Just as abolitionism demonstrated successive reliance on the black body to "conform to certain codes to be legible to its audience" (2), so does the proliferation of both Pompa's (2004) article and program design suggest the frontier trope as a powerful force in prison literacy's rhetorical economy. Yet, the piece's stylized depiction of prison and prisoners takes that figuration even further.

Pompa writes that Inside Out aims to "move [students] out of the safety that distance provides, and go there—in order to learn, to experience, to be disturbed, to *read the life itself*" (24, emphasis author's). Here, as with Jacobi's invitation to injury and contraband, the article leads readers on a perilous journey "behind the walls" to "disturb where we are comfortable" (24). The piece describes the prison as a site of fertile pedagogical terrain for students and an opportunity to

unseat comfortable assumptions about the neat logics of the criminal justice system; inclusion of multiple student and prisoner statements attest to the program's success. Yet, the program's positioning of the prison as a disturbing encounter with otherness intensifies prisoner dehumanization—an effect reinforced by an even more theatrical staging of Pompa's own first encounter:

... a sensory cacophony of stale sweat, old sneakers, clanging bars, crumbling cement, deafening announcements over the P.A. system, and men...hundreds of men, who seemed to be locked in some bizarre dance, a listless fugue arrested in time (24).

This appeal to the prison's affective structure—atomizing prisoners into sounds, smells, and metonymies that rankle in their intensity—resonates with anyone who has ever visited a prison and been unnerved by its atmosphere. Yet the language also evokes the damaging fabulation of slave suffering described by Morrison, and a voyeurism Rodríguez (2002) might call, a “structure of enjoyment that thrives from the horror of an imprisoned Other's suffering” (411): so moved, Pompa (2004) recalls a desire to uncover “...truths hidden beneath the surface that begged to be revealed” (24-25), enticing readers to follow.

This rhetorical strategy is a shrewd one, dressing the set of the prison's strangeness, to be transformed by offering a pedagogy that dramatically undermines that otherness to embrace prisoners' humanity—a satisfying, Aristotelian reversal that shares poetic terrain with the liberal subject's cathartic revelation of whiteness described by Ryden and Marshall (2012, 132). Given its range of circulation, that strategy is also a successful one, positioning expectations and rewards for the reader with each successive telling. Jean Trounstein (2014) takes up the discursive mantle 10 years after the *Reflections* special edition, recounting a tense exchange during a theater workshop. Though Trounstein recognizes the incommensurability of prisoners' experiences (153) and employs dialogue allowing the women to speak for themselves, the text nevertheless conflates prisoners with darkness and darkness with the unknown in every human, asking, “What other dark secrets lay in the hearts of these women who stood before me? For that matter, in

any of us?" (160). Given that she recalls an experience decades' past, one might reasonably conclude that this aside simply keys the reader into the affective structure of that memory—the imprint of fear and discomfort, just as Pompa recalls her first encounter in sensory terms. Yet, the language employed places Trounstone's narrative squarely in the discursive circuitries described by Morrison, rendering workshop participants as props in a larger drama.¹⁴

LITERACY, HANDMAIDEN OF THE HUMAN

Though tropes of darkness, light, and prison-as-frontier might surface in an array of prison-based genres of practice, the figure of literacy as the vehicle for personhood makes the critical-rhetorical stakes particularly acute for rhet-comp and community literacy. Here, too, McBride's (2001) literary scholarship proves instructive, identifying this particular feature of white-abolitionist discourse in Margaret Fuller's 1845 review of Frederick Douglass's autobiography, deployed to combat perceptions of African inhumanity. Fuller's review affirms the role of written testimony in not only humanizing the slave, but also legitimating the (white) witness as an arbiter of ability. While acknowledging the review as radical for the time (McBride 2001, 75), McBride contends that its rhetoric—circumscribed by the racialized discourse that defined the terms of exchange with a white audience—subverts Fuller's intended meaning. Where she chastises those "spendthrift dandies, or the blows of mercenary brutes, in whom there is no whiteness except of the skin, no humanity except in the outward form" (Fuller, qtd. in McBride 2001, 76),¹⁵ McBride argues that she re-inscribes a racial hierarchy determined by culture rather than phenotype (77). In McBride's reading, then, emancipation—and humanity itself—depend on written ability, making proponents of literacy handmaidens of the human, moving enslaved subjects from raced unbeing/unknowing to enlightened personhood.

Despite scrupulous attention to reciprocity (Berry 2017; Carter 2014; Holmes 2015; Pompa 2004; Reynolds 2014; Ryder 2016), wariness of the rehabilitative rhetoric shaping the literacy narrative genre (Hartnett et al 2011; Rogers et al 2017; Rolston 2011; Jacobi 2008; Jacobi and Johnston 2011; Sutcliffe 2015), and critiques of dominant literacy narratives that feature the "triumph of light over darkness" (Harvey Graff, qtd. in Branch 2007, 29), prison-based

composition and literacy scholarship nevertheless participates in the rhetorical economy McBride describes, employing Morrison's and Smith's language of shadows, darkness, and light to dramatize the transformative power of literacy in particular. Jacobi's (2001) "Speaking Out for Social Justice," for example, extols the virtues of community literacy to bring "writers beyond the shadows of criminal identity into positions of possibility" (52), while Kerr, in a 2006 lecture, relies on opposition of darkness and light to draw contrast between eras permitting prisoner education. Kerr (2006) first employs *chiaroscuro* to describe how increased educational access in the 1970s gave way to "the Dark Ages" (6), gesturing to the common designation for loss of written record coined by Petrarch (Mommsen 1942), then extending the metaphor, first by offering ways to "measure the darkness" of "sheer numbers of people incarcerated, by disproportionate representation of black and Latinos/Latinas" (Kerr 2006, 6).

Kerr's lecture is noteworthy for two reasons, both related to its participation in rhetorical economies that might otherwise appear nonvalent. Scholarship on Petrarchan historiography suggests that Petrarch's poetics contributed to and, in some cases, originated the colonial/othering discourses operant in texts described by Morrison, McBride, and Buck-Morss (2000), even as they predate those texts by several hundred years; Dagenais and Greer (2000) note that, "in the *Africa* Petrarch establishes most of the language which will be key to the European colonization of The Middle Ages: the idea that there is ... a squalid time of shadows which follows Roman Antiquity and which will in turn be followed by a second coming of light, of radiance" (434). Even as Kerr's lecture invokes light and darkness to signal contraction of educational access, the discursive genealogy behind the term yokes that darkness to a barbarism opposite the illumination that only education—and all its positive associations with civilization—can bestow. The abilities emerging from educational access, by contrast, necessarily bring prisoners into the light—the renaissance Kerr describes. The second figuration, however—"measure[ing] the darkness" of "countless numbers" of black and brown bodies (Kerr 2006, 6)—binds the darkness of reduced educational access explicitly to the raced bodies of prisoners themselves, thereby extending both the abolitionist discourse

McBride describes and the sentimental voyeurism Han (2012, 3) and Rodríguez (2002, 411) caution against.

These rhetorical moves are subtler than those of Deborah Appleman, who explicitly links the ability endowed by writing to light over dark, saying, in a 2012 CCCC response to Jimmy Santiago Baca, “the transformative power of our pedagogy and the power of language can travel even to the darkest of places through their poetry” (Appleman 2012)—a sentiment she reiterates in “Teaching in the Dark” (Appleman 2012, 24). That account offers up the poetry of Appleman’s students much the same way Fuller exhibits Douglass—as a testimony to literacy’s humanizing powers: “these men become more human when they are learning, reading, and writing” (Appleman 2012, 29).

So, too, does Sister Helen Prejean (2014) participate in this rhetorical economy, noting, in her foreword to *Women, Writing, and Prison*, that, “We can’t enlighten ourselves...until we find ourselves, or put ourselves, in situations that provide an awakening spark” (Jacobi and Folwell Stanford 2014, xv); here, she reiterates a need for dual enlightenment, for both prisoners and those on the outside. Prejean’s foreword, like the scholarship above, labors to persuade audiences of shared humanity between citizens and prisoners towards positive social change; notably, this volume pivots to a lay audience interested in literacy and activism more broadly. Yet, as with other scholar-practitioners and their abolitionist forebears, the language employed opposes unbeing/unknowing to a kind of spiritual and intellectual illumination made possible through literate practice—here, coded as a “spark” that nevertheless confers a humanity distinct from whatever embodied subjectivity prisoners had before: “The work of writing in prison and jails is spiritual work ... that calls the deepest part of every individual who puts pen to paper and allows them to say, “I am real. I am human” (xvi). One could argue that Prejean’s use of *chiaroscuro* articulates an understanding of self-discovery through writing that is available to a variety of audiences; as sight-dominant beings, we recognize the ready-to-handness of the spark metaphor, as easily as we register a lightbulb. At the same time, that spark as the condition of possibility for the human—combined with the foreword’s framing function for a series of testimonies¹⁶—places the text squarely in

the path of the discursive circuitries laid by abolitionists, and all the freight those circuitries carry.

The problem is not that scholar-practitioners employ these figurations at all; but neither is the problem that most prison literacy sponsors are white. What these examples do suggest, however, is a need to recognize the relationship between the tactics employed and the materiality of scholar-practitioners' own subjectivities as purveyors of ability, coded as white. This move to some extent undoes advances in the field's awareness of whiteness as a "neutral category" that functions as a universal, socializing mechanism (Kennedy, Middleton and Ratcliffe 2005, 367), even as white practitioners espouse antiracist values.

USING WHAT WORKS: MIRRORING THE CODES

Is it problematic that contemporary prison literacy advocates repeat successful rhetorical strategies from their abolitionist forebears—given that slaves themselves employed the same rhetorical economies to advocate for their emancipation? As McBride (2001) observes of the rhetorical economies animating abolitionism, these strategies—the cultivation of suspense on a dangerous frontier, the satisfying move from dark to light, bondage to freedom, and unbeing to humanity—formed a dynamic in which discourses legible (and satisfying) to white audiences were taken up by slaves *because* of their success. Douglass, for example, recognizes and meets the public's demand for "increasingly revealing and even pruriently detailed" accounts of slave suffering (McBride 2001, 154) by refusing his reader a detailed account of his escape, while mirroring white audiences' familiarity with/investment in rhetorics of Christian brotherhood so as to shame them for hypocrisy (McBride 2001, 156). Importantly, it was Douglass's written ability that rendered him human in the eyes of readers like Fuller, paving the way for wider acceptance of slaves' humanity; that scene of mutual recognition, however, as McBride suggests, retains the logics of whiteness that we see in future testimonies provided by imprisoned writers.

Jimmy Santiago Baca engages in a similar testimonial circuit, having been invited to speak about his writing in Jacobi's classes (Jacobi 2008, 72), and ballroom events like his 2012 CCCC address,

echoing the movements of the speaking circuit of which Douglass was a part.¹⁷ Baca, too, narrates a move from darkness to light in his autobiographical *A Place to Stand*, recalling his prison literacy acquisition as “a linguistic light that illuminated a new me” (Baca 2001, 257), while Judith Clark (2014) employs it to describe her discovery of fellowship with other women poets (51), and Taylor Huey (2014) writes of her desire to “bring society back into the light that for so long has been snuffed out” (192). So, too, do other testimonials employ this figuration, excerpted as evidence in scholar-practitioners’ own arguments about writing’s transformative power (Curry and Jacobi 2017, 8; Rogers 2004, 18; Erlichman 2004, 86).

The troping of darkness and light echoes techniques employed by imprisoned visual artists as well, often equipped with only a golf pencil or the ink shaft of a pen (Ziegler 2015), who employ *chiaroscuro* to capture the light and shadows permeating their otherwise barren surroundings. Treacy Ziegler (2015) cites comments from one writer, Dan, to illustrate this phenomenon: “Now that I see *chiaroscuro*, I see it everywhere! The patterns of light through the window, the floor, the light bands cast across the corridor. The light that comes through the cell window!” (Ziegler). The slippage between the visual and the metaphorical in prisoner vocabularies, then, suggests that, even as imprisoned writers mirror the raced rhetorical economies inherited from abolitionism and extended by scholar-practitioners, so, too, are they responding to the affective terrain of their environments. If, as Sadie Reynolds (2014), suggests, using terms like “offender” strips prisoners of their humanity by “do[ing] a kind of epistemic violence to them” (106-7), then one might reasonably ask: “Does the physical space of the prison sufficiently explain prisoners’ and scholar-practitioners’ affinity for these rhetorical choices, thereby exposing this line of thinking as itself racially overdetermined?” The answer in both cases might lie in the body as both discursively and physiologically determined.

SOMATIC INSTRUMENTS

Razor wire and iron bars, too, punctuate poetry and paintings, reminding us of these tropes’ distinctly somatic origins—metaphors for partition, enclosure, dehumanization, suffering, and redemption that coalesce in the repeated bodily movements of prisoners and

prison-based literacy practitioners, alike. Just as Nadya Pittendrigh (2015b) observes of the powerful political rhetoric enacted through supermax prisoners' expressions of bodily suffering (156), so, too, do the affective experiences of scholar-practitioners enact political rhetorics of their own. It follows, then, that we should record and transmit those experiences mindfully, both as a means of rehearsing bodily memory and maintaining methodological rigor.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the somatic as, "Of or relating to the (or a) body; bodily, corporeal, physical" (OED); the somatic encompasses our cells, our circuitries, our skin and our limbs, but also has the capacity to illuminate our understanding of the relationship between individual experience and the kind of affective solidarity that coheres around interpersonal exchange, social groups, and political movements. In her study of rhetorics generated by dancers' bodily memory, LeMesurier (2014) argues that sensation not only "exemplif[ies] the body's capacity ... for storing and using memory and performance," but also constitutes a "conduit for remembered knowledge" (362). Given the turn in rhetorical studies towards fieldwork and an attendant focus on what Aaron Hess calls the phronetic "self-as-instrument" (qtd in LeMesurier 2014, 129), such attunement to bodily memory might aid rhetoricians working in spaces where bodily disposition affects both *ethos* and method; becoming, to adapt Quintilian, a good researcher, *sensing* well.

Yet, important to LeMesurier's work, and to understanding the rhetorical force and mobility of bodied knowledge, is the role of metaphor in capturing that knowledge succinctly—thereby rendering it recognizable and repeatable. We know from Ricoeur (1978) that metaphor enables the appearance of discourse by assuming the body's forms and traits, allowing, in a paraphrase of Aristotle, an epiphoric transfer of meaning from distance to proximity between heterogeneous ideas (147). LeMesurier's (2014) account of somatic metaphor operates much the same way, as it "demonstrate[s] tangible effects of the discourse / body connection" through a process in which bodies are modified through the application of discursive metaphors that are crafted to be recognizable to the dancers' embodiment" (366). And yet—to the extent that metaphors make those somatic storehouses portable, they become potent instruments

for the bodies politic John Protevi (2009) describes as scaling from personal affective experience to a civic body with the potential to shape movements and institutions. Protevi writes, “Individual bodies politic are cognitive agents that actively make sense of situations: they constitute significations by establishing value for themselves, and they adopt an orientation or direction of action” (33). However, what he calls a personal “political physiology” shapes the interactions and shared affective experiences of groups, which, in turn, make up “the patterns and triggers of institutional action” (xii). LeMesurier’s somatic metaphor helps translate Protevi’s scaled understanding of affect as it moves from individual to wider political bodies by narrating the process by which repeated sensory experience accrues to memory, coalescing in the figured forms that might travel from body to body as useful knowledge—hence the ready-to-handness of language around prisons: dangerous frontiers, darkness, and light. LeMesurier (2014) gestures to this process when she reimagines Cicero’s tale of Simonides, in which Simonides’s repeated bodily movements not only summon the richness of memory but testify to arrangement as a rhetorical force. She observes that, “Defining memory in terms of action, how one moves through memory in order to enact it and to make it useful, allows rhetoricians to best consider how memory and recognition operate in tandem” (366).

This process—from bodied experience, to somatic metaphor, to rhetorical action—has implications for prison-based writing scholarship, insofar as individual somatic rituals within prison walls create a political physiology that, in turn, contributes to the formation of civic bodies capable of shaping institutional action. In other words, though one might step into a well-used rhetorical pathway to evoke the intensities of personal bodily response, that utterance nevertheless has the capacity to shape and even impede the movements of other travelers where the troughs become so well-worn that other paths become unthinkable. To the extent that scholar-practitioners in community literacy and rhet-comp maintain disciplinary investments in writing’s capacities for change, scaling from classroom to culture—it follows that rhetorical scholarship representing prisoner voices must examine the broader social and political implications of that scholarship’s rhetorical choices—particularly where those choices are influenced by, and intended to evoke, the singularly charged space of the prison.

The peril lies in the mobility of such somatic metaphors beyond the interpersonal—and the extent to which these particular storehouses of physical memory aid and abet racialized discourse. To return to Protevi's account of somatic physiology, the point where affect moves beyond the personal to groups to publics is the point where prison-based researchers—or any researchers working with communities of color—need to consider (or at the very least acknowledge) the discursive implications of the language we use to describe embodied experience, however perilous, or bathed in the very real light and shadow of carceral space.

I do not write this piece to police the poetic impulses of writers on either side of prison walls, any more than I think excising these tropes would somehow bring about some new era of emancipatory possibility. The primacy of the visual as an heuristic explains the availability of these tropes to articulate any number of struggles. Curry and Jacobi (2017), however, model how we might mobilize language to evoke the affective experience of the prison without resorting to vexed rhetorical economies:

Entering jail is an assault on the senses. Thick recirculated air feels either drafty or stuffy, never comfortable. The walls protrude with a stark, dingy white, bare of character or care. The smell is sterile, some unidentifiable cleanser stinging the tongue and nostrils. Doors clang shut and open via invisible mechanics (5).

Here, the writers focus on the structural, ambient qualities of prison architecture; this assault on the senses codes the prison as dehumanizing in and of itself, rather than rendering prisoners as props in the larger drama of literacy's humanizing light. Nadya Pittendrigh (2015a) observes of her own research that, "service learning and community engagement function as powerful pedagogy precisely because they are so all-consuming" (42), suggesting a complex knot of affective and emotional experience shaped by the hours and even years spent with prisoners writing on the inside. Perhaps, as rhetorical instruments, we might pause more often to attune our awarenesses in scenes of bodily discomfort, including

those that accrue in routine movements and bodily response; in so doing, we might better calibrate our language to account for both the immediacy of affect and the discursive substrates that shape our shared vocabulary.

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NOTES

- 1 Ryden and Marshall suggest that “moral accounting” reveals racial discursive structures (2012, 14), but also “recenter(s) the white subject by paying attention to the particularity of whiteness in its various incarnations” (2012, 5). That prison is shaped significantly by racialized discourse suggests that literacy sponsorship in prison faces similar challenges.
- 2 Hartnett et al (2011, viii), Kerr (2004), and Plemons (2013) write about the marginalizing effects that prison-based pedagogies may incur despite scholar-practitioners’ progressive intentions.
- 3 Insofar as prisoners are, via the 13th amendment, “slaves of the state” (Dayan 2001, 16)—and therefore what Dylan Rodríguez (2002) would characterize as, “never *free to write*” of their own volition (409), scholar-practitioners face the ethical and epistemological impossibility of scholarship on prison writing broadly conceived. Here, however well-intentioned, writing about prisoners necessarily reproduces a kind of spectacle in a larger, American-constitutional drama; Cory Holding affirms these difficulties for community literacy research, noting prison-based writing’s illegibility to university-based methods, and wondering “whether free (not incarcerated) researchers should be undertaking such projects in the first place” (Rogers et al 2017, 83).
- 4 Caleb Smith (2008), citing Morrison, identifies a similar kind of chiaroscuro in American literature’s treatment of prisoner and penitentiary, with frequent reference to how “corpses of the law” become a kind of “shadow” (253).
- 5 The 2010 Census indicated that the populations of whites and blacks were nearly equal (39 and 40 percent respectively) in prisons nationally (Sakala 2014).
- 6 Angela Y. Davis (2005, 35-38) and Michelle Alexander (2012) chronicle the interplay of these factors as they culminate in the

formation of what Alexander calls a “caste” system (2012, 12) for African Americans, disenfranchised and systematically denied justice.

- 7 While James’s rendering is somewhat reductive, its identification of “controlling” discourse highlights the reality of the unequal power relations inscribed in the prisoner sponsorship dynamic, particularly as texts generated by prisoners constitute emotional and intellectual labor redirected by sponsors for an array of purposes, often exceeding those texts’ original purpose.
- 8 Curry and Jacobi (2017) challenge Coogan’s preference for peer-reviewed publication over self-publishing, arguing that such efforts towards legibility in fact reinforce dominant discourse (14). Others, like Kerr (2004), acknowledge the naïveté of attempting to mitigate powerful representations of prison through written exchange between students and inmates.
- 9 Jacobi and imprisoned writer Elliot Johnston elsewhere note the already asymmetric power relations inscribed by the sponsorship designation (Jacobi and Johnston 2008).
- 10 Hartnett et al (2011) echo this call for recentering imprisoned writers themselves, and a pedagogy “rooted in the lived experiences of those populations most directly affected by the structures of inequality” (333).
- 11 Patrick Berry (2014) reiterates this caution, observing that “hopes and beliefs about the power of reading and writing ... vary among students and their teachers” (5).
- 12 Kennedy, Middleton, and Ratcliffe (2005) acknowledge Morrison’s piece as seminal for bringing whiteness studies to Rhet/Comp (Kennedy et al 2005, 360), working in tandem with contributions to critical race theory.
- 13 Caleb Smith (2008), too, describes prisoners as a “shadow” (253) in the poetics of the penitentiary.

- 14 Trounstone (2014b) elsewhere uses figures of light and darkness to dramatize the impact of her theater workshops in *Shakespeare behind Bars*, promoted by publishers as, “shed[ding] a compassionate light in a dark world.”
- 15 Here, Fuller shares terrain with Hegel, who used the slave to explore philosophical questions of freedom and consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). As historian Susan Buck-Morss (2000) explains, Hegel struggled to give shape to that project until the onset of the Haitian revolt (852).
- 16 The positioning of Prejean’s statement operates as a mode of authentication to legitimize and confer moral authority, as abolitionists did for slave autobiographies targeting white audiences (Stephens 1991, Sidonie Smith 1974, 9)—by all accounts, rhetorically successful strategies, given slave narratives’ proliferation preceding the Civil War (McBride 2001, 153).
- 17 Plemons and Kerr participate in a similar sponsorship circuit, sharing the story and writings of Spoon Jackson in conference presentations (Kerr 2011, 2012), college classroom exchange settings (Kerr, qtd. in Jackson), print (Plemons 2012, 2013), and even Twitter (Plemons, 2010). San Quentin-based prison educator Judith Tannenbaum collaborated with Jackson to co-write *By Heart: Poetry, Prison, and Two Lives*, a text Spoon partially voice-recorded, now posted on YouTube (atnightlyfilm 2010). Plemons tweeted the link to publicize the memoir’s publication (Plemons 2010).

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