

PRISON SENTENCES:
A THEORY OF PRISON WRITING NETWORKS

By

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Dedicated to the men of the Lawtey Correctional Institution, especially Doc, David,
Reggie, and Kevin

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There have been two dominant perspectives for studying prison writing. The first perspective, interpretive, examines the sociological, political, or cultural contributions of literary or celebrity prison writers. The second explores writing in the unique context of prison-based education classes. Both perspectives assume that writing's signature function is to transmit meaning and information. However, the production and circulation of writing in prisons is more important than these two modes of interpretation acknowledges. While they are concerned with writing in prison as either literature or sociology, neither perspective deals with writing as it actually occurs and works in prison, and neither is comprehensive. Simply put, we do not understand how writing takes place in the context of prisons. A third perspective is required. "Prison Sentences: A Theory of Prison Writing Networks" provides the initial step toward this third perspective.

I begin by re-defining writing in prison as actors in the complex networks that overlap and interpenetrate prison. This perspective departs from views of writing as primarily a transmission technology. I show that the material situations of writing and its circulation affect writers across the prison, transforming writing tasks and writers alike.

Drawing on the work of Bruno Latour and Clay Spinuzzi, I argue for a perspective that that, in prison, renews writing's agency as equal to and linked with human actors.

Having re-theorized writing in prison as a network, I examine how concepts such as genre, public and counterpublic space, resistance and control, and pedagogy and resistance can be re-imagined. I describe how writing networks in prison and their constituent texts enact socio-historical genres, how prison-based textual circulations contribute to public/counterpublic formations, and how these textual networks enable acts of resistance and control within the textual landscape of human non-human actions. I conclude my dissertation by examining the connections between pedagogy, research, and the networked place of writing in prison. I call for continued and renewed research and teaching using this network perspective that will provide more comprehensive and realistic descriptions of writing in prison.

CHAPTER 1 ENTERING THE NETWORK: WRITING IN PRISONS

Introduction

In August of 2009, several prisoners at the Lawtey Correctional Institution in Florida mailed copies of a letter to professors and teachers at institutions across north Florida. In this letter, these prisoners expressed a desire to form a writing workshop at their prison. This workshop had been approved by the warden and assistant warden, but the group needed a mentor or teacher to help run the workshop. Two prisoners, Larry and Reggie, signed this letter with their names and, as required, their Department of Correction ID numbers. However, the letter was meant to represent the intentions of twenty other prisoners at Lawtey C.I. who also wanted to participate in this workshop. Because I study writing in prison and prison education, I decided to get involved. I could not write to Larry and Reggie through email since prisoners in Florida (as in most states) are not allowed to have email. So, I wrote a letter back to them that expressed my interest in helping them set up and run this workshop. Larry and Reggie wrote another letter back to explain how I could contact the education director and the chaplain to start the paperwork to become an educational volunteer. I wrote once more to these men. I also wrote several emails to the education director and chaplain of Lawtey C.I. More letters, more paperwork, and more time passed, as slowly the resources and plan for our writing workshop took form.

By October, a small archive of writing had been sent back and forth from my office at the University of Florida to the prisoners and officials at Lawtey C.I. Security officials had opened, inspected, and re-sealed each letter to and from Larry and Reggie. Many of my emails to the chaplain were forwarded to other officials who worked at Lawtey, as

well as other officials who worked in the Florida Department of Corrections. This collected body of writing produced by me, the prisoners, and the prison officials between August and October was extensive. This corpus included two dozen personal letters written between me and the prisoners, a dozen emails to the Chaplain at Lawtey C.I. and the Education Director, and an unknown number of emails between those two officials and the warden and Commander of security at Lawtey. In addition, I filled out volunteer application forms, National Crime Information Center background check authorization forms, training verification forms, lesson plans for the first two months of “class,” and a teaching journal. After the workshop’s first meeting, I learned that other texts orbited our class, written and circulated by prison officials and the prisoners: call-out rosters, security memos, sign-in sheets, all in addition to more emails between me, the chaplain, and the warden, as well as more letters between me and one of the prisoners who emerged as a leader in the workshop. Finally, the men who participated in the workshop also produced and shared writing with one another as well as with family and friends outside of prison.

This experience led me to recognize two things: first, that the texts surrounding these efforts to bring about our writing workshop produced interrelationships between distant people with disparate goals; second, that this writing was the material means by which that interrelation occurred. In a larger sense, writing *circulates* in and around the prison as a *network*. This writing network enables and influences the people and activities in prison, allowing prisoners and prison officials both to do the things they do in prison. As our writing workshop took shape, and we began to meet every Saturday, I saw how our writing and the official writing of prison circulated among multiple people,

in multiple contexts, and worked toward multiple objectives. For example, I learned that not everyone shared a similar goal for this workshop.

To understand prison, we need to understand its writing. And to understand any writing in prison, we need to understand all writing in prison. This is because writing circulates in prison, forming a network of texts that in turn forms relationships with other texts, people, and situations. As a network, it acts upon and influences those people and their identities and activities, interrupting some activities while prompting new ones to occur. Simply put, writing in prison is substantive and powerful. Writing is self-generative: in prison, the result of writing and its circulation is always *more writing*. Existing descriptions of writing in prison do not account for this self-replicating network of texts, actions, knowledge, and objectives that occurs in prison.

In Chapter 1, therefore, I argue that writing in prison has been narrowly conceived. I offer a description of writing in prison grounded in writing-studies and network theory. This description will show how writing in prison occurs as a complex network, one wherein equal attention is given to writing as to the people who write and the situations in which writer and writing occur. I argue that previous modes for studying writing in prison need to be set aside to make way for these complex, networked descriptions of writing. I begin by considering current modes used to study writing in prison. I then draw on arguments for writing studies as a mode of inquiry to show how studying writing in prison as an historical technology provides more accurate empirical and theoretical descriptions of writing than those provided by previous theories. I finally turn to network theory through the works of Bruno Latour and Clay Spinuzzi to place writing studies into

a network theoretical framework that accounts for writing and its complex relationships with other texts, technologies, and humans.

In this dissertation, I use the term prisoner and prisoners to refer to the men and women who are incarcerated in American jails and prisons. I have selected this term for connotative and stylistic reasons. The terms “prisoner” and “inmate” or “prison inmate” are often used interchangeably. I have eschewed “inmate” and “prison inmate” because those terms carry an institutional connotation. This connotation of being institutionalized also applies to individuals in mental health facilities. Furthermore, the term implies that the individual is passively kept. This is simply not the case with many prisoners. I also considered using the phrase “men and women in prison” since it emphasized humanity above their setting. However, this phrase is awkward and unwieldy.

In the end, I have decided on the term prisoner. This term indicates the violence of prison by drawing on the connotations associated with similar terms such as “political prisoner” and “prisoner of war.” Furthermore, the term hints at its root as a verb; a prisoner is someone who “does” prison. The action of this nomenclature suits the purpose of this work, since my focus is on the networked interactions between prisoners, writing, and the prison. In a real sense, this study verbalizes the term prisoner through writing. That is, prisoners (and other people as well) use writing to construct and interact with prison. For these reasons, the term “prisoner” is used almost exclusively.

The Problem with “Prison Writing”

There are two current modes for studying prison writing. The first mode, which seeks to interpret texts, is used by the largest group of scholars who study prison writing. This group includes scholars from fields such as English, history, and sociology.

Collectively, these scholars study the contributions of prison writers to conversations about politics, society, and crime. These scholars often examine the sociological, political, or cultural contributions of literary or celebrity prison authors such as Jean Genet, George Jackson, or Martin Luther King, Jr. For example, H. Bruce Franklin has published several books that interpret prisoners' creative writing in order to refigure the role of slave and prison narratives to give them a privileged place in the canon of American literature (1978; 1998). Other scholars try to connect the work of incarcerated authors across various time periods, ranging from Biblical to contemporary, in a literary category that marks imprisonment as the salient political, philosophical, and rhetorical feature of all prison writers. For example, in *Writers in Prison*, Ioan Davies argues that literate prison writers participate in an historical “ur-epic” that represents the collective experiences of a non-literate oral prison culture in which literate prisoners are immersed (*Writers* 34). The imaginative works produced by literate prisoners form a continuous narrative throughout Western history that combines the cultural, social, and political contributions of imprisoned individuals and places them as a central part of western cultural development. In his examination of Davies’ argument, Bob Gaucher notes that even though this narrative includes oral traditions like songs, storytelling and “dead time” conversations, what scholars most frequently study are the texts that reflect and represent the whole of prison experiences. Because these textual works are produced mostly by literate prisoners who are themselves more likely to be prisoners of conscience, the narrative that appears is a politicized one, reflecting only a portion of the prison (“Inside” 33). Written objects within this “ur-epic” are produced by politicized prisoners and thus do not reflect the majority of prisoners. The collected corpus of

“prison writing” reflects their perspectives and agendas instead of the experiences of the entire prison population. Gaucher argues that educated prisoners are “writing from the margins of both their society and the prison” and might provide us with a sense of the broader oral culture in which they are immersed (34). This “cream of the crop” perspective is used by Davies, Gaucher, Franklin, and other scholars of prison culture to read the prison and its influence upon past and current societies.

The second mode explores writing in the unique context of prison-based education classes. It is often used by writing teachers from the field of composition studies to study their own prison-based writing classes. These teacher-scholars try to explain how prisoners learn to write in prison-based education programs. Their goal is to improve writing courses that take place in prisons. These classes often focus on creative writing and proceed from the assumption that writing is therapeutic, rehabilitative, or redemptive. For example, Jane Maher explains the rehabilitative power of teaching basic writing at a women’s correctional facility. In her class, she helps prisoner-students use writing to empower themselves in order to “break the cycle” of circumstances related to literacy levels and low self-image that contribute to recidivism (“You” 83). This type of self-improvement through liberal arts education, particularly writing, is frequently cited by prison education advocates and teachers. Other prison education scholars like Howard Davidson seek to understand how prison education classes reproduce or disrupt popular beliefs about the role of punishment as well as the dominant ideologies of criminality that justify those beliefs (*Schooling* 1995).

While these studies provide insight into how individual prisoners use writing in educational settings, they do not provide a complete understanding of how writing

otherwise occurs outside of prison-based education. This is primarily because educational studies do not examine the discrete object of writing in prison but rather the sociological framework that encapsulates prison writing.

Both the interpretive and educational methods assume that writing's signature function is to transmit meaning and information. However, the production and circulation of writing in prisons is more consequential than this interpretive work acknowledges. For example, an analysis of first-time prisoners by Richard Jones and Thomas Schmid explains how prisoners use forms such as letter writing to adapt to the cultural shock of incarceration. Jones and Schmid's study argues that newly incarcerated prisoners rely on the circulation of letters to and from relatives and friends to assert their "home" identity and resist the "prisoner" identity imposed by prison (*Doing* 68). Dylan Rodriguez's *Forced Passages* points to the role of writing in constructing and maintaining networks of resistance in prison- and social-reform movements in his analysis of the lineage of prisoners' radical political thought. A collection of scholarly essays and articles from the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* exposes the ways in which prisoners participate in academic conversations on issues related to justice and corrections. These texts written by prisoners challenge the authority that criminological scholarship claims over them by appropriating the textual genres and styles of academia to articulate counter arguments and resistant knowledges. Their work points to a discursive hegemony that is based in textual production and circulation, which enforces genre-based privileges of academic scholarship and authority. Furthermore, very few educational or interpretive studies examine how prison operations rely on the production and circulation of technical documents and technical writing tasks. The

scholarship that addresses the subject deals with teaching correctional officers technical writing and does not address the ways in which writing contributes to the official and unofficial operation of prisons.

Once we step outside these two dominant modes of studying prison writing, we can see a larger corpus of writing that has not been researched. Writing that prisoners produce and circulate (in the form of autobiographies, short stories, letters, novels, poems, and personal essays) makes reference to another body of technical and legal writing. This second corpus constitutes the "official" textual productions in and from prisons, a powerful body of texts that stands in opposition to the writing produced by prisoners. So, while the two dominant modes of studying prison writing are concerned with writing in prison as either literature or sociology, neither deals with writing as it occurs, and neither is comprehensive. Simply put, we do not really understand how writing takes place in the context of prisons, only what its literatures say and its education does. A third perspective is required.

A Third View in Prison: Writing Studies

A third view of writing in prison can be found in the theories and methods of writing studies, and particularly in theories of writing ecologies and networks. Writing studies, as Charles Bazerman explains, is a mode of inquiry that attends to writing's "production, its circulation, its uses, its role in the development of individuals and societies, and its learning by individuals, social collectives, and historically emergent cultures" ("The Case" 32). He argues that studies of writing have focused on writing in universities, while "areas such as technical writing, business writing, writing in the professions, writing in the workplace, and rhetorical studies of writing in the agora have reminded us that writing in universities is only a small slice of the writing that goes on elsewhere in

the world” (33). Part of the historical emphasis on writing in universities is based on the view of universities as important sites for the development of “society’s knowledges, ambitions, and professions” (33). That is, the university is an example of a nexus of writing; it uses writing to produce knowledge, store information, and train others to use knowledge.

Prison is a similar nexus. Within this site, many kinds of texts are produced and circulated as part of the constant negotiation over information, identities, and spaces. As in universities, writing is an important and prolific part of prison, though research on it has focused rather narrowly on its ability to encode specific meanings rather than on its systemic functions. To broaden and deepen our understanding of how writing works in prison, we need to explain the many ways writing in prison is used and learned, and we need to understand how it produces and distributes identities and knowledge that, in effect, define the institution of prison itself. In addition, by understanding writing in prison, we might begin to understand the functions of writing in other spaces.

Bazerman provides three points from which to study writing as a “major subset of the study of human consciousness, institutions, practice, and development” (36). The first perspective is historical, a view which provides “an emergent picture of writing practices, genres, systems of circulation, and related institutions and social systems” (36). Second, Bazerman argues that writing should be studied from a theoretical perspective to allow us to re-see writing in new ways that will generate new, predictive claims (37). Theory in this sense serves as a way to describe and explain what writing is and what it does, not an esoteric concept far removed from the event of writing. Though many writing studies scholars have eschewed theory in favor of “grounded” empirical

research, Bazerman argues that “writing is the basis for theories of language as the best positioned [discipline] to begin to put together the large, important, and multidimensional story of writing” (33). Third, he claims that along with historical and theoretical descriptions of writing, writing studies should examine the writing practices of individuals to provide a more complete picture of writing and to help put our historical and theoretical descriptions into local perspectives. This view of individual writers can help us understand how writers are socialized into community language practices, how they engage with and position themselves within their communities, and how writing contributes to “emergent identities, commitments, and accomplishments as literate social beings” (37-8). By deploying these three perspectives, Bazerman suggests that writing studies can attend to historical, theoretical, and individual dimensions of writing to provide nuanced descriptions of writing as a technology so central to society as to constitute it.

In addition, a writing studies perspective focuses on texts without evaluating them culturally or aesthetically. As Susan Miller argues, writing studies focuses on the formations of textuality as “shaped graphic utterances that can be disassociated from human sources” (“Writing” 42). From such a perspective, evaluations of high, low, popular, creative, or ordinary writing do not apply. Miller explains that writing studies “assumes interest in *all* available writers and *all* available writings, even forgeries, for their own sake” (45). Writing studies locates written text at the center of social and cultural action. This perspective allows us to see social and cultural action outside of literary privilege. No text is treated as more important than any other. When considered in light of writing in prison, Miller’s re-focus avoids defaulting to those literary and

pedagogical modes of inquiry described above, since each focuses on providing an interpretation-based evaluation of prison writer's texts as either literature or educationally-situated personal reflection. For studying writing in prison, writing studies is not just an alternative to previous modes of inquiry; it is a "clean break" from those modes.

One method researchers in writing studies may use to theorize writing as an historical object is to examine the connections among texts, settings, and writers, through ecological models of writing. In *The Wealth of Reality*, Karen Syverson places the writing of individuals and collectives of students into a "writing ecology" to describe "the complex interrelationships in which writing is embedded" including texts, people, and environments (6). Syverson argues that these writing ecologies are webs of relationships "composed of numerous interrelated complex systems" that include writers, readers, texts, environments, and the dynamic process of composing (2-3). Together, these function as a "network of independent agents [that] act and interact in parallel with each other, simultaneously reacting to and co-constructing their own environment" (3). Through this interaction, an ecological order and organization emerges without the direct intent or control of a single writer or reader.

In addition to being linked, self-organizing, and emergent systems of relationships, ecologies are also complex systems. The pattern of relationships between participants never remains stable, but continuously changes and adapts. Complex systems differ from complicated systems that may have many parts that work together in stable ways. The linkages between agents in complicated systems are mechanistic and operate the same regardless of the number of parts or agents. The outcomes of complicated

systems are predictable. In a complex system, however, relationships and their outcomes between agents are unstable and semi-predictable.

Complex systems exhibit four features: distribution, embodiment, emergence, and enaction. Work in complex ecologies is *distributed*. That is, work such as writing is divided among multiple agents across time and space within ecologies. The notion of writing as a distributed activity destabilizes the commonly-held idea of a single writer and text, an approach that attends only to isolated writers, processes, and artifacts (8). Writing that is distributed across an ecology of relationships accounts for the full depth and breadth of writing contexts. Context comes to involve a shifting and temporarily effective combination of the text, writing technology, the people involved in production and circulation, knowledge, and other texts that are drawn into the activity called “writing.”

Complex ecologies are also *emergent*. This concept “refers to the self-organization arising globally in networks of simple components connected to each other and operating locally” (11). Patterns of effective work, and the order and organization that such work brings about, emerge as part of the active relationship between participants. Emergence is not chaos, but is rather the self-organized and re-organized order that arises from the interaction of agents over time. It is the pattern that arises naturally to make sense of what otherwise would be chaos.

Complex systems are *embodied* in the physical agents that constitute and participate in the system; the constituent agents of an ecology and the ecology itself are inseparable. Based on this concept, closer attention can and should be given to writing as a form of material embodiment, including how writing is produced and circulated.

Writing is the object of study that allows research to explore the composition and movements of complex writing systems. This focus is demonstrated by Trimbur in “Composition and the Circulation of Writing.” He argues that the “isolation of writing from the material conditions of production and delivery [is] a problem” that writing teachers and scholars have not really attended to (189). By ignoring the materiality of writing and the conditions of its circulation, we have had to “equate the activity of composing with writing itself and to miss altogether the complex delivery systems through which writing circulates” (190). Embodied ecologies place renewed attention on the material object of writing within its relationships and contexts, an object from which to begin re-understanding writing.

Finally, ecologies are *enacted*. The behaviors and movements between participants cause the ecology to stabilize those relationships, however briefly in that form, over time. Such enaction is more than “situated activity”; enaction allows knowledge, meaning, and identity to exist (Syverson 13). These things emerge through the actions of addressing them, particularly in writing. For example, identities like “guard” and “prisoner” in prison are enacted roles, existing as such because they are enacted by people who “fill” them, largely through behaviors like writing.

Ecological models help to identify writing as a powerful object that occurs in complex, enacted, and embedded ways. And though writing exhibits these traits across physical, social, psychological, spatial, and temporal dimensions, ecological models do not completely account for the active role of writing in those environments (23). That is, ecologies do not explain how work continues to be produced, how it circulates, or how other work occurs in response to that writing. Ecologies provide static models that

explain the traits of complex relationships, but do not explain how the agents that fill the ecology, particularly writing, function together to accomplish work. That is, “the ecology” is an attempt to describe what is in the “black box.” The network gives rise to the black-box and the ecology it contains.

Network Theory

Networks share many traits with ecologies, including complexity, distribution, and emergency. In ecologies, writing is an indivisible object to be deployed by more active participants, people. Network theory moves beyond describing the links between writers and writing as actor and object. Network theory explores the agency of how writing is an actor that accomplishes net-work: “the work that connects, coordinates, and stabilizes polycontextual work activities” (Spinuzzi *i*). Written texts are actors in that network, equal to human actors in their power to link and mediate the work of the network.

Network theory developed in several fields of theory and research that includes information technology, developmental and educational psychology, and computer science. Because networks are the conceptual result of multiple fields, networks are difficult to define in a stable way. Each field uses the term networks to describe the different embodiments and effects of networks in ways that contribute to that field’s knowledge. However, broadly speaking, network theory attempts to provide empirical and theoretical accounts of networks in order to better understand how those networks function in reality.

To explore networks and writing, I draw on the work of Clay Spinuzzi and Bruno Latour. In his book *Network*, Spinuzzi’s analyzes how networks are conceived differently by activity theory and actor-network-theory. He places these two theories into “discussion” with one another to show how each describes differently what a network

and net-work is, how participants in networks gather to do that work, and how networks function in particular settings. However, Spinuzzi avoids addressing a fundamental issue with networks as described by both activity theory and actor-network theory, one which I explore here using writing in prison to do so: the status of non-human agents, and in particular writing, as actants in networks.

Shared Attributes of Networks

Activity theory and actor-network theory share similar definitions of networks. Both acknowledge that networks are semi-stable assemblages of linked agents. Activity theory further defines networks as “linked activity systems – human beings laboring cyclically to transform the object of their labor, drawing on tools and practices to do so” (Spinuzzi 7). In actor-network theory, networks are “*assemblages of humans and non-humans*; any person, artifact, practice, or assemblage of these is considered a node in the network” (6, italics original). In both activity theory and actor-network theory, networks are seen as enacted relationships between people, tools, technologies, knowledges, and spaces. Through these semi-stable relationships, the work of networks is accomplished. Such work does not necessarily mean producing an artifact, but refers more generally to some effect upon or change in the world brought about through the transformative relationships between the network’s assemblages and nodes. These kinds of networks surround, involve, and affect us: satellites circle the globe, fiber-optic and telephone wires, highways and traffics signal systems help us move about the globe, and relationships between individuals and groups of people all surround us and organize our behaviors toward one another. In prison, networks similarly surround and affect the people there to shape their behaviors and relationships. However, in prison, writing is an important means of embodiment for such networks.

As Spinuzzi explains, activity theory and actor-network theory identify four salient traits. Networks are heterogeneous, multiply linked, transformative, and black-boxed (46). In both activity theory and actor-network theory, networks are *heterogeneous*. Networks gather agents distributed across time and space that link together to form the network. These agents include both humans and non-humans. As networks form and act, the relationships between these agents proliferate and shift. Whether they are human or non-human, agents participate in networks by forming multiple links to one another.

The possible and actual relationships between these agents are prolific. Because there are numerous, shifting points where relationships form between actants, networks are termed *multiply linked*. The work of networks occurs because the agents necessary to complete this work are gathered, however temporarily, in one place in a *node*. These node-relationships are not arranged in a stable pattern, but instead form semi-predictable patterns over time by linking, de-linking, and re-linking. These semi-stable assemblages of human and non-human agents give networks their complexity. The patterns of relationships between nodes and actants emerge from the continual shift of those relationships, unstable and semi-predictable. One result of the multiplicity of links is that networks are durable, as well as semi-predictable. Spinuzzi points out that networked agents are fragile and are easy to disrupt independently. However, because nodes are comprised of multiple agents, and networks are comprised of multiple nodes, networks are extremely difficult to stop or destroy entirely (47). When one node is disrupted, other nodes take over to continue the work.

Third, objects within the network, human and non-human agents, are *transformed* by their participation in the network. Simply put, human and textual agents gather as nodes. Those nodes and the work they accomplish are transformed by their interaction with other agents and nodes. As agents link together to accomplish work as nodes, those agents are likewise transformed in the course of completing that work. Spinuzzi explains that “transformations happen as movements to different physical and social locales – different media, different activities, different groups with social languages” (49). Agents change as a result of working with other agents as part of the network. Furthermore, work which occurs at one node interpenetrates and interacts with other nodes, each mutually affecting the others’ work. Nodes do not engage in transformative work in isolation but instead affect the remainder of the network, including close and distant nodes and agents. For example, texts that circulate in prison between agents interact with other human and non-human agents, transforming all agents involved in the process. This interaction also transforms the text, and vice versa.

Finally, networks are black-boxed. This term refers to the ways in which complex relationships within a network are reduced and managed to allow networks to appear simple (49). The outward appearance of networks conceals the work that occurs inside where human and non-human agents form transformative, semi-stable nodes that accomplish their work. Internally, these relationships are multiple and semi-stable, constituting an unpredictable aggregate of working relationship and effects. To an outside observer, networks appear un-complex, even simple. For example, an observer who considers the prison from outside but who never enters would see the prison as

simple. This observer would see a prisoner enter and then later emerge. When the prisoner emerged they would be deeply transformed by what went on inside.

This transformation was black-boxed by the prison. During the time the prisoner was inside prison, relationships were formed, some enduring and some temporary, between the prisoner and other people. Many different actors, including texts, transformed the prisoner's life through the plethora of relationships that emerged and dissolved as they served their time inside. This is a defining principle of networks: the semi-predictable emergence of relationships that cause transformations. And just as the prison transformed the prisoner through those links, so the prisoner indelibly transformed other actors, including the prison itself. He left his mark, so to speak, because the network works in all directions, although not equally so. Undoubtedly, the prison transformed the prisoner more than the prisoner transformed the prison.

Spinuzzi explains that "black boxes tend to hide not just complexities but also local transformations" (49). In a way, black-boxes mark the borders of a network, within which network agents are poised to encounter and intercept agents from outside the network (54). As cordoning borders, black-boxes "reduce and manage the complexity" of the network so that such complexity can be managed and the network can do its work (49). By black-boxing relationships, agents are gathered to form nodes, collecting and managing otherwise complex relationships into manageable and describable groups.

Occasionally, the complexity of prison is exposed and the black box is opened. This occurs when a piece of writing reaches out from the prison writing network to the public, whether produced by prisoners or by correctional officers. The black box is also breached during riots, or when injuries or deaths occur, and must be made public. In

these cases, the complex and very tense relationships between agents in prison are revealed and the network is made visible before it closes again.

Activity theory and actor network theory agree that networks are heterogeneous, multiply linked, transformative, and black-boxed. Setting these theories and their descriptions of networks into a dialogue does not synthesize them or rationalize them against one another but rather causes their similarities, and also their differences, to emerge. However, these theories do differ in how they perceive the nature of agents. These differences are important when we focus on writing as an object of study.

Activity Networks

Activity theory is “a theory of distributed cognition that focuses on issues of labor, learning, and concept formation” (*Network* 62). This theory developed in fields such as educational psychology and communication. Its focus was, until recently, the development of individual humans within their activity systems in order to understand how humans develop the object of their labor through their activity systems. As Spinuzzi explains, activity theory is based on the analysis of activity systems, the interactive mediation of work between humans and an objective world (68). Activity theorists have recently begun using a new term to explain how different activity systems link together to form *complex* activity systems, *activity networks* (72). These activity networks explore how different activity systems weave together over time. This concept allows activity theorists to examine the development and mediation between and among activity systems over time (74).

However, the relationship between humans and non-human agents in activity networks is asymmetrical. In activity networks, humans use activities and tools like writing to transform their labor through cognitive and conceptual development. The

source for all action is human in activity networks. This focus helps explain how humans develop over time using their methods to accomplish their work with tools and technology. Describing prisons as activity networks could produce new insights into how correctional officers and prisoners (as well as other actors like volunteers and visitors) develop their labor and goals over time.

Activity theory focuses too closely on the role of humans within activity networks. While this perspective allows for nuanced descriptions of human behavior in activity networks, non-human agents such as writing are given little agency beyond the status of tools. So, the descriptions of networks and *net-work* that activity theory allows for are not up to the task of fully describing the role of writing in prisons. An activity theory approach would likely support literary and sociological research perspectives on such writing by drawing attention to writing as either a product of individual authors or as a result of educational activity systems. Simply put, since they give limited status to non-human agents, activity theory and activity networks cannot give us new, helpful explanations of writing in prison.

Actor-Networks

As Spinuzzi explains, “actor-networks are *assemblages of humans and non humans*; any person, artifact, practice, or assemblage of these is considered a node in the network” (7). Actor-network theory is concerned with networks as multiplicative and interactive collections of actors, but not as developmental or dialectical activities (81). In actor-networks, relationships between humans and non-humans in actor-networks are interactive: “all groups, actors, and intermediaries describe a network, they identify and define other groups, actors, and intermediaries, together with the relationships that bring these together” (84). Agents in networks depend on each other to accomplish their

transformational work. In actor-networks, human and non-human agents transform one another during the node's net-work. To this end, Bruno Latour explains that "it is the same task to define the artifact tying together the various groups or the groups tying together one artifact" (quoted in Spinuzzi, 84). In an actor-network, both are the effects of networks, "something that gains its identity through the interactions of an ecology" (Spinuzzi 85). To mark the shared status of humans and non-humans in the network, actor-network-theory uses two terms: actants and actors.

Activity theory and actor-network theory conceive of human and non-human agents differently. Although activity theory focuses explicitly on humans and places non-humans in the status of artifacts rather than actors, actor-network theory focuses on human and non-human agents as participants in networks. Although actor-network theory appears to give equal status to human actors and non-human actants, it still favors humans as actor-agents over non-humans. As Spinuzzi points out, actor-network theory focuses on the alliances and associations between the actants, not the actants themselves (*Network* 40). For Latour, as for Spinuzzi, non-humans such as writing are "*participants* in the course of action waiting to be given a figuration" (*Reassembling* 71, italics original). But they are not equal participants. Writing texts are not considered as actors in networks.

Spinuzzi's discussion of actor-network theory shows how texts are conceived not as actors but rather as material actants by which the network is spliced together (*Network* 40). He points to Latour's claim that "networks are used to link actants, make distance irrelevant, and circulate texts as 'immutable mobiles'" (11). Written texts are defined by their intermediaries, humans, and are dependent upon human actors to be

actants themselves in a network. Texts are not considered actors, but instead are always the mediating agents that allow human actors to “know” and work (11). In this way, actor-network theory and actor-networks allot greater status to non-humans like text than activity theory and activity-networks. However, non-humans, such as written texts, are still not given full status as actors. They remain actants that link actors together to give “figuration” to the network (*Reassembling* 54). In activity theory and actor-network theory, humans are still required for writing to participate in networks, whether in activity-networks or actor-networks.

Unlike fields such as English, sociology, and even composition studies, writing studies is interested primarily in the non-human material object of writing. Through writing studies and network theory, writing can be described as an actor that functions independent of human intention or meaning. Writing circulates, proliferates, leads humans to actions, and causes transformations regardless of its source. Neither activity theory nor actor-network theory recognizes written texts as actors. Activity theory considers only the acting agency of humans in networks while actor-network theory attempts to place writing as a mediating actant between humans. Latour explains, “*any thing* that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor” (*Reassembling* 71, italics original). I want to propose a third view wherein written texts are not just “mere” objects or actants but are full actors in the prison writing network.

Prison Writing Networks

The prison writing network is a term that encompasses both the texts written in and around prison as well as their relationships with people, institutions, and other texts. These relationships form nodes within and throughout the prison network itself. While I draw the idea of a network from Clay Spinuzzi, I use prison to reconsider a key element

of his work: the status of non-human agents as actors. Let me start by making some initial theoretical claims:

- The prison writing network is a complex assemblage of people, texts, technologies, information, and situations
- As the material component of the prison writing network, writing is distributed, emergent, embodied, and enacted--meaning that it acts independently of yet is interconnected with human and other non-human actants
- Descriptions of the prison writing network are limited because networks are extraordinarily complex.
- Prisons are black-boxes: they conceal complex interactions and conflicts within from close scrutiny by outside observers.

In prison, written texts circulate and act on their own as actors within the larger prison network. To focus attention on the linked, distributed agency of writing in prison, I will call the totality of these textual links and circulations the prison writing network. This term encompasses written texts and points to their relationship with other texts and humans. The prison writing network is an assemblage that links non-human textual actors to human and other non-human agents as nodes. These nodes and their emergent network interpenetrate and overlap the prison network itself. As stated, what I am describing here is the relationship among textual objects as agents-actors, or actants, within networks. I am not examining texts as vessels or containers for meaning or information. This is not to say that writing cannot or should not be analyzed for its meanings, but that writing as an object circulates and acts independently of authors, writers, or readers within networks.

In the prison writing network, people use writing to create effects and are in turn affected by writing. Because writing is distributed and enacted, there are points in this network when writing precedes actions and when writing is an effect of action. Human

actors in this network do not always understand the work, action, or goals of other actants or how they are affected by them. The reason for this is simple, from the prison's perspective: they do not need to understand. Full awareness on the part of any individual actant is unnecessary for the work of the network to proceed. This division between understanding (or intention) and action is evident in prison lockdowns, policy changes, transfers, dormitory and cell searches, privilege suspensions, disciplinary actions, furloughs, education programs, work orders, and other functions.

The observation that prisons conceal their interactions has several applications. Seen as a whole, each prison facility is black-boxed. Prison's functions and its complex network of actants and effects are concealed from outside scrutiny. Humans and texts enter the prison and return from prison, if at all, changed. The transformations that occur inside prisons are largely unobserved by the general public, hidden within the black-box. Inside prison, black-boxes continue to "bracket off" people, activities, and knowledge into different departments. To cement these black-box divisions, each department uses particular kinds of written texts like incident reports, statistical reports, regulations manuals, and a myriad of other texts. These texts help organize the prison into a semi-stable order that controls and shapes relationships between people and knowledge. Even prison's physical spaces are given semi-stable meaning by the writing that shapes and controls the behaviors that occur in those spaces. Dormitories, classrooms, chapels, cafeterias, visitor areas, sally port, and "the yard" are spaces whose meaning is enacted and reinforced by writing. For example, to physically enter a prison, a range of associated actants (texts, humans, and information) must align to make its doors open. To the visitor or volunteer entering, much of this work is invisible: I

type in my visitor PIN, or I sign my name, and the gates either open or they don't, sometimes without any evident explanation. This notion of black-boxed access, behavior, and work in prison is not the focus of Chapter 1, but such observations of black-boxing have significant consequences for future analyses of the prison writing network. Specifically, such analyses would need to open the boxes that are layered in each prison to trace the nodes and links that are concealed, particularly by following the nodes of actant texts. The act of entering the prison constitutes one textual node where a range of human and non-human actants meet on the terrain of textuality, but there are many others. These include the daily "Incident Reports" and the more dramatic—and thankfully rare—Death Watch.

Example Node 1: Incident Reports

A man in prison walks across the yard to a writing class. In his arms, he carries a notebook, some loose papers, and a pen. He is wearing a sweatshirt with his prisoner number written across the front in black marker. A correctional officer notices the notebook is not the kind provided for purchase by the commissary and stops the prisoner to investigate if the notebook, the pen, or the papers are contraband. This officer questions the man about where these items came from and learns that they were received as part of my class, and furthermore the materials were approved by the warden. Then she notices his sweatshirt, which is not prison-issued, even though his number is written across the front. The officer tells him to take the sweatshirt off and to accompany her to a holding cage. The prisoner is going to be "written up." A disciplinary incident is about to happen, and it is enacted through writing. Forms are retrieved, rule-books consulted to determine the exact rule infringed. The incident report is filled out by the officer. The prisoner is allowed to comment on the incident in writing after the officer

completes the form. This form is passed to the head of security, and the prisoner receives punishment appropriate to the infraction, which requires a disciplinary report. The act of punishment draws more people and places into this event as well, including writing teachers who may happen to walk by the holding gate with the prisoner locked inside. The incident and disciplinary action are included in monthly and yearly reports. This series of events is not merely a hypothetical case, but occurred to a man who participated in my writing class at Lawtey Correctional Institution. Three weeks after he was “written up” he returned to my class wearing the same sweatshirt.

When something happens in prison that is not supposed to happen, that event becomes textualized in an incident report. This report becomes the official and authoritative version of the event (Tiersma 7). Incident reports provide material evidence of the prison writing network’s relationship between texts, writers, and situations. Incident reports also record disruptions and interventions in the daily life of prisoners and correctional officers. Beyond documenting the actions of a fight, riot, or argument, these reports are also the mark the beginning of disciplinary processes. The resulting disciplinary processes can also include other texts and affect other people not immediately connected with the report’s production. These reports tie people, actions, and responses together by documenting events and precipitating new actions and behaviors that in turn bring new actants into contact with each other.

As texts within the network, incident reports are the material link of a relationship between people, information, and events. These reports require the participation of many people to produce them, and affect people and texts beyond their immediate situations. Individual correctional officers initially produce the document alone, involving

other officers and prisoners only when the rules require that statements and comments be included about the precipitating event. In this way, the requirements of the text dictate the relationships between other people. Incident reports are then copied, and distributed to multiple points of reception: warden, security commander, prisoners' records, and department of corrections archives. Incident reports are connected to preceding and proceeding texts, people, and information, reciprocally responding to and influencing them as well. I will examine incident reports again in Chapter 2.

Example Node 2: "Death Watch"

The death penalty exists in thirteen states. In each of these, the execution of each death row inmate is black-boxed. These executions appear to be a simple series of actions. Each execution constitutes a networked event wherein actants link together to complete the task of legally ending a person's life. The writing that surrounds these events demonstrates the extent and power of the prison writing network, and how the black-box of the prison writing network presents executions as single events rather than as a series of transformations that assemble humans and texts. The texts involved in state-mandated executions show how writing forms the material link between distributed agents across the prison writing network, and also how the prison writing network connects nodes and networks inside the prison system to networks outside of prison.

Death row inmates are first given a copy of the execution warrant by the warden. As the execution date approaches, usually fourteen days before, the condemned inmate is transferred to a cell close to execution chamber and is observed by a correctional officer. While in this cell, the correctional officer assigned to watch the inmate records the inmate's actions in exact detail, producing a document known as the Death Watch log. This log records in minute detail everything that occurs within the Death Watch cell:

when the inmates sleeps, eats, uses the toilet, writes a letter, smokes a cigarette, makes a phone call, or meets with legal counsel. The death watch is similar to an incident report, but it is meant to provide the textual record of several days and covers not transgressions but every action. This log becomes part of the state's legal record regarding that execution.

However, executions involve writing for the condemned person as well. Death Row inmate Richard Rossi lists the many forms that require some writing by the inmate: the execution warrant, Last Meal Requests, Execution Witness List, Application to the Board of Executive Clemency, Method of Execution, Disposal of Property, Disposal of Remains, and Last Will and Testament ("Changing" 125). Many of these documents also require the participation of government and correctional officials. These documents then draw the condemned and those officials into a relationship that temporarily expands the network. Condemned inmates are allowed one sheet of paper and one short pencil, which must be surrendered before they are given replacements.

The work involved in an execution is distributed to, enacted, and embodied by a range of texts, people, and spaces. While relationships between these agents mostly work in reliable, predictable ways, they remain semi-stable relationships. That is, these relationships undergo transformations during executions. This semi-stability is visible if we examine the specific transformations that texts, people, and spaces undergo during state-sponsored executions. All three of these actors fundamentally transform themselves and one another as the net-work of an execution proceeds through its nodes. As each execution causes immediate transformations, each responds to the transformations of past executions. That is, each execution enacted in the past

precipitates changes to the participating texts, people, and spaces that affect the relationships and actors of future executions. Each execution is a transformative network that responds to past instantiations of the network and will influence future instantiations as well. In particular, the texts involved in executions have changed and increased, which in turn affects the other kinds of agents involved, and so on into future network relationships.

For example, if a text like the “death watch log” were not involved, the officer who records that log would also “change” as well, perhaps acting in other ways or disappearing from the process entirely. Furthermore, the way in which relationships emerge between actants can be interrupted or changed during each execution. While writing is not the “first” link in this relationship, it can provide a primary point of perspective for analyzing networks in prison.

Likewise, terms and titles in prison such as warden, correctional officer, prisoner, staff, volunteer, etc., are often treated as stable or immutable. Viewed as components of the prison network, they too have semi-stable meanings that are enacted and emergent based upon, in large part, the texts that link with the people who would enact these titles. For example, one becomes a death-row inmate because of the texts that circulate around him, including especially those texts that arrive shortly before his or her time of execution. In other words, prison designations are produced by the linking of texts, people, spaces, information, and technologies to the point where other designations outside the network no longer matter. Whatever other designations a prisoner might have had outside prison--father, mother, carpenter, card-sharp, Jewish, atheist--the only designation that “matters” is *prisoner*. In networks, the intervention of an agent affects

the relationship of all other agents. However, prisoners do attempt to re-designate themselves and the correctional officers, making the prison network a site for rhetorical conflict, enacted especially through writing.

If we describe the relationship between these nodes, we can show how written text moves between and acts with humans and other non-humans as equal participants. In this way, *human* and *non-human* become almost irrelevant categories, particularly where writing is concerned. Rather, in the prison writing network, all participants are actors and all participants contribute to the functioning of the network. The purpose of analysis becomes then to describe the details of the interactions and transformations of actors and nodes.

The prison writing network expands how far and deep we can study writing in and around prison. It moves our perspective beyond writing in educational settings or writing published as literature. The prison writing network includes all writing, since all writing in prison functions as an actant there. This recognition requires that we expand our textual corpus to study all writing by prisoners and correctional staff as well as the writing that penetrates the border of prison's black-box from other sites like universities and public networks. Furthermore, scholarly work largely ignores writing's material function in prison and overlooks important issues related to materiality and circulation within the prison network. A network view of writing in prison compels us to describe writing as the material agent in nodes that are linked to other material nodes. Writing is no longer a vessel of authored meaning but rather is a material actant that transforms and is transformed through its interactions within the network.

Continuing Along the Network

Written texts are actants equal to human actants in the prison writing network. This understanding helps us articulate new views of the relationships between the act of writing, material texts, and people throughout the prison. Networked descriptions of writing are important since they show how writing, as part of a network, participates in the formation of power. In such a network, power is a consequence of action rather than the simply the cause of action. That is, the power to define and limit people's daily lives begins and is reinforced through networks of writing. Power acts independently of human intent even as it gives shape to that intent. Writing has power to transform and influence the roles and actions of humans in prison.

The prison writing network is generative in other crucial ways. The prison writing network produces and is produced by text. It organizes those texts into genres that "are developed, adapted, transformed, translated, displaced, re-linked, and added as they circulate" through the network (Spinuzzi 17). It divides people in and around prisons into groups, which I will define in Chapter 3 as publics and counterpublics. Finally the prison writing network raises important questions about research and pedagogy in prison.

If we see writing in prison as a powerful participant in a prison network, we can also begin to study writing on large-scale levels, such state or nation-wide, or at more local levels such as individual institutions or even individual participants, human or textual. Indeed, the prison writing network would require us to trace as many directions as possible to connect textual and human relationships at all scales. Doing so would help trace how texts circulate state-wide or even nation-wide as well as how text circulates between individuals in individual prisons.

Also, exploring the prison writing network can begin to explain how writing participates in the larger relationship of state and national departments or bureaus of prisons, as well as at the local and individual level. Studies of the prison writing network can revolve around a small group of writers in a single dormitory of one prison facility, or a state's entire network of circulating official documents. The motivation is not to map out the whole network. Such an effort would be an attempt to provide a stable picture of an unstable complex thing and would immediately become inaccurate. Tracing and studying the prison writing network would provide new knowledge. This knowledge would include limited explanations of the material object of writing, how that writing is produced, and how writing is used within prisons.

In the following Chapters, I describe the functions and effects of writing in the prison writing network by turning to important concepts illuminated by attention to the network. These concepts include written genres as distributed and emergent properties, public and counterpublic spaces, writing as resistance to and within the network, and the problems and benefits of teaching and researching writing in prison. Genres, public and counterpublic space, resistance, and pedagogy and research are connected to one another as aspects of the prison writing network. That is, genre, public/counterpublic space, resistance and pedagogy are all mutually productive and reinforcing aspects of the prison writing network, and are important conceptual areas from which a nuanced theory of writing in prison can be drawn.

In Chapter 2, I turn to sociocognitive and sociohistorical genre theory to discuss how genres of written text common in prison function as socio-historical forces. I locate much of the tension of prison's writing in the struggle for control of different genres and

their situational effects in there. In Chapter 3, I connect larger theoretical discussions of writing to discussions public and counterpublic spaces, particularly as they are consequential for writing in and around prison. I argue that in prison, participation in public and counterpublic, and the boundaries that “separate” those two concepts occur through the circulatory writing of the prison writing network. Furthermore, I argue that the very act of circulating writing as public or counterpublic lays the groundwork to challenge and dismantle the physical and conceptual boundaries that privilege public over private. In Chapter 4, I turn to theories of resistance and control to explore how the prison writing network enables writers of demonstrably different power to engage in acts of control and resistance. Specifically, I explore the role that prisoner newsletters have played historically and currently in bringing about reforms and changes to prisons. I also look at the ways in which official texts have served as the manifestation of order, control, and power. I draw from Foucault’s discussion of prisons and capillary power to argue that writing, especially in a network or relationships, forms the object and the means for powerful actions. Writing in prison precedes control and resistance, and the act of writing constitutes a manifestation of power.

The final Chapter examines issues of writing instruction and writing research in prison, particularly the uses and teaching of writing in prison-based education programs and the research that occurs parallel with that education. I examine how a network theory of writing in prison provides a new perspective on what already goes in such education and research, and what might be done, if anything is to be done, in future education programs to more effectively connect research and pedagogy through network theory-based approaches to both. I will examine what it means to write and

learn writing in prison as part of a network, and how such a focus would change writing instruction and research in prisons. I draw on my own experiences teaching a writing workshop in a Florida prison to explore the benefits and dangers of writing instruction in prison based on a network concept. I do not intend to offer practical approaches or lesson plans, but rather to suggest a theoretical, or more appropriately methodological analysis of the role of network-responsive pedagogy in a prison.

CHAPTER 2 ORDER AND ORGANIZE: WRITING AND GENRE IN PRISON

Writing in prison occurs through many genre forms. These genres are produced by and distributed to many groups of writers and readers as part of a writing network. In this prison writing network, genres function as social action rather than as categories of texts based on themes or individual traits for literary interpretation. To situate genre in the field of writing studies, I draw on Anis Bawarshi's claim that genres are a function of situated texts rather than an identifiable category or object (8). Genres emerge from the complex interactions between humans and text. Within these relationships, genre boundaries are not simply formal distinctions but mark the "social and rhetorical conditions which make possible certain commitments, relations, and actions" (8-9). In prison, understanding generic writing means examining how those texts function with, and for, prisoners and correctional officers. Textual genres provide order and coherence to recurring situations in prison even as they transform officers' and prisoners' responses to those situations.

The structure and organization of prisons enables some behaviors in certain ways while proscribing other behaviors. These actions depend partly on generic forms of writing to be effective. This is because in prison, action and genres are often linked: genres enable action and help shape the situation of action. Meanwhile genres and actions change to remain effective within their contingent situation. Actions like reassignments, transfers, lockdowns, administrative punishments, administrative segregation, court actions, and the daily operations of prison all require writing that "fits" within certain genres to be enacted. Understanding how genres shape actors and actions in prison can explain the complex relationships between correctional officers

and prisoners, groups that both act by writing generic texts. This understanding can also illuminate how genres shape the conditions of prison and those situations to which generic texts respond over a period of time. The relationship of genres and actions in prison is complicated. It occurs in a network of interactive and conflicting writers with different many different purposes. Sorting out the relationships of genre, prison, and writers in prison will help us understand genre in specific, complex social situations.

To explain how genres function as social action in prison, I will examine two examples of genre writing that occur there. These examples are not meant to exhaustively represent the broad spectrum of genre forms that occur in prison. They are meant to serve as starting points for tracing the network of genres that occurs there. I will consider the forms and features of genres in prison and how they enable and perform social actions in prison. I hope to show how genres are used by correctional officers and prisoners to influence and transform each other and the prison.

The first example of genre writing I examine is the prison newsletter. I will trace the development of one particular newsletter, *Prison Legal News*, a publication similar to many newsletters and magazines produced by and for prisoners. The second example genre I examine is the incident report, a form of technical and professional writing commonly used by correctional officers. What I show is that these two examples of “prison writing” are from different genre sets, and perform different social actions for separate social groups. And yet, they are linked to one another as textual genres that enable interactive actors and actions.

Prison Legal News & Incident Reports

Prison newsletters are a common genre in prison. These newsletters differ from other newsletters not because their authors are incarcerated, or because they are

circulated in prison. While prisoners help write and produce prison newsletters, these newsletters are often collaboratively written with free individuals on the outside. This collaboration obviates the claim that prisoner-authorship is an identifying trait for prison newsletters. Prison newsletters are not place-bound to the prison. Many such newsletters are circulated as much outside of prison as inside prison. Many kinds of newsletters circulate in and around prison that are not prison newsletters. Because genres are defined here as functions, not categories, prison newsletters should be defined by their participation in the situations of prison and the prison writing network. Within this network, the prison newsletter has emerged as a form of action for prisoners to influence and transform their situations.

Prison Legal News (PLN) is a prison newsletter started in the late 1980s to inform prisoners about legal issues related to prisons and to how prisoners could respond to those issues. The newsletter was intended to provide order to prisoners' efforts. This ability to order and organize the actions of distributed actors is central to its function as a prison newsletter. Other newsletters similarly organize the behavior and knowledge of prisoners when they distribute popular news articles, creative work, and anecdotes about prisons across the United States. *PLN* publishes articles that explore legal issues such as prisoners' rights, prison labor, living conditions, medical access, and the judicial system. To enact its legal focus, *PLN* uses textual features common to legal writing and law journals.

When *PLN* was first published, topics were researched in the limited law libraries of prisons. Today, *PLN* writers have access to extensive legal libraries. This allows articles to draw on a wide range of sources. Articles in *PLN* cite cases using the

Shepard citation system. The Shepard citation method is used by legal professionals to trace related, precedent cases. This Shepard method of citation allows readers to trace previous legal opinions and decisions related to past cases. This attention to legal citation is a boon to “jail-house” lawyers, prisoners who either are officially trained as paralegals or trained themselves, and who litigate on their own behalf or on the behalf of others.

Since it began in 1989, *PLN*'s format and content has transformed in response to the changing situations surrounding the editors, Paul Wright and Ed Mead, and other contributors as correctional officials attempted to silence the newsletter. Wright and Mead were both incarcerated at Washington State Reformatory in 1989 when they decided to start a newsletter called *The Red Dragon*. According to Wright, *The Red Dragon* was meant to inform and organize prisoners and their families during a time when “prisoners and their families were the people most affected by criminal justice policies but...were also the ones with the smallest voice, if any, in deciding these policies” (“The History” 80). *The Red Dragon* was originally formatted as a large, quarterly magazine, between 50 and 60 pages. However, Wright and Mead lacked the funds and support outside of prison to publish a large magazine. Their early articles were loosely researched news pieces that overtly criticized prison and judicial officers. When Washington State prison officials learned of Wright and Mead’s efforts to revitalize *The Red Dragon*, Wright was “subjected to a retaliatory transfer...because Washington prison officials wanted to stop publication of the new *Red Dragon*” (81). The difficulties of producing a large magazine and of collaborating from separate institutions through censored mail, led Wright and Mead to change *PLN* to a smaller format (81).

PLN was changed to a monthly newsletter format about 10 pages long and included short, timely news stories. Additionally, Wright and Mead changed the name from *The Red Dragon* to *Prisoners' Legal News*. The newsletter's new name was meant to emphasize an audience of activist prisoners and not prisoners with Marxist leanings alone (81).

In 1990, Wright was transferred a second time from Walla Walla (now called Washington State Penitentiary) to Clallam Bay Corrections Center in response to his work with Mead on *PLN*. Despite the physical distance between them and the efforts of prison officials to disrupt *PLN*'s publication, Wright and Mead were able to produce three issues of *PLN* (82). Both editors typed five pages of news articles in their cells without access to word processors and used censored mail to communicate. Their finished articles were laid out in the newsletter by hand. Columns and graphics were added by gluing them onto blank paper and arranging the articles around them. Wright and Mead then mailed their pages to a volunteer outside of prison who photocopied and mailed the newsletters to prisons across Washington State. According to Wright "the first three issues of *PLN* were banned from all Washington prison on spurious grounds" (82). In response to these publications "Ed [Mead] was charged by WSR [Washington State Reformatory] for allegedly violating copyright laws by writing law articles. Officials...ransacked my cell and confiscated my background article materials and anything that was *PLN* related" (82). Under threat of federal lawsuit, Washington Department of Corrections officials agreed to allow *PLN* to continue publication and distribution.

In 1991, Wright and Mead began to enlist the help of free volunteers. These volunteers would receive articles written by Wright and Mead through the mail. They would then re-type them on computers, design the completed newsletter issues, and mail them back to Wright and Mead for editing and approval. During this time, litigation against Washington prison officials caused them to relax the mail systems and remove strict censorship standards. This change in policy was in part due to articles on censorship and free-press that Mead and Wright included in *PLN* to bolster litigation. Meanwhile, *PLN*'s readership increased to 1,000 subscribers, subscriptions that included many law libraries and correctional officers. In response to this broader audience, *Prisoners' Legal News* was changed to *Prison Legal News*. In addition, the newsletter made a lexical shift in the terminology of its articles: articles no longer used terms that could offend lawyers or correctional officers with subscriptions. For example, the newsletter ceased using the term "pigs" to denote guards and other prison officers and adopted the official term "correctional officer" (83).

In June 1992, Wright was transferred back to the Washington State Reformatory with Mead. As a result, *PLN* expanded from a 10 page newsletter to a 16 page bound magazine. Their close proximity allowed Wright and Mead to work more directly on *PLN* together. As *PLN* increased its readership, its size expanded to 20 pages, and by 1999 had expanded to 50 pages. Articles began to focus on nation-wide legal issues related to prisons. At this time, *PLN* began to use the Shepherd citation system to provide readers with the broader legal contexts of each article.

PLN emerged in its current form over time in response to situational changes. The newsletter's format and content shifted from essays about legal issues to researched

scholarly-legal article. These changes developed in response to the newsletter's situations. These situations were marked by actions of control and suppression by Washington prison officials as well as the responses of Wright and Mead. Officials intervened in *PLN*: Mead and Wright were charged with several infractions and were transferred to separate prisons. The repressive official actions changed the situation in which *PLN* functioned as produced and circulated genre text. Work on the newsletter was interrupted but did not end. Instead of ending the newsletter, Mead and Wright worked together and the newsletter transformed to respond to these situational changes. For example, the content of *PLN*'s article and the form in which the newsletter circulated to subscribers changed. Wright and Mead's transfers made working together on a large magazine impossible. To respond, the editors converted *PLN* to a small newsletter format to adapt. This meant articles addressed narrower subjects in more focused ways. The newsletter became shorter since that format was easier to share and produce quickly, but the articles became more topically specific. Since readership also expanded beyond a narrow prisoner audience, the terms used were also changed to be more inclusive. Overall, *Prison Legal News* developed in response to, not in spite of, the action of prison officials.

Incident Reports

It is a widely accepted truism among corrections professionals that if something is not written down, it did not happen (Brown & Cox xi). The recognition that writing determines the reality of events has led official genre forms to become longer and more precise and to include more methodically organized information. Such precision serves an informative and a juridical purpose. It provides a consistent and stable official version of events. This stability gives correctional officers and lawyers precise and detailed

records of events that might be used in a court or disciplinary hearing to reflect the official reality of prison. Each court hearing produces its own corpus of genre writing, which loops back to feed into the prison writing network.

The “reality” of prison is dictated largely by texts. Like prisoners, correctional officers’ roles and behavior are enacted by generic writing. This writing maintains prolific records of official actions as well as knowledge on each prisoner held by correctional facilities. Correctional officers enact entrances, releases, movements, interactions, infractions, and official disciplinary actions all in the reports and memos they are required to produce. These official documents always result in more writing, a proliferation which expands the network as well as the physical archive of prison records. Prisoner records contain many pages of reports, forms, and letters to which prisoners themselves have no access or control. These documents are produced and circulated by correctional officers; though prisoners do receive copies of some of these forms, they cannot readily produce such genre texts, at least not in a manner that such texts would do official work. A prisoner could mimic a release authorization form, but if it’s not “real” it will not work.

The archive of official writing is comprised of technical genres similar to those found in other sites that might require extensive and exact record keeping. These records include forms such as memos and professional letters, as well as more prison-particular forms such as incident reports, transfer orders and receipts, education and HIV assessment forms, and activity logs. Correctional officers use these texts to satisfy the institutional requirement that all actions and knowledge be codified and recorded to maintain security and control over the prison and its occupants.

Prisoners' texts and correctional officers' texts are linked by the prison writing network. This link between them allows us to trace the ways generic writing by prisoners instigates correctional officers' generic writing. This reciprocal relationship is a process of enactment and transformation. Shift reports, transfers and intake orders, search for contraband forms, and incident reports were all filled out and filed as forms of action against Wright and Mead. The result of this body of writing was the continued punishment of Wright and Mead. Every infraction that Wright and Mead were punished for, every transfer they endured, and every piece of mail they shared added texts to the body of official generic writing. In the case of Wright and Mead's disciplinary actions, the writer of each official text is not important. The genre-function of that writing within the prison writing network was important.

The incident report is one of the most common genres written by correctional officers. While the exact formats of incident reports differ for specific departments of corrections, all incident report forms share similar format and content features. This similarity is because the incident report is aggregate of linked documents that inscribe the official version of an event in prison. This report is arguably the most important genre-text correctional officers have to control prisoners. If a prisoner breaks a rule, correctional officers use this report to document the event and begin the process of disciplining the prisoner. So, the version of an event put forth by an incident report is the version that will become reality, as far as the prison is concerned. This power makes incident reports the most likely tool for officers to "act against" a particular prisoner. Incident reports are "truth" from a legal standpoint. These are in-depth, detailed, and thorough descriptions of an event that enable officers' punitive responses.

Incident reports are thorough. They include an amalgamation of shorter reports, and thus are often quite long. Included in this amalgamation are the cover sheets that record the basic information of an event, as well supplemental reports that record prisoner information and follow-up disciplinary reports. The cover sheets can often include three to four pages that establish the factual version of an event. Correctional officers write most of the information for this report: the institution name, prisoner name and number, date and time of the incident. The remainder of the cover sheets include check-boxes to indicate a vast range of relevant information: type of incident (beating, shooting, stabbing, spearing, poisoning, strangling, slashing, sexual, other), weapons used (firearm, knife, spear, explosive, projectile, slashing instrument, commercial, hands/feet, bludgeon, caustic substance, other), injuries or deaths that occurred, response units that responded, controlled substances involved, escapes attempted, exceptional activities that may have occurred (prisoner strike, demonstration, environmental hazard, "special interest inmate," major power outage, explosion, fire, hostage, gang involved, other), whether the media was contacted, and what non-lethal or lethal response methods were used at the time.

A short narrative section follows the cover pages. In this section, the reporting officer writes a synopsis of the event as the official "story" of what occurred. Correctional officers are trained to write this narrative from the first-person "I," to emphasize their role as impartial witness, though of course not all officers follow this training (Goodman 9). This first-person "I" perspective allows correctional officers to assign prisoners as the acting subject, giving the impression that any action correctional officers took was a response to real events, and was therefore justified.

While the cover sheets stabilize a record of the incident's details and provides an official narrative, the incident report's supplemental forms record the official punitive actions and any relevant contextual information. This contextual information includes secondary investigation reports with descriptions of the prisoners' friends, gang affiliations, past infractions, and enemies the prisoner may have. There is also a section for the prisoner to comment on the event. However, the correctional officer who submits the report transcribes the prisoners' comments, maintaining clear control over the final form of this official genre.

The incident report is a powerful genre that produces an official reality as well as a powerful archive of knowledge about prisoners. Cover sheets include a broad range of information while supplemental forms allow correctional officers to "know" the prisoner by building an indisputable archive of information. Furthermore, incident reports begin a chain of written actions, leading inexorably to more writing. Incident reports are often the basis for disciplinary actions against prisoners, including actions like long-term administrative segregation, loss of yard, phone, and mail privileges, or transfer to a higher-security prison. And each of those actions results in more generic writing that leads again and again to more writing.

The Genre-Network of Prison

Genres in prison are enacted and interdependent. They emerge from and occur in the situations of prison, enabling and shaping the actions of people there. Also, these enacted genres function and develop interactively through the repetition of situations shared by correctional officers, prisoners, and writing. A genre's enaction and development affects the enaction and development of other genres, a process that the interaction between prison newsletters and incident reports demonstrates. To draw on

the example above, *PLN* developed as a prison newsletter because it was enacted in prison *and* because it interacted with correctional officers, whose actions were enacted in part as generic writing. But *PLN* reciprocally influenced the form and content of incident reports, disciplinary reports, and transfer orders by forcing those genres to change. These changes to official genres were necessary to maintain and adapt correctional officers' control over Wright and Mead as well as other prisoners who might use writing to challenge the power of prison. The struggles between prisoners and correctional officers are manifested and negotiated in writing that is generic. Furthermore, this generic writing must change over time to maintain effective control over prisoners and information.

Genres in prison are forms of situated action that enact the intentions of prisoners and correctional officers. However, such writing does not act isolated from the purposes and effects of other generic writing. Generic writing in prison is interactive: each instance of generic writing relies on established conventions for particular situations, while simultaneously transforming how other kinds of generic writing are produced and circulated. To explore the interdependent social activity of generic writing in prison, I turn to social genre theories.

Genre as Social Action

Claims that genres constitute forms of social action are not new. Work on genre in the fields of writing studies and composition studies has shaped concepts of genre beyond traditional notions of categories and traits. Scholars like Carolyn Miller, Charles Bazerman, Amy Devitt, and Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas Huckin argue that genres emerge over time within their contexts and communities of use as ways to act in those

repeating situations. This work on genre as social action can help us explore the ways in which writing in prison operates with similar generic features.

Carolyn Miller's article "Genre as Social Action" is an important work in social genre theory. Miller argues that to understand genres we need to focus "not on the substance or the form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish" ("Genre" 151). Genres are not types of texts so much as forms of action. This view of genre moves our understanding away from examining and categorizing formal traits and more toward how that text functions and what features in that text allow it to function for its situation.

Miller's claim is supported by other scholars who also describe genres as typified forms that function in specific, recurring situations. For example, Devitt claims that genres operate within a group of genre forms, called genre sets ("Intertextuality"). Likewise, Bazerman terms these groupings of texts that operate in this way "genre systems" (*Constructing* 32). Whether sets or systems, such texts are intricately connected to their situations and contexts of use; for each situation that recurs, a range of genres function as potential actions and reactions to those situations.

Social genre theory also explains how genres and situations serve to stabilize one another even as both change over time. That is, genre writing stabilizes recurring situations as typified and recurrent situations even as the continual re-occurrence of that situation repeatedly calls for the "appropriate" kind of text as a response. This stability is connected to the idea that genre texts and situations are reciprocal. This does not mean that genres and their recurrent situations are static, but rather transformations in one helps limit the transformation of the other in order to maintain the link between them.

For example, Bazerman explores how knowledge production and the genre of experimental reports in scientific communities reciprocally stabilize those knowledge production and community structures. While the experimental articles in the sciences altered slowly over three centuries in response to situational and organizational changes, those situational changes helped shape the form of science articles (*Shaping* 7).

This concept of genre as social action suggests the reciprocal relationships between genre and recurrent situations are deep. The connection between genre and situation can be found occurring in individual enactments of genre as well as in broader community and societal enactments of genre sets (*Constructing*, 1994). Across these layers of individuals, communities, and society, a “cycle of texts and activities” emerges (310). This cycle of texts results in “well articulated organizational systems within which specific kinds of texts flow in anticipatable paths with easily understood and familiar consequences” (310). Genre texts operate in semi-predictable and specific ways within their community of use, but only within appropriate situations. This attention to community and situation explains on how writers in communities such as academic disciplines or profession develop and deploy genres as typified responses to recurrent but not always immediately shared situations. These social genre models describe the genres of unified communities where participants share goals and knowledge. This focus on unified communities accounts only for the cycle of texts and activities within a community that works together. These models assume that a community that shares genres also shares a relatively unified goal.

Genre writing in prison operates through a similar cycle of texts and activities. However, genres in prison and the actions they represent are tectonic and volatile. When genres and situations interact and change over time, they engender conflict. This conflict emerges when the semi-stable relationships between situation and text are threatened and the power and influence tied to genre are challenged or renegotiated. In prison, much of the volatility of this cycle emerges because there are two communities in prison, prisoners and correctional officers, not a single unified community. Prisoners and correctional officers are not unified, despite the fact that they share recurrent situations and the genres that act in those situations. In prison, the complexity of circulating texts and their responsiveness to recurring situations is made more apparent by this conflict. Each act of genre writing is an act of power whose effects can be quickly seen: an incident report results in immediate action against the prisoner or prisoners mentioned in that report, which of course transforms their situation dramatically. In some instances, an entire prison will be put on “lockdown,” an event pierces through the individual level and into the community and even occasionally reaches and influences societies. In the prison writing network, reciprocating texts, situations, and the activities of one community have powerful influences on the other communities in prison.

Sociocognitive Genre Theory

Most theorists of genre as social action acknowledge that written genre forms emerge in response to specific situations. Each textual enactment of a genre reinforces that genre’s identity as an “appropriate” way to respond to that situation. Berkenkotter and Huckin’s sociocognitive theory of genre describes how genres operate in complicated social settings at the individual, social, and textual levels, where situations across these levels interpenetrate one another in dynamic and unstable ways. They

explain that a sociocognitive perspective on genre examines “the ways in which writers use genre knowledge (or fail to use such knowledge) as they engage” in the communicative activities of their social group (*Genre* 3). This theory allows us to better understand how genres operate in coherent and unified communities by articulating five principles of sociocognitive genre.

Genres are dynamic

First, sociocognitive genres are dynamic forms that adapt to the changes in community and situational needs (4). This adaptation provides a sense of coherence and meaning by forming a series of texts that link recurrent situations together. Berkenkotter and Huckin have challenged the notion of *actually* recurrent situation, claiming that true recurrence would require external conditions to repeat exactly. They argue instead that recurrent situations are based on perceived similarity as an “intersubjective phenomenon” (5). That is, groups of people perceive a situation as similar to a previous situation and a collective decision emerges that they are recurrent. In higher education, many situations appear recurrent: registration, final exams, paper due dates, and grade submissions at the end of semesters. Likewise in prison, situations like prisoner reception and classification, shift changes, and lockdowns appear to be recurrent situations. To the degree they are perceived to be recurrent, they *are* recurrent. However, the perception of recurrence is enabled by the network of generic text. Networked texts provide the material links between these situations and allow those situations to be identified as recurrent. Devitt explains that:

groups of writers construct genres through their actions (social acts) in situations that they perceive to share some similarities of purposes, participants, subject, and settings (from perceived repetition of situations). Each writing event and writing situation is unique...Genres capture the

ways people categorize those unique writing events as related writing events (“Transferability” 216).

Situations are perceived to be similar and thus a particular textual form is the appropriate “genre” response. This connection between perceived situation and appropriate textual form causes those forms to emerge as replicable, recognizable genres. Instead of actually recurring, situations are *perceived as similar* to previous situations because generic texts link them together, all despite the situations’ *actual* differences. Because of this interplay of stable/changing forms and situations, genres are described as dynamic forms that alter with, yet provide cohesion between, “recurrent” situations.

Building on this notion of dynamic genre, Devitt proposes that writers have a “repertoire” of genre forms for responding to similar situations, and “transfer” their genre knowledge between similar situations (221). Writers acquire this repertoire by writing in situations where genres already exist as forms of action. This theory of genre “transfer” furthers our understanding of how genres adapt to changing conditions and how similar genres proliferate into different situations. When writers are confronted with situations that require genres not in their “repertoire,” they adapt their existing genre knowledge to that situation (222). Although genres are not directly “transferable” between different situations, they can be adapted to dynamically act within new situations.

Dynamism works in a similar manner for genre writing in prison. The “quotidian atmosphere of the penitentiary” causes a sense of almost daily repetition; each day is perceived as a constant “recurrent situation” wherein personal choice and control are gone and prisoners feel powerless (Novek 282). Prisoners even express feelings that violence becomes so pervasive repetitive as an effective means of action (Hassine,

“How I Became” 19). Within this context, prison newsletters emerge as an alternative to direct confrontation. Rather than confront correctional officers as a way to address unfavorable conditions, prisoners challenge the organizational structure of prison through newsletters, as well as journals, letters, essays, and pamphlets. These generic forms of writing allow prisoners to act within situations where they would otherwise be powerless. This demonstrates how generic writing in prison not only stabilizes the power of prison but how it also empowers prisoners and enables them to transform their situations.

Genres are situated

Berkenkotter and Huckin also claim that genres are situated: genres emerge from their social structures of use and those situations in which they function. This situated quality is what allows genres to act as recognizable actions for those situations as well as to provide cohesion with similar situations. Because genres change within their situation of use, and because writers acquire their knowledge of genres in those situations, texts can be “packaged” as generic in order to make them recognizable to others (7). That is, certain genre forms such as memos are recognizable even outside their situations because they are common to many situations. However, even memos function as genre writing only if circulated within their intended situations. The work that memos in prison accomplish would not function in a business environment, despite the formal traits they share. They are not transferrable between the two situations.

Dorothy Winsor argues that the situated quality of genre depends in part on political control over available forms of writing (“Ordering” 156). She explains that genres are deemed appropriate for their relevant situations largely based on that genre’s visibility. The more visible a textual form is, the more recognizable that form will

be as a responsive and appropriate genre for that situation. However, not all textual forms are given equal visibility, particularly within complex, hierarchical organizations like prisons or business settings, where power is distributed partly through writing. In these settings, “power relations and perceptions...lead to and from perceptions of genre” (179). In these hierarchies of power, having power to control genre visibility also means having power to control the means of knowledge construction and exigency within that situation. By having control over genre forms, a person can limit or enable the ability of others to use genres as situation-responsive actions.

Winsor’s work on genre and visibility explains how particular genres are available or limited in prison. Correctional officers have a powerful range of genres that produce social facts that “wouldn’t have existed except that people made them so by creating texts” through identifiable genre forms (Bazerman, “Speech” 310). Much of a correctional officer’s authority is organized by and through the genre he can write. For example, transfer orders and receiving documents are two genres that book-end a prisoner’s move between institutions. These genres allow correctional officers to transform reality by relocating the body of a prisoner away from situations that anchors their social and work relationships in prison. In a transfer, the network relationships a prisoner worked within are severed, and new relationships must be formed. To strengthen this power, the belongings of a transferred prisoner, including their writing, are often not transferred to the new prison with them. While many prisons keep detailed records of what possessions a prisoner arrives with, they do not necessarily record whether those are the same possessions they arrive with at their new facility. Anything that does not arrive with them is no longer theirs; those items no longer officially exist.

These possessions fall into an institutional black-hole, a gap manifested by the production and deployment of two official genres. This act of transferring prisoners in order to disrupt their lives is often called “diesel therapy” (Niles 266). Like many actions in prison, this “therapy” is enacted in part through a series of genre texts like incident reports, official evaluation reports, and transfer orders and receiving documents. Each action in the string of events that leads to “diesel therapy” is inscribed as a social fact by genre writing, tying the particular event to a larger category of recurrent situations. This example demonstrates how genre forms act as powerful tools in prisons. Furthermore, correctional officers have considerable control over the visibility of those genres that are accessible by prisoners. By denying prisoners the opportunity to write in an official genre, or controlling the materials available to prisoners to write personal genres, correctional officers can control the continuum of resulting actions and future situations.

Although genre visibility is controlled by correctional officers in prison, prisoners often resist this control by writing in genres to which they have limited access. These often include legal genres and institutional grievance forms. In prison, when a genre becomes increasingly visible to prisoners as a potential form of effective action, that genre proliferates as more prisoners write it. *PLN* is an excellent example. As that newsletter became more available to prisoners, through extensive litigation and civil rights charges against prison officials as well as efforts to expand distribution, the newsletter genre became more visible to prisoners. As a result, more newsletters were founded in order to cause change at the local level and at the community level, i.e. at individual institutions and across state prison systems. This was evidenced in Florida when prisoners founded the *Florida Prison Legal Perspective*, a newsletter that closely

followed the style and format of *PLN* but was addressed to inmates in the Florida prison system.

Genres have forms and contents

Genres also have specific forms and contents that are deemed appropriate to their dynamic situations. According to Berkenkotter and Huckin, “true genre knowledge is not just a knowledge of formal conventions but a knowledge of appropriate topics and relevant details as well” (14). Genres encompass formal textual features and content that are appropriate for “a particular purpose in a particular situation at a particular point in time” (13). In other words, genres are enacted texts that adhere to formal characteristics and that include appropriate kinds of content and information for that situation.

However, genre forms are reinforced by the repetition of expected content and features. Together, form and content signal to a reader that a text “belongs” to a genre for is recognizable and appropriate. It is this repetition of appropriate form and content that allows genres to remain recognizable even as forms and contents change over time. Furthermore, because genres are reinforced within their situations of use by this repetition, genre writing that alters or ignores either formal characteristics or appropriate content is dismissed as illegitimate. For example, Bizzell argues that because they have situation-appropriate forms and contents, academic genres are reinforced and “protected” in academic environments, while alternate or mixed forms of discourse are marginalized and treated as less valuable and illegitimate (“Intellectual” 3). By requiring standards of form and content, genres control situational coherence and context-sensitive meaning. Texts that alter or ignore “standard” forms or contents are treated as marginal or wrong and are often dismissed entirely. On the face of it, this dismissal is

easy to explain. A text that does not enact appropriate forms and contents does not function as that genre. As community and situational needs change over time, genres transform. In response, powerful groups of participants can impose standards upon a genre in ways that hinder or shape this transformation to their advantage or in ways that preserve their power.

Generic writing in prison exhibits different degrees of flexibility within distinct social settings, with regards to form and content. For example, because prison officials use technical writing genres, like professional letters and reports, individual officers have less freedom to change the form or content of their reports, logs and other genre texts. Furthermore, prisoner-produced writing that uses legal or professional genres still must adhere to court standards of appropriate form and content. However, because prisoners have limited access to the community and culture in which legal genres are situated, their efforts to produce acceptable legal-genre texts often fail. This can have drastic effects for those prisoners and their efforts to maneuver the legal system. The power of being able to access official genres, and the consequences of failing to enact or adhere to their standards of form and content, are powerfully demonstrated in prison.

Genres that are situated within prisoners' particular situations are more accessible and more flexible. The genres that prisoners frequently write, like newsletters, family letters, or even letters to other prisoners, do have appropriate forms and content to which examples generally adhere. These forms and contents are not imposed but rather emerge naturally from their situations of use. For example, letters written to family members by newly incarcerated prisoners exhibit many formal traits and contents similar to other letters written by different prisoners from different prisons in different

countries (Jones and Schmid 68). First time incarceration is a “recurrent” situation that all prisoners experience, and the familiar letter genre has emerged as a salient form of appropriate action. Prisoners who maintain contact with their family write personal letters that share remarkably similar contents. These letters include reassurances that the prisoner is safe, descriptions of their surroundings, stories of how they pass time, reminiscences about home and family, and promises to write more soon.

Genres have duality of structure

Berkenkotter and Huckin claim that genres exist in a reciprocal relationship with the social structure from which they emerge. This concept is termed the duality of structure. It explains how genres emerge from their social structures and situations and how they also reproduce and reinforce those same social structures (17). Texts that enact genres reinforce both the genre form and its social structures. Furthermore, as generic texts are produced and circulated, they reinforce the structural formation of the organization in which they act.

Genres form a link between human agency and their social structures by enabling agency positions within those social structures to emerge. There is no division between people and their structures in which they act, but rather “human agency, and social structure can be seen to be implicated in each other rather than being opposed” (Bawarshi 18). Specifically, genres negotiate between human agents and their social structures while simultaneously providing “the conditions and assumptions that shape the choices writers make when they begin to write” (19). For example, a recent study of workplace genres claims that workers are identified and organized largely by their access to, and ability to change, written genres. This study explains that “the ‘right’ to both read and write genre texts adds to a general understanding and control of the

literacy practices in the workplace” (Karlsson 75). Access to and control over genres helps establish writers’ positions within their social structure. This reinforces the structural relationships of that setting overall, and allows genre writing to form recursive connections between writers and their social structures.

In prison, communities and social structures of action are organized, constituted, and reproduced by genre writing that is enacted through texts such as incident reports or call-out lists. Within those structures, specific positions like “correctional officer” or “chaplain” are enacted and reproduced not only because they allow access to such genres but also because those positions require the production of those genres. Whoever has access to official and legal genres also has access to their institutionalized power and can distribute that genre as writing to enact that power. Conversely, if prisoners had access to official and legal genres their inability to distribute that genre writing restricts their power¹. The relationship between subjectivity and genre writing challenges traditional notions that subject positions precede writing. The subject positions “correctional officers” and “prisoners” are constituted and reproduced through the genre writing those positions require, which then reinforces those positions to enable and require more generic writing. The connection between genre and subject position is a reciprocal relationship rather than a linear relationship that precedes or emerges from one or the other.

¹ Frustrated over the dismissal of their written protests, one group of prisoners rethought the criteria for an effective text. For example, at the Maximum Restraint Unit in Westfield, Indiana, prisoners’ written protests about extreme and inhumane prison conditions were largely ignored by state officials. In response, several prisoners severed their own fingers and mailed them to U.S. senators, using their own bodies as alternative texts.

Genres reflect community values

Genres are socially and structurally embedded in their situations of use, and thus “signal a discourse community’s norms, epistemology, ideology, and social ontology” (Berkenkotter and Huckin 21). This allows us to trace arrangements of power and knowledge in a genre’s community, social structures, and specific situations of use. These values of power and knowledge are not merely signaled by genre forms but are regularized and made effective by genres (Little 76). In other words, how a community values knowledge and power are both reflected and controlled by its genres. In complex organizations, genres can also reflect any struggles over power and knowledge by revealing. Genres reflect the controlled and contested power structure and also provide ways to challenge that power arrangement.

However, attempting to identify how genres reflect the values of a community in prison writing raises two concerns. First, there are several communities in prison whose genres circulate between each other. Official genres are meant to solidify power and knowledge held by correctional officers over prisoners and so these genres reflect their values: security, power, and control. Meanwhile those genres that prisoners produce value resistance and often challenge or usurp the power of prison. Many prisoners claim that genre writing is their only true mode of resistance in prison to physical and intellectual suppression (“Writing” 50). Charles Huckleberry explains that “whatever genres we choose, we cannot allow our cells to become cages” (57).

Second, these “communities” that produce genre writing in prison are linked. A result of this link is that the norms and values of these competing communities influence one another. The genres written and the values they express become sites where correctional officers and prisoners struggle for control. In Mayr’s analysis of educational

programs in Scottish prisons, she shows how ideological values and knowledge conveyed by certain genres introduced by correctional officers become contested sites of struggle between those officers and prisoners. Prisoners regularly refuted and resisted the genres of the guards as a way to challenge the ideologies and values those genres express. She explains that prisons and their genres are “not simply...social collectives where ‘shared meaning’ is produced,” but rather are places where the constituent groups involved struggle to define knowledge and meaning (Mayr 6).

When power in prison becomes institutionalized, the genres that enact that power become more “visible” as a result. They increase in circulation and effectiveness within the institution, affecting more people. A highly visible genre like the incident report is an “institutionalized” genre that solidifies power in favor of correctional officers. Put another way, the power of the institution is “textualized” into the incident report (Tiersma 7). Mayr explains that “power and dominance are usually organized and institutionalized to enhance their effectiveness” (6). Correctional officers control genre visibility in ways that prisoners cannot. Their power to control visibility is “organized and institutionalized” into specific genres like incident reports and prison regulations that allow them to control prisoners’ lives in precise ways. Although power like this is textualized into genres, much power is also institutionalized into the daily routines of prison. These routines are also largely determined by written codes, records, and rules. This overall network of structured institutional power enacts what Foucault calls a network of “capillary power” (*Society* 29). In this kind of network, power through knowledge and control are expressed, or manifested, at the extremities of institutions like prison. Capillary power in

prison is displaced into the daily routines that in prison always involve generic forms of writing.

Genre as Social Action in Prison

The sociocognitive theory of genre explains how genre writing in prison is a dynamically situated form of action that constitutes and reproduces social structures, values, and situations. Because there are two cohesive “communities” in prison, genre writing functions in reciprocal and complex ways. Simply put, genre writing from one community in prison affects the genre writing of the other community, and vice versa, in semi-predictable ways. In this reciprocal relationship, genres emerge, change, express values and norms, and help reproduce communities, subject positions, and conflicts over knowledge and power.

The sociocognitive theory of genre enables a reconsideration of the social function of genres in prison. Looking at prison newsletters helps demonstrate this by revealing five necessary claims. First, prison newsletters are dynamic and change as needed in response to new situational needs. Second, prison newsletters are situated in their emergent context and reflect the conditions of that context, specifically the need to distribute information in order to organize distant collectives of prisoners. This redistributes agency and responsibility for newsletters like *Prison Legal News* to many participants as well their changing situations. Taken out of their dynamic situations, prison newsletters cannot act in their intended way: to inform and organize prisoners. These displaced newsletters do not stop functioning entirely, but rather function as a “transferred” genre for new situations and become a new genre. Third, prison newsletters have specific forms and contents that are genre-appropriate. The articles found in *PLN* show this by addressing the values and concerns of prisoner audiences

who have a vested interest in legal news. Fourth, prison newsletters emerge from their social structures of use to shape those social structures over time but also to help reproduce those structures. Finally, values of the prisoners who produce and circulate newsletters are reflected in that genre, including values like resistance and insurgent self-identification.

Rethinking the “Prison Writing” Genre

My goal has been to reconsider how writing in prison enacts genres as forms of social action. A sociocognitive perspective sees genre as a textual-social function that operates recursively within a complex, shifting environment. In addition to deepening our understanding of genre in and around the prison writing network, it also reveals deep problems with previous efforts to theorize genres in the context of prison.

Many scholars use the term prison writing to categorize and interpret writing that emerges from behind the prison walls. These scholars treat texts written by prisoners as part of a single coherent genre “category.” This category called “prison writing” or “prison literature” identifies a text’s place of origin, prison, as the defining feature and allows scholars to neatly organize those texts homogeneously. “Prison writing” and “prison literature” become terms for a single reductive perspective for research dedicated to interpreting those texts. This study of the prison writing genre prevents political goals intended by the writer by emphasizing the intentions of the scholar doing the interpretive work. Once a text is considered prison writing it is always considered first as “prison” writing. When prison writing is studied as such alongside “non-prison” writing, it is placed in a genre that excludes it from inclusion in other categories, despite any alternative criteria that would warrant multi-category inclusion. Because of this,

anthologies that include prison writing are almost entirely “prison writing” anthologies rather than anthologies that gather writing produced in and around prison.

In this mode of research, genre is theorized as a category system. As a result of this concept of genre, writing by prisoners is homogenized into a controlling category then “refined” into sub-categories of form or theme. This reductive view limits the way we read, study, and understand writing from prison. Furthermore, this leads to the broader notion that genres have stable boundaries, reinforcing claims of proper genre forms for proper uses, in effect making genres into a feudal system of access, power and control. This textual homogeneity extends prison control over prisoners by reinforcing a “prisoner” identity onto the writing that emerges from prison populations, extending even after those writers have left prison. Indeed, we must seriously question whether this view of genre prevents former prisoners from writing texts that ever escape the designations like “prison writing” and the limitations of that term. The genre category of prison writing reinforces the social and physical boundary of prison itself, specifically in ways that limit current and former prisoners’ interaction with non-prison culture and society. In the analysis that follows, I will use the term “prison writing” to denote both terms, since the scholars who study these objects often use the terms interchangeably.

I want to re-examine the concept of the literary genre “prison writing” mentioned above. This concept strongly informs the literary and cultural study of prison writing as a genre category. As a term, it allows texts to be identified and “placed” into a recognizable category based on a thematic classification system. Texts that exhibit certain thematic topics or formal characteristics are “placed” into the broad category of prison writing or prison literature. Writing by current or former prisoners is categorized

as prison literature since their themes or topics are seen as related to their time in prison. Most often themes are limited to those related to imprisonment, but some scholars have included themes of exile and slavery (Davies 3). Overall, the themes of the prison writing genre directly pertain to the experience or aftermath of imprisonment.

Texts by authors who were incarcerated but are now free often continue to be included in the prison writing genre. H. Bruce Franklin claims that the “formative event” of imprisonment affects all of a writer’s work (*Prison* 37). Imprisonment becomes a kind of “metamorphosis” that forces all of a writer’s work to be categorized as prison literature (37). For Davies, the “ur-theme” of incarceration is the ultimate boundary of the prison literature genre (*Writers* 4). Texts that explain or reflect upon experiences in prisons and jails are included in this “prison literature” genre. So too are texts by incarcerated, enslaved, or exiled authors that do not directly proclaim imprisonment as theme or topic. Davies even includes the biblical book of Exodus in this category.

The prison writing genre divides texts according to themes and topics. Those texts are then sub-categorized by formal traits for analysis and interpretation. For example, writing that addresses subjects like literacy or violence are further parsed into formal groups like letters, novels, essays, or poems. In this way, the category of “prison literature” becomes an encompassing web that treats those texts as both fundamentally different from, but still subordinate to larger categories of literature. The range and quality of formal genres included in prison literature is evident in the range of submissions to the PEN’s Prison Writing Program. Program director Gale Bell Chevigny explains that prisoners submit a wide range of texts to their program and contest:

Painstakingly handwritten manuscripts, sometimes illustrated, arrive alongside computer-generated text. Some send novels and treatises, others

a few works, as if thrust into a bottle and tossed into the sea. The texts range from barely literate to highly polished... Those who have had the benefit of writing workshops offer more finished pieces, but some who toil alone take our breath away. Most contestants become writers in prison, many are natural writers. Few professional writers compete (*Doing* xxviii).

Her image of prisoners writing alone and with great difficulty points to an important issue: the struggle of producing writing and circulating that writing out of prison to receptive audiences. Rather than consider this issue, Chevigny turns to the lack of professional writers in prison, and reinforces “prison literature’s” formal connections to literature. What matters for PEN editors and literary scholars like Chevigny are thematic contents and formal traits (xxvi). They are interested in writing that “looks” like traditional literature but which is about “prison” topics. PEN’s anthology *Doing Time*, edited by Chevigny, includes short stories and poems but is organized by themes: Initiations; Time and Its Terms; Getting Out; Death Row and other topics organize the writing included in this anthology. Because PEN and other scholars assume that writing from prison is a coherent literary genre that explores a myriad of literary, social and philosophical subjects, readers like Chevigny focus on literary quality to create thematic and formal subdivisions as the proper way to understand the function of “prison writing” as thematic writing. Literary methods of reading and understanding are imposed on writing from prison while writing’s purpose *in* prison is ignored.

The emphasis on theme is also supported by the way prison-based writing classes are taught (Williford 16). Teachers in these classes prompt their students to write about their crimes, sexuality, daily activities and struggles, experienced violence, and the effects of their incarceration on themselves and their families. This kind of writing instruction recapitulates the thematic emphasis that literary studies and anthologies of prison literature use to categorize texts as prison writing. Teaching writing in prison by

focusing on themes supports the importance of those traits, which scholars later identify as the defining features of “prison writing” forming a tautological relationship. The connection between literary themes and pedagogical methods all but guarantees that “genres” taught in prison writing classes and workshops become the focus of scholarly work on prison writing. As a result, the notion of genre as a thematic or content-based category in literary studies of prison writing becomes entrenched as the “proper” way to understand genres and writing in prison.

The concept of “prison writing” limits how we understand writing in prison and, in particular, how genres function there. Two scholars who contribute most to this limitation are H. Bruce Franklin and Ioan Davies. Their historical and literary-philosophical interpretations of the prison writing genre claim to provide particular insight into “the creativity and strength of humanity” (Franklin, *Prison* 17) and to “convey more to us...a separate existence of which we can never be a part” (Davies 219). Furthermore, newer studies of prison writing take Franklin and Davies’ work as starting points, further entrenching the concept of prison writing as a legitimate object. Since prison writing places social and political limits on the texts included in that category, making them into curiosities for a free public to consume, a thorough critique of the category is in order.

H. Bruce Franklin

H. Bruce Franklin’s *The Victim as Criminal and Artist* is a seminal work in the study of the prison writing. In it, Franklin develops an organizational hermeneutics that identifies specific literary themes across widely dissimilar texts. This theory of genre searches for, and ultimately finds, shared themes across vastly dissimilar texts from numerous time periods and situations. Franklin provides directions for the interpretation

of texts from across American history, directions that largely dismiss a text's contextual influences. Franklin relates American slave narratives to American prison writing based on thematic traits within texts. Specifically, he argues that American prison writing is the historical and thematic descendant of the slave narrative genre. These slave/prison narratives, he writes, were "the first genre the United States contributed to the written literature of the world" (5). He further claims that contemporary prison writing forms a historical and thematic lineage with the songs and narratives of America's slaves. Franklin's prison writing category thus extends from the beginnings of slavery to the most recent prisoner-author, and includes written texts and even stories and songs that were eventually recorded or transcribed.

Franklin tries not to produce a homogenizing genre category by carefully hedging his claim. He explains that slave and prisoner writings form a coherent body of literature by sharing similar themes, but that these historically divergent texts do not necessarily cohere as a single coherent literary genre due to different formal characteristics. Specifically, slave song and narrative were rarely written down, while contemporary prison literature "consists of novels, plays, essays, letters, songs, autobiographies, etc" (234). However, in spite of these different formal traits, Franklin claims that contemporary prison writing exhibits "certain unifying and predominant formal characteristics, determined not only by the background of the writers, but also by their intentions" (235). Within his broad literary category, Franklin identifies several themes shared by slave and prison narratives of the mid-twentieth century. These themes include the conversion to criminality, arrest or capture, escape, survival in prison, legal pardons, and the promise of freedom (*The Victim* 233). Franklin connects these

consistent themes to the historical time of the authors. Through this connection, Franklin constructs a literary genre whose themes and contents, despite the range of forms, are representative of the prison condition.

Franklin's edited collection *Prison Writings in Twentieth Century America* reflects the editor's failure to avoid a homogeneous genre category. In it, Franklin maps out the relationships of prison writing according to his theoretical description of the American slave/prisoner genre. This anthology includes work by well-known authors like Jack London and Herman Melville as well as lesser-known writers who spent time in prison. It organizes these texts into chronological and thematic categories. In this anthology, Franklin articulates a distinction in American prison writers between writers who are imprisoned and prisoners who become writers while in prison. This distinction is meant to provide scholars with cues on how to read prison writing differently from other kinds of writing. This distinction allows readers and scholars to engage in more nuanced readings and interpretations of prison writing, but also reflects the boundary between the two. This hermeneutic distinction reveals the homogeneous nature of Franklin's prison writing genre. While scholars can separate canonical authors who were incarcerated from "common" prisoners who began writing in prison, both groups are ultimately remanded to the category "prison writing."

Ioan Davies

If Franklin defines prison writing as a genre category that includes writing by slaves and prisoners, as well as famous and non-famous writers, Ioan Davies expands prison writing as a literary and philosophical category that includes writers across history and cultures. Davies' *Writers in Prison* argues that Western culture and philosophy must be read through the experiences of slaves and prisoners throughout

history (3). Davies includes every work produced by incarcerated authors into a single “ur-narrative” to show “how the incarcerated imagination has become part of Western ideas and literature” (7). While Franklin restricts his genre category to the writing of American slaves and prisoners, Davies argues that the prison ur-narrative includes all authors whose texts emerge from situations of incarceration, regardless of time. His genre is meant to provide the beginning for interpreting “the forms that prison writing takes, its content and how the prison experience might be read” (3). Davies’ philosophical theory reinforces the concept of prison writing as a genre category system similar to Franklin’s, albeit on a larger historical scale. In both works, the genre of prison writing is identified by a text’s themes and formal traits. However, formal traits are secondary for Franklin and Davies since they are less helpful for interpreting prison literature; traits merely provide a convenient way to arrange texts for more efficient interpretation or comparison.

This academically constructed prison writing genre allows literary scholars to make claims about the meanings of incarcerated authors and what the conditions and experiences of prison can teach us. This type of hermeneutic study has not abated. The May 2008 issue of *PMLA* focuses entirely on prison writing. This issue includes articles on the poetry of Etheridge Knight, the redemptive qualities of Shakespeare programs in correctional institutions, the reading strategies for self-transformation learned from prisoners’ writing (by H. Bruce Franklin, no less), and the incendiary nature of reading literature in prisons. The editors of this issue ask: “what is the academy’s responsibility to the men, women, and children who live behind bars? What is its responsibility to those who are released?” (Alexander, *et al.* 545). Their introduction frames the renewed

conversation on prison literature as a dialogue *between* scholars about prison writers and prison literature, but does not *include* prisoners except through citation. This scholarly control over prison literature occurs throughout the issue, re-inscribing the genre of prison literature as a scholar-created, hermeneutic category. This exclusion demonstrates that the study of prison writing is still firmly an academic endeavor dedicated to the interpretation of a coherent, identifiable genre category. The boundary of this literary, thematic genre remains largely unchallenged within English studies. The various studies expressed in articles, essays, and academic conference presentations reinforce the view that prison writing is a coherent genre category. Furthermore, this approach to genre shows how prison literature is made to contribute to academic fields of study like philosophy, literary studies, history, gender studies, queer theory, and critical race studies.

My argument is not that analyzing prison writing as a “literary” genre should be abandoned. It is possible that these studies accomplish their lofty literary and philosophical goals of articulating the contributions of “prison writers.” However, they also succeed in reinforcing the “prison writing” genre category. After all, these studies do introduce readers to otherwise invisible texts and provide methods for reading those texts. This has increased the frequency with which texts by prisoners appear on classroom reading lists. Also, literary analysis of prison genres contributes to prison reforms by revealing harsh prison conditions from an insider’s perspective, conditions that would likely remain concealed from public view otherwise. In this way, prison writing can act as investigative journalism. However, scholars subjugate these texts to their own goals by studying prison writing as a literary genre only. For some scholars,

including ethnic studies scholar Dylan Rodriguez, the prison writing genre poses serious problems, including the way “prison writing” as a genre subvert the political efforts of prisoners that are enacted through writing.

Dylan Rodriguez: Against Prison Writing

In *Forced Passages*, Rodriguez argues that analyzing prison writing as a genre category favors a literary theory perspective of texts. For Rodriguez, “prison writing” is not a stable literary category or genre but rather functions as an academic construction for the purpose of interpreting and subordinating the violence of prison. Rodriguez argues that while literary scholars emphasize the meaning of prisoners’ texts they ignore the important contextual influences on writing. Prison writing and prison literature serve academic scholar’s interests, not the writer’s. He argues that any effort to construct a coherent genre category called “prison writing” is “a discursive gesture toward order and coherence where, for the writer, there is generally neither” (85). By claiming that a genre of prison writing exists, academics imply that prisoners experience a degree of stability and order in their lives that is simply not there.

Furthermore, Rodriguez argues that the prison writing genre imposes discursive stability upon the works of subaltern prisoners and isolates them in ways that renders their writing consumable for a voyeuristic public. This isolation and consumption does little to change the conditions of the prisoner-writers. Rather, Rodriguez argues that isolating these texts obscures the “constant disintegration of the writer’s body, psyche, and subjectivity” by removing those texts from their emergent situation that is “the institutionalized killing of the subject” (85). The genre of prison writing obscures, and therefore endorses, the violent logic of incarceration to serve academics’ disciplinary and aesthetic desires, rather than instigating reforms that would eliminate the horrible

conditions that motivated prisoners' writing in the first place. As long as prison writing is a genre available that is profitable for academic study, Rodriguez argues that efforts to abolish prisons will be less likely.

Rodriguez's most condemnatory claim is that "'prison writing' as the broad categorical designation for incarcerated cultural production...legitimizes and reproduces the discursive-material regime of imprisonment" (84). The genre of prison writing (or prison literature) places particular texts into a thematic category, defining that text primarily by the condition of imprisonment that led to the act of writing. As long as prison writing is studied, prisons will remain a naturalized part, if not a normalized or inevitable part, of American society and culture.

Franklin and Davies acknowledge that the genre of prison literature leads texts to be unfairly evaluated or ignored. For example, Franklin explains that *Time* magazine evaluated the work of a poet from Attica prison as "primitive" (*Victim* 235). However, the poem that *Time* criticized was not the work of a prisoner but that of Jamaican-American poet Claude McKay. When writing is identified as belonging to the prison writing genre, it is immediately devalued in ways that reproduce expectations. Writing that is placed into such a category, legitimately or not, is devalued and assumed to be of lower quality.

Franklin and Davies do not consider their genres to be socially constructed categories, but rather naturally occurring categories that only need to be described, examined, and interpreted. For them, the problem isn't the category of prison writing but the social view of the writing that comprises that category. This ignores the fundamental dilemma that the genre category "prison writing" reinforces society's response to those texts. As long as there is a continued emphasis on prison writing as a genre for

interpretation and analysis, texts will be placed into and treated as belonging to that category. Rodriguez challenges the prison writing genre category as a way to open the possibility that “prison writing” could actually serve the prisoners’ purposes, not those of academics or the prison. He claims that the writing of prisoners forms a “contemporary radical prison praxis” that challenges the authority of prison (73). This radical prison praxis manifests in and through writing because other manners of action are severely limited.

However, Rodriguez’s “radical prison praxis” also constructs a category similar to prison writing and prison literature. This category is, according to Rodriguez, an “institutional and discursive antagonism. . . an insurgent or insurrectionist formation of critique, dissent, and rebellion” against the prison regime (*Forced* 76). While he argues against the construction of literary genres of prison writing, he merely replaces those categories with his new category. Rodriguez’s “radical prison praxis” replaces “prison writing,” but also limits how those texts are read by maintaining an ultimate goal of interpretation (76). Where Franklin and Davies emphasize literature and philosophy, Rodriguez’s “radical prison praxis” replaces them with political theory and radical criminology. Despite the name change, prison writing, prison literature, and radical prison praxis are all genre categories that subordinate texts to the act of scholarly interpretation. Efforts to interpret these genre categories, prison writing or radical prison praxis, subjugate contingent texts to the goals of academic fields by forcing those texts into classifications intended for the benefit of scholars, not prisoners.

Prison writing, prison literature, and radical prison praxis are treated as stable categories whose texts are readily identifiable. Franklin and Davies’ genres identify

prison writing and prison literature by text's literary and philosophical themes. Meanwhile Rodriguez's "radical prison praxis" identifies thematic traits that fit within radical criminology and political science. These scholars treat these categories as demarcated by stable, identifiable thematic traits. However, even categorical genre boundaries are not stable. The instability of literary and political "prison writing" genre categories demonstrates the argument made by Jacques Derrida that genres are internally divided by principles of purity and impurity. The boundaries of genres necessarily break down and become impure. Derrida argues that genres operate first through a principle of purity. He writes that "as soon as genre announces itself, one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly, or monstrosity" (57). Genre boundaries allow writers and readers to identify or interpret texts as belonging to a certain genre. They repeat within recurrent situations, reinforcing the relationship between situation, trait, and genre boundary. Genres are recognizable because their boundary-traits appear to remain stable across multiple situational repetitions. They exhibit an "identifiable recurrence of a common trait by which one recognizes, or should recognize" a certain genre (63). Furthermore, a code is necessary by which certain traits are identified. This code allows that text to claim membership within the boundary of one genre or another, while allowing for easy identification of that text as belonging to a certain genre.

In Franklin, Davies, and Rodriguez's genre categories, the codes of membership traits are derived from the scholars' academic discourses: literary studies, philosophy, and political theory. For example, Franklin identifies the experience common to slave and prisoner as the trait that marks the boundary of the prison writing genre. Davies

expands this trait to include a broader range of history, but genre category works the same as Franklin's, including those texts that exhibit an authentic "imprisoned" trait. And Rodriguez identifies radical political action, the radical prison praxis, as a trait to include all texts that form a discursive, political rebellion against the power of the prison. These scholars create genres that have boundaries demarcated by traits particular to their own fields of study.

However, Derrida locates the counter-law of genre, a law of impurity or disruption in the repetition of this trait across separate and unique writings or texts (57). Although genres require repetition to be recognized as genres, they inevitably degenerate as a result of their repetition in different and always unique contexts. Each text that participates in a recognizable genre by having a particular trait also produces an anomalous difference in that genre. Derrida explains that "these disruptive 'anomalies' are engendered—and this is their common law, the lot or site they share—by *repetition*" (58, italics original). The repetition of "stable" trait across actually different texts and contexts leads to a principle of contamination (59). Genres exist because they must repeat in different situations in order to be identified as genre; they are never stable or pure. The traits that allow genres to be identified are never stable, the boundary of a genre never intact.

Because of the paradox between repetition and identification, genres are never stable, coherent categories. For a genre to remain stable, its identifying trait, such as the prison experience, would not to repeat exactly across as many different forms of texts written for many different situations. The result is that genres like prison writing or "radical prison praxis" use broad traits like imprisonment or political resistance to identify

those texts that belong. These studies presume that traits and their subsequent genres are stable and easily identifiable. But as Derrida shows, this is a position that is not tenable.

To study genre in prison, we cannot claim that there are stable categories called prison writing, prison literature, or radical prison praxis. These genre categories rely on identifiable traits that appear stable but that are really “attempts to develop taxonomies or classificatory schemes, or to set forth hierarchical models of the constitutive elements” of a particular group of texts (Berkenkotter & Huckin 2). More importantly, studying genre as categories “does not enable us to determine anything about the ways in which genre is embedded in the communicative activities of” those groups that use genres to act (2). For these reasons, interpretive work on prison-based genre categories must give way to social-textual studies of genre as a form of dynamically situated action.

Existing studies of prison writing genres ignore how genres function *in* prison, focusing instead on interpreting prison writing *outside* of prison. We do not yet have a full understanding of how writers in prison enact, adopt, or resist the genres that are available to them. These studies also overlook the genre writing that correctional officers, administrators, and officers produce. Prison writing has until now been understood as *prisoner's* writing. But the largest amount of writing in prison is produced by the correctional officers, not prisoners, in the form of reports, memos, letters, and other technical and professional forms of writing. These forms of writing relies function largely as genre, yet they have not been studied.

Conclusion

Social theories of genre describe writing in prison as a complex form of social action. Genre writing in prison means producing texts that behave appropriately for “recurrent” situation there. Repetitively produced genres reinforce the notion that certain kinds of writing are appropriate to certain situation and that those situations regularly reoccur. In spite of the inherent instability that repetition causes, genres in prison lead to the apparent sense that situations and structures are consistent, if not stable. In this way, “genre *is* what it allows us to do, the potential that makes the actual possible, the concept and its practice, the ‘con-’ and the ‘-text’ at the same time” (Bawarshi 45). Genres enact and make themselves possible. At the same time they recursively reproduce the situations that call for them to be written.

Furthermore, because genres are “the intellectual scaffolds on which community-based knowledge is constructed,” the communities in prison use different genres for particular situations (24). Future studies could examine “the ways in which writers use genre knowledge (or fail to use such knowledge) as they engage” in the communicative activities of their social group (3). Seeing genre as social action in prison allows us to understand how texts both enact and reinforce the social structures in which they are embedded. This understanding can help reveal how genres enable correctional officers to exert official power and how the prisoners resist that power. Since each prisoners and correctional officers produce writing that adheres to appropriate genres and situation, we can explore how genres construct and reproduce social and organizational structures of prison.

Because written genres produce coherence and meaning across the social structures and situations in prison, genres are also often sites of struggle and power.

Official genres organize and institutionalize official power over prisoners and influence and control the genre writing to which prisoners have access. Genres are, for the official community, a written means of maintaining and reproducing their structures of power. This power allows them to control prisoners' genres, writing, and ultimately the ability to produce knowledge and meaning. Meanwhile, prisoners produce genre writing as a means to provide coherence and meaning to their situations, while resisting and even altering the genres used by correctional officers. While correctional officers can limit and control the genres to which prisoners have access, prisoners still write in the genres available to them, occasionally co-opting official genres for their own acts of resistance. For both prisoners and correctional officers, written genres are important tools that contribute to prison's structural, social, and discursive organization.

CHAPTER 3 THE SPACE OF PRISON WRITING: PUBLICS AND COUNTERPUBLICS

Prisons are meant to isolate that which is inside from the rest of society. But what occurs in prison does not remain isolated in prison. This is true especially of writing. Writing in prison breaks out. It connects to people and public conversations outside of prison in unpredicted ways. Tracing how writing circulates both within and beyond prison reveals something even more startling: that writing, and by extension the people in prison, are interwoven with publics and non-publics. The social groups that form and act in prison are enacted, interconnected, and interpenetrated by writing. But more importantly, these groups connect to groups outside of prison again by, and through, written text. Writing produces and negotiates boundaries between publics outside and the non-publics in and around prison.

The boundary between prison and the public and the isolation of prisoners is not total. There are connections that connect prisoners and members of the public. Tracing the flow of writing in prison and between prison and the public illuminates these connections. Writing is the object of study and the means of study at the same time. These connections, like the boundaries between prisoners and the public, are manifested and enacted through writing. These connections and boundaries are not merely traceable through writing but, as the case of writing in prison will show, they are brought into being by that writing. The complex relationships between prison and its interconnected publics are manifested by the written text that circulates within and between these spaces. Revealing how these connections are formed and maintained between groups can also reveal the important role writing plays in forming other publics and counterpublics. The connection between writing and boundaries of publicity

illuminates not just how public spaces and discourses form but also how they interact, change, and conflict with one another through writing. Looking to prison, we can see how public and counterpublic spaces are brought into being, and struggled over, by writing and writers.

The prison writing network forms groups and connections that challenge traditional theories of public space and discourse. It also reveals the limited ways in which those theories describe textuality and group formation. The study of writing in prison can help us better understand that relationship and can help account for relationships of inclusion, exclusion and conflict between public and counterpublic. Understanding writing and publicity in prison sheds light on how writing and publicity operate outside of prison.

In Chapter 3, I consider how writing simultaneously produces and affects public and public and counterpublic discourse in and around prison. First, I discuss the connections between writing in prison and publicity, focusing on how writing and writers in prison are isolated from broader formations of publics and public discourse. I then discuss how public and counterpublic theory developed as it relates to writing. Finally, I examine two samples of writing produced and circulated by prisoner and official writers in prisons: those prisoner-produced publications which I labeled prisoner journals in Chapter 2 as well as official incident reports. I consider how these examples motivate a rethinking of public and counterpublic theory in favor of a reticulated notion of publicity.

Writing, Publicly, in Prison

Prisoners once were members of the political public. Although some may have entered correctional facilities at a young age, no prisoner is born incarcerated. But prison, as the preferred method to punish a growing class of criminals and felons in the

United States, strips prisoners of their rights, if not their abilities, to participate in public discussions and decisions. Once incarcerated, prison isolates those people we send there and fetters their access to other members of the public. This isolation and incapacitation are part of prison's punitive function: to destroy prisoners' abilities to affect public society or to participate in public discourse.

Prisoners' writing is also affected by prison as an extension of its isolating and incapacitating power. Prisoners can write, but not without burdensome restrictions and controls placed upon them and their texts. Paper and pens must be purchased with what little money they make. Stamps and envelopes too must be purchased if they intend to mail any of their writing to family or for publication. Also, newspapers, magazines, books must be sent to prisoners through approved avenues to prevent banned materials from entering. Even materials brought in by educational volunteers, like a dictionary for example, must be shown not to have certain "inflammatory or foul" words included. All text is observed, recorded, and scrutinized by prison officials whether entering, exiting, or merely circulating within prison. Text is treated as a dangerous thing.

It is treated like this for good reasons. Writing in prison is dangerous. Letters to family members allow prisoners to resist their "role" as prisoners. Prison newsletters and pamphlets increase awareness and organization among prisoner populations. And all writing that leaves the prison could bear witness to the conditions in prison and the treatment of prisoners inside, information that is jealously guarded by prison administrations. Despite prison's attempts, prisoners do not remain isolated; they resist and refute this isolation by writing and sharing (i.e. circulating) that writing. Prisoners

write letters to family members, friends, and strangers. They write personal journals, essays, poems, articles, pamphlets, songs, plays, and memoirs. And they distribute all of this writing through many official and unofficial forums. Prison writing anthologists have shown that prisoners are and always have been prolific writers.

But these anthologists and scholars of prison writing have overlooked that this writing, from the isolated space of prison, does more than offer a counter-text to the dominant forms of society. It also provokes a complex relationship between the very idea of public and non-public. Writing from prison exists not only as parallel discourse to “free” public writing nor as a challenge to it. It interacts with and affects the forms and functions of public discourses. Prisoners revitalize their connections to public discourse through counterpublic writing, a process which asks us to rethink how texts and publics form and act, and power relationships necessarily emerge between publics and the exiled groups of people it still controls.

Prisoners’ writing and its insurgent re-connection to public discourse raise questions about the relationship between prisons and the “public.” After all, prisoners are not members of the public, but they are obviously still tied to the public. But prisoners are not the only writers in prison. Correctional officers and staff also produce and circulate writing as part of the daily operation of prison. Transfer orders, daily logs, incident reports, and other ordered and structured genres are produced and distributed daily by wardens, correctional officers, chaplains, and staff. Much of this official writing is meant to extend and maintain the isolation of prisoners, including their discursive isolation, by directly controlling their behaviors like writing. This official body of writing, and its antagonistic relationship with prisoner writing, complicates analysis of writing

and publicity in prison. To account for how one body of writing is public, we must also account for the other body of writing as well as the relationship between them. In prison, public, counterpublic, and professional semi-public interact.

In his introduction to *Writing As Resistance*, Bob Gaucher explains that writing in prison is purposefully disallowed from interacting with public discourse (6). Even though this writing is not produced in public spaces, and in spite of the blockades set up to keep such writing separate, Gaucher explains that prisoners still contribute to public space and discourse. Some of their writing escapes the prison and finds a way to re-engage with public discourse. Writing from prison cannot fully participate in public discourse but rather acts as a counter-inscription to public discourse from a counterpublic space. This relationship between public space and the counterpublic space is based in the complex relationships manifested by the prison writing network. This network allows prisoners and their writing to re-engage with public discourse in ways that challenges their total isolation from public life. It also helps us to better understand how writing contributes to the ways in which how public space is formed, partitioned off, and defended. Looking to the public insurgence of writing in prison reveals the relationships between public spaces and discourses and excluded texts and alternative publics.

In addition to contributing to individual prisoner's lives, writing also forms official and unofficial groups in prison and allows them to act as coherent groups. Understanding how these groups interact together is difficult. Gaucher contends that "if we are to understand the prison institution, and the culture and order it contains, then we must investigate the positions, relationships, and 'sense'/accounts of all participants

in this complex organization, especially those of the silenced majority – the prisoners” (6). This culture and order include kinds of writing to give shape and stability to group formations and relationships. The social order inside prison is produced, maintained by the production and movement of writing as much as the separation between public space and prison is maintained and even challenged by writing. Writing and its circulation in prison forms the wall between prisoners and the public, but is also the means to re-link people inside prison to publics “outside” of prison. Through these written links, people inside prison and “free” people outside negotiate the relationships that develop as publics and counterpublics. Writing is the materiality of the prison/public boundary as well as a way through that boundary.

Writing in prison is prolific and mobile, moving between prison and the public realm. This raises questions about nature and function of writing for public theory: is the writing that pours through the prisons’ boundary public?; is it outside the realm of public scrutiny and influence?; how is writing in prison contained?; and how does writing in prison participate, or how is it kept from participating, in public spaces? To frame these questions, much less answer them, we need to consider theories of public space and discourse that examine the relationship between publicity, public space and discourse, and writing. These theories show how writing and its circulation draw people together to form public spaces and discourses.

Together, writing by prisoners as well as writing by correctional staff produce simultaneous instantiations of public spaces. These multiple “kinds” of public space all converge in the institutional realm of prison: the public discourse that surrounds and overlaps prisons, the semi-public discourse of official writing, and the counterpublic

discourse of prisoners' writing. Production and circulation of these different texts are central to understanding concepts of publicity. This is because, in prison, writing marks the boundaries between these different kinds of public spaces. Writing is how these publicities are produced, reproduced, and challenged. Concepts of public space and writing's role in it challenge the notion that public spaces are coherent groups, or that those groups exist prior to writing. Earlier concepts of publicity often imagine writing as an action that occurs as a result of public space and membership that precedes texts and discourse, even if that space is considered somehow discursive. The prison writing network and its public interactions challenge the notion of a pre-textual space for public discourse. Rather, writing in prison shows how publics and counterpublics are produced and reproduced by writing.

Public & Counterpublic Theories

Modern public theory truly begins with Jürgen Habermas. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989), Habermas sets out a conceptual model of public space and participation as a shared arena. Habermas sees the public sphere as an inclusive, discursive arena that acts as the authoritative basis for collective political action. In this arena participants of "mixed companies" can meet to discuss issues of common concern, free of official constraints or status considerations, in order to reach a consensus. This consensus is the means by which the public can "compel public authority to legitimize itself before public opinion" (26). The public sphere, according to Habermas, is an open space where people can share in the wielding of power. People participate there self-consciously by self-identifying as members of the public; they participate in the exercise of power because they choose to. People come to identify themselves as members of the public in order to participate in that public space.

However, Habermas's public sphere model has been criticized for being too conceptual. It lacks a sufficiently nuanced description of how public interactions *actually* occur. In her article "Rethinking the Public Sphere," Nancy Fraser identifies several flaws in Habermas's model, chief among them that it does not account for an actually existing public sphere. Following other criticisms of Habermas's notion of a unified public sphere, Fraser argues that Habermas's public sphere cannot account for public practices in actually existing democracy. She claims that "despite the rhetoric of publicity and accessibility, the official public sphere rested on, indeed was importantly constituted by, a number of significant exclusions" (113). According to Fraser, public spheres are not accessible by everyone. Indeed, they must exclude some to maintain the political efficacy of public authority. She points out that despite these exclusions many groups find ways to participate in public discourse, especially by working through grass-roots and community movements and actions (116).

Furthermore, Fraser challenges Habermas's claim that the bourgeois public sphere renders differences in social status irrelevant by "bracketing" its participants in space where all may communicate equally. She argues that such "bracketing usually works to the advantage of dominant groups in society" (120). Rather than being erased and rendered irrelevant, the Habermasian public sphere excludes would-be participants who have less power, presenting a homogeneous public sphere as an illusory egalitarian space. Fraser further argues that there exist subaltern counterpublics consisting of people excluded from participation in dominant public spheres. These counterpublics then function as organizing spaces from which participants can challenge the political and discursive power of more powerful publics (124). This critique

and subsequent “rethinking” of Habermas’s public sphere provides a pluralistic model of multiple public spheres. In this multiplicity of public spaces struggle and conflict are not just accounted for but are actually desired.

Michael Warner

Michael Warner’s work provides a series of concepts that identify publics as action-based, multiplicitous, reflexive, circulatory, and often exclusive. In *Publics and Counterpublics*, Warner provides a different concept of public space than Habermas and Fraser, one based in the actions of public participants through discourse rather than the notion of pre-existing spaces or spheres of people. For Warner, publics are created by behavior, not by participation in a pre-existing public space with similar people. Because his model is based in action and not identities, publics become transitory. They are difficult to “pin-down” and identify because their forms and effects are so “close” to us as part of our lived experience. He writes that publics and our participation in them “have become an almost natural feature of the social landscape” (7). They are part of our daily, media-saturated lives. As members of publics, we are always participating in one in some form or another with other members of our publics whether we intend to or not. And today, our participation often occurs by the production and circulation of written texts and other media forms.

Publics emerge through circulated media like writing. Because circulation is the means by which such publics emerge people do not need to be geographically or culturally close. As a result, dissimilar people are increasingly likely to interact as members of a shared public identity because they share media. Publicity becomes a temporary shared event not a condition of identity or location. Where Habermas conceived of similar people coming together to discuss and express a public opinion in

a space (in coffee houses, for example), Warner argues that publics emerge as reflexive actions. In other words, publicity becomes an effect of discursive action, rather than a prerequisite to it. Identity is produced by participation in a public. It is through these actions that public meaning and identities are struggled over (12). In this way, publics are autotelic: they exist as addressable spaces *because* they are addressed. According to Warner, “a public might be real and efficacious, but its reality lies in just this reflexivity by which an addressable object is conjured into being in order to enable the very discourse that gives it existence” (67). This circular dimension of publicity is crucial for bringing different kinds of public into existence as sites where critical social action may occur. Furthermore, this reflexive existence is brought about by, and depends upon, the circulation of discourse, especially writing. Warner argues that “the concatenation of texts through time” allows publics to emerge through the act of circulation (65).

Warner articulates three senses of reflexive, circulatory publics. “*The public*,” Warner explains, is “a kind of social totality...It might be the people organized as the nation, the commonwealth, the city, the state, or some other community” (65). *The public* is a notional space where people can freely engage in discourse, and as such is something “that everyone intuitively understands how it works” (66-7). Warner also sees *the public* as a malleable, overarching concept that can and does include other versions of publics. When the notions of *the public* are invoked, this invocation signals that other kinds of publics “are assumed not to matter” (66). *The public* becomes an encapsulating benchmark for all other senses of publicity.

Warner also identifies the notion of “a public,” an immediate, concrete group that shares a “sense of totality, bounded by [an] event or by [a] shared physical space” (66). These limited, concrete publics are endless in design and purpose, but are often non-permanent. These publics are notional as well, but are still enacted within limited, complex spaces, meaning they have a physical reality we can point to for a time. And because these limited concrete publics emerge and disappear within *the* public, Warner points out that “there could be an infinite number of publics within the social totality” (67).

Warner’s third category of public is empirical, rather than notional: “the kind of public that comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation” (66). This category of a public emerges through textual circulation. Warner observed that public participation today is often mediated, and is most often mediated through writing. As such, publics can be comprised of people who are distant from one another physically, but who connect in forums that rely on technologies like email, chat-rooms, and newsletters.

Warner identifies a final category of publics similar to Fraser’s subaltern counterpublics. He explains that:

some publics are defined by their tension with a larger public. Their participants are marked off from persons or citizens in general. Discussion within such a public is understood to contravene the rules obtaining the world at large, being structured by alternative dispositions or protocols, making different assumptions about what can be said or what goes without saying. This kind of public is, in effect, a counterpublic: it maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status (56).

A counterpublic then, according to Warner, is a public defined by its difference and tension, by its limited access to other public spaces, and by its tacit awareness of its own status as outside or separate from other publics. Such counterpublics are “formed

by their conflict with the norms and contexts of their cultural environment” (63).

Counterpublics thus illuminate the boundaries of more powerful publics as well as the absence of some groups from within those powerful publics. They enable proscribed rhetorical practices. Counterpublics are spaces that represent the groups excluded from, and in conflict with, mainstream publics and *the* public. Although counterpublics emerge as a space where proscribed meanings and rhetorics can occur, they also highlight what cannot be said or expressed in dominant publics. For counterpublics to remain coherent, they require hostility and conflict with more powerful publics.

Counterpublic are “damaged forms of publicness,” which rely on an alternative status to differentiate themselves from mainstream publics (Warner 63). When their tensions with publics and *the* public cease, counterpublics no longer function.

Gerard Hauser

With Warner’s concepts of multiple publics and counterpublics, categorical boundaries of publicity begin to dissolve. The boundaries between them are porous and the connections are enacted. For example, counterpublics are damaged publics. But it would not take much to redefine them as limited publics, simply a removal of tensions. In this way, publics and counterpublics become slippery and displaceable concepts. These multiple descriptions of publics and counterpublics are based on the concept of a dominant public to which, at least in social arrangement and definition, other publics and counterpublics are subordinated. Gerard Hauser’s work contrasts greatly with this concept. Hauser imagines publicity as a network of publics and counterpublics that interact, conflict, combine, relate, and dissolve into one another. No single coherent public is dominant for any length of time. Instead, depending on perspective and motivation, the network of publics and counterpublics can be described in a plurality of

ways. There is no stable constellation of publics and counterpublics, only temporary relationships between powerful and less powerful reticulated public spheres.

In *Vernacular Voices*, Hauser provides a way to trace this shifting network of publics. Hauser argues that “*publics do not exist as entities but as processes...their awareness of issues is not philosophical but eventful*” (64, italics original). From this he claims that we understand “the public” and “public space/spheres” in limited ways, based on how publics enact their beliefs, not how those publics are conceived prior to an event or action. Publics are behaviors, not identities. This expands on Warner’s first form of publicity, the all-encompassing notion of “the public,” but Hauser’s concept here is based on action and interaction rather than awareness of a shared identity. In such a public sphere, public opinion becomes a shared understanding” or a submerged consensus of opinions and beliefs that can “indicate and even sanction” behaviors and actions (3). According to Hauser, public life is best understood as a discursive action which opinion polls and notions of “shared awareness” do not explain.

In fact, Hauser argues that the mediation of public opinion to general audiences actually “contributes to our sense of disjunction from the public” (5). Mediated public opinion produces a view of publicity that is simulated. It has no real referent in the reality of public discourse and opinion (5). Defining the public as having “shared understanding” also contributes to the unproductive disjunction of people whose opinions may not align with perceived “public opinion,” especially as public opinion is mediated through opinion polls. When people act publicly based on the authorization granted by “shared understanding” public opinion provides them, while we do not

personally approve of their actions, we perceive ourselves as distanced from this representation of “public opinion” (6).

Hauser proposes a new concept of interrelated publics: reticulate public spheres. This concept does not rely on the notion of shared awareness, or a defined space and identity. Hauser argues that the montage of publics is best understood as belonging to a reticulate network, one that marks their interrelatedness and their conflicts. In this reticulate network of publics, multiple publics are in conversation with one another through many communicative and rhetorical avenues. Rather than requiring the homogeneity of shared awareness and identity, Hauser argues that “a conversational model of society requires that participants share *intersubjective meanings*” (67, italics original). In a reticulated network of multiple publics, conversation and dialogic interaction allow different publics to construct and negotiate the salient meanings that come to define public issues and actions. Hauser writes “public reality comes into being as such precisely because its meaningfulness is shared among subjects” (68). The reticulate public sphere then is the totality of polymorphous and interconnected publics and their shifting relationships. This includes those publics that in other views are subordinate or antagonistic, i.e. counterpublics. The reticulate public sphere provides a framework to trace publics and their interactions. It also helps explain how public interactions contribute to or challenge the way intersubjective meanings are formed. In a way, the reticulate public sphere is the map by which we can track and understand the players and actions of public life and conflict as they occur. The reticulate public sphere does not demand or require open access, the bracketing of difference, or consensus to

function as a description of actually existing democracy. It allows for the network of publics and public discourse to occur.

Writing Studies and Reticulate Publics

Because text is intricately involved in their formation, writing is a powerful tool that allows us to trace how publics and counterpublics form through its circulation. To that end, fields that claim writing as an object of study now focus more on writing, rhetoric, and how these allow us to participate in public spaces. In *Moving Beyond Academic Discourse: Composition Studies and the Public Sphere*, Christian Weisser explains that:

more and more compositionists have recently become interested in moving beyond traditional methods of writing instruction and, consequently, many of the current discussions of writing instruction have begun to theorize pedagogies that move beyond the college or university classroom (57).

How writing and publicity are taught has expanded to explore concepts beyond academic spaces into notions of public space and discourse. To do so, composition theorists have turned to public theorists such as Habermas and Fraser to explore and teach students to write in those public spaces. Such theories of public space explain how writing affects public space and participation, in turn motivating teachers to teach writing with the explicit purpose of improving their written public actions.

Writing instructors often use a limited concept of public writing in their classrooms, one that places students outside of public discourse, revealing the persistence of Habermas's already-existing public space. In her article "Rogue Cops and Health Care: What Do We Want from Public Writing," Susan Wells argues that the public sphere should be taught as a discursive space where private citizens, including students, can discuss matters of mutual concern (326-327). She claims that writing teachers should help students build and participate in a public sphere, rather than place themselves

continually outside the public. Public discourse includes “a complex array of discourse practices, including forms of writing, speech, and media performance, historically situated and contested” (328). However, composition classes are not prepared to help students to participate in such a space. She writes that “we do not do justice to this history, this set of possibilities, when we assign students generic public writing, such as an essay on gun control, or a letter to a nonexistent editor” (328). Her pedagogical approach to publics as multiple and contradictory leads her to the claim that writing classes could connect academia and publics by analyzing modes of discourse and exploring how academic disciplines “speak to a broader public” (339). Similarly, Weisser sees the composition classroom as a microcosmic contact point that connects to the broader public sphere. However, there is no consensus about how to teach that contact to students. Overall, writing classes have not done a good job connecting academia, private lives, and the public.

Writing classes have not addressed public writing well. This is primarily because the concept of “publicity” such classes rely upon is based in the Habermasian model, which assumes a public space exists prior to public actions like writing. Because of this, writing classes cannot address the public sphere because there is no place or stable thing called the public sphere. In other words, the “contact point” between the writing classrooms-as-microcosmic-public and the “public sphere” is a simulacrum. In contrast, Hauser’s reticulate public sphere shows that publics are not only multiple and enacted but also interconnected in limited, ephemeral ways.

In *The Private, the Public, and the Published*, Barbara Couture examines the connections between public space and private lives. She claims that how we write

connects the experiences we have between these two spaces. However, Couture argues that public expression is coming to dominate our private lives (2). The boundary between public and private slips together in the ways we enact them; we act as if no boundary separates private space from the public realm. This breach of public expression into our private lives reinforces identity-based rhetorics as the only viable mode of expression. That is, people interact with one another from positions of identity. In Couture's view, such rhetorical positions obviate more nuanced modes of social interaction. She argues that "this conflation of private life with public expression demands that the audience absorb, deny, refuse, or obliterate difference" (4). Identity-based public action either reinforces the differences we perceive between people or erases actual fundamental differences. The result is public discourse based in unbridgeable difference. When people express private lives as public rhetoric they either reinforce shared identity by obliterating distinction, or eliminate respect for the real differences between themselves and others. For Couture, public rhetoric that serves the public good promotes public empathy while respecting private difference to promote a sense of "shared understanding" (4). Such public expression becomes the discursive means by which different publics interact without retrenching themselves in identity-based notions of publicity. Couture's hope is that public expression could become a means to expand individual empathy and understanding rather than a stultifying force for social reification.

But these identities become recalcitrant and unchangeable. Public interaction becomes based entirely in identity politics and the alignment of groups of people based in those identities. For example, the relationship between the public and prisoners in the

reticulate public sphere is based entirely on identity. Prisoners are prisoners only. Their actions, including writing, become unalterably fettered to that role. Furthermore, prisoners' private lives are always dominated by their public identity, even after they are released. Identity asserts and re-asserts its pre-eminence in public matters, draining any focus on active publicity away and re-asserting it on ossified identities. This reinforces boundaries between groups of people. In prison especially, this process reinforces the boundary between prisoners and non-prisoners, further strengthening their exclusion from public matters. Prisoners write to participate in public discourse in ways that are not based on identity but rather in spite of it. Prisoners enact a more effective form of public participation because they are forced to step outside of a role and identity, which are re-imposed upon them daily.

Official Prison Writing and Public Space

The reticulate public sphere helps re-conceptualize the relationship between public and counterpublic spaces in and around prison. Through the material connections of circulated writing, prison becomes interconnected with other publics in the reticulate public sphere. Furthermore, the circulation of writing in prison causes the boundaries between public, private, and counterpublic spaces to become permeable rather than solid. This writing moves between groups in prison and reaches out to publics outside of prison. Prison and its writing network allow a unique perspective to study the tenuous nature of boundaries that separate publics in the reticulate public sphere.

Prisons are an odd admixture of public and private space. The majority of prisons are built upon public land, paid for with public money, and constructed by private construction companies. Furthermore, prisons are operated according to public legislation regulatory policies that presumably reflect the political will of the people. The

collective will of the public determines how prisons operate, where they are built, and, ultimately if and when they are needed. Prisons are public institutions meant to protect a society from criminal members of that society. But unlike other public institutions, prisons are total-control spaces where security overrides any public accessibility. Members of the public do not have access to these public institutions, making them not completely private or public. Furthermore, there are an increasing number of privately operated prisons and military prisons, but even these “private” prisons are subject to public laws of oversight and thus are subject to public discussion and intervention. These “private” prisons are still subject to governmental management and/or oversight, meaning that even private, for-profit prisons are still, in some respect, public institutions.

Prisons are simultaneously public spaces and private, controlled spaces that house public exiles and are staffed by members of the public. Each correctional institution hires its employees from the communities that surround the facility. The federal prison system has one hundred and fifteen institutions and employs approximately thirty seven thousand individuals in these institutions. Individual states often employ similar numbers of people. For example, the Florida Department of Corrections in 2008 employed twenty six thousand people as wardens, correctional officers, classification officers, chaplains, cook staff, educators, counselors, etc. FDOC operates 146 prisons across the state. All together, the state and federal prison systems employs over one million, five hundred thousand people each year, nearly as many employees as there are prisoners.

Prison employees also participate in various publics within the reticulate public sphere. They can participate in public discussions and decisions on issues of common

concern, including local, national, or global issues related to prisons and criminal justice. Outside of prison, correctional officers' rights or abilities to participate in public spaces and discussions are not restricted. That is, from their position as public citizens and employees of the state, they are able to participate in multiple public discourses, including discussions about prisons and crime.

Inside prison, however, correctional officers act beyond their role as participants in the public sphere. They also act as agents of the public power that prisons express when they isolate and incapacitate prisoners. To enact this power and ensure that prisons function as they are intended, correctional officers must engender dual capacities: as agents of the public and as members of that public. Within the prison walls they are agents of correctional system, while "outside" they are citizens acting in various publics within the reticulate public sphere. This bifurcation of capacity is not crisply delineated, but it is visible in correctional officers' writing. What they write and how that writing circulates inside and outside of prison demonstrates this dual role. For example, outside of prison, correctional officers use writing in ways similar to most people. They write letters, fill out forms, write letters to the editor, email family and friends, etc. They are a part of the 21st century's global writing culture and they are free to participate in public discussions and decisions.

However, officers write to fulfill their jobs as well. This writing is structured around specific sociotechnical genres and operates within the prison writing network. That is, the writing produced by correctional officers circulates throughout the prison network. As it circulates, it enables and affects the situations and actions of other people in the prison, particularly their role-specific behavior and writing. Their writing shapes and

enables the existing reality of prison at the institutional, community, individual levels in ways that that affects correctional staff as much as prisoners. Daily operations, transfer orders, prisoner work detail logs, releases, and the other official operations of prison are processes that assemble people and knowledge together in ways that are entirely undergirded by writing. The work that this writing enables, and the physical texts themselves, are properties of the public. They are public artifacts. This leads to an interesting paradox: correctional officers' writing is public writing that also contributes to the formation of a non-public space.

Official Writing Influences “Public Opinion”

Correctional officers act as agents of the public through professional writing. This professional writing is shaped and formalized by the distributed written policies of the prison. These policies dictate the production and circulation of writing. The corpus of prison-based professional writing forms an archive whose texts are summarized into statistical and narrative reports, reports that have a powerful influence over public discussions of crime, punishment and the nature of prisons and prisoners. As the official version of prison, these texts convey knowledge in ways that are largely uncontested. They are granted greater authority to represent the reality of prison and prisoners. To put it simply, the official writing of prison produces the official version of what occurs in prison. This in turns influences public discourse, and subsequently public opinion, on issues related to prison and criminality. Hauser calls this relationship “public opinion,” the expressed contact between reported information and how those reports influence public belief (3). These reports are used to influence the way people think about prison by presenting its complexities as a simple, consumable form of data. In this way, the

simplified textual version of prison becomes the rhetorical reality, and shapes public opinion to conform.

This form of public opinion reflects only a sample of opinions that members of the public hold. These sample opinions are re-presented by media outlets as representative of broader sentiments and thoughts. Through this process, sample opinions about prison and prisoners are re-mediated as representative of general “public opinion.” This produces a standard public opinion with which the majority of people must either agree or define their opinions against. The normal, average opinion is set, requiring people to define themselves against that standard. In this way, the public opinion that prisoners are social outsiders is reinforced by mass culture’s dramatization of prisons and prison life.

For example, in his analysis of public discourse regarding punishment and public opinion, Sloop points out that “mass media outlets, due both to the position of the producers of mass-mediated texts as members of mass culture and to economic constraints that require marketable output, will necessarily reproduce, albeit with minor changes, the dominant culture’s ideology and its perspective” on criminals, prisons, and punishment (11). Members of the public are often under-informed about the reality of prisons and the correctional system. And yet, public opinion about prisons is strongly influenced by popular “news” forms. In his analysis of popular discourse on the topic of prison, Sloop examines several decades of popular news reports on crime, prisons, and criminals to show that “mass-mediated representations of prisoners function as a public display of the transgression of cultural norms” (3). That is, the public perceives prisoners as social and cultural outsiders, in part because mass-media presents them

as outsiders. This perception then influences public discussions of crime and punishment and shapes public policies and expectations about the function and conditions of prisons. Mass-media then relies upon official reports (statistics, statements, official renderings of events) to present prison in a way that supports the dominant public opinion. Through this network of circulated writing and discourse, public opinion can be dramatically shifted away from one ideology of prison to another. Such a shift in public opinion and resulting policy occurred when prisoners' access to Pell Grants was stripped in 1994, effectively eliminating many education programs in prison to satisfy the public's desire that prisoners be stripped of undeserved benefits such as free education ("Pell" 477). This explains, in part, why people's opinions are largely under-informed about prisons, and how prevailing misconceptions about prison are continually reinforced. As Michelle Brown explains in *The Culture of Punishment*, correctional institutions are total control spaces that exist apart from the general public. In these spaces, the movement of people, objects, and information is carefully watched, analyzed, and recorded to maintain a constant state of security. Because of this control, information about prison is tightly grasped by administrators, and slowly released through reports and statistics, forms of information that only hint at what actually occurs behind the walls. Public opinion alters because of this narrow flow of information.

Official Writing Shapes Daily Reality

Official writing does more than provide an authoritative corpus to shape the opinions of people outside of prisons. Inside prisons, the collection of texts that contribute to publicly available reports also shapes daily life for prisoners, including how and when they write. In particular, official writing shapes the degree to which prisoners can write to one another and to the public, mainly restricting that degree rather than

expanding it. Prisoners' lives are under total control by the prison, a control enacted by the official writing that undergirds the operations of prisons. Schedules, work assignments, and program call-out sheets, incident and disciplinary reports, transfer orders, and a range of psychological and educational assessment forms all shape daily life for prisoners, dictating movement, meals, and communication. These schedules, forms, and reports confer privileges or impose constraints upon prisoners they name. These texts also enact and reinforce prisons' power to control the physical body of the prisoner, as well as their discursive capacities, all through the production and circulation of official texts.

Though power in prison begins with written text, and extends its control into the reticulate public spheres to shape opinion there, the power of official writing is stabilized in the physical space of prisons. Prisons are first manifested in written proposals, designs, legislation, and blueprints. These arrangements of space and power are later manifested as buildings with boundaries, identities, behaviors, and rules. Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon Letters* demonstrates how writing stabilizes power relations in prison even prior to a prison's existence. In these letters, Bentham describes the architectural model of a prison that arranges bodies within a specific architectural design that provides one-sided control, production of knowledge, and power through the "apparent omnipresence" of agents of power (Bentham 45). His letters demonstrate what Foucault later argues: that the power of prison to impose discipline and control is codified into the architecture of the building and the relationships of knowledge and action that prison creates.

Writing continues to shape the purpose and meaning of specific spaces like dormitories, entrance gates, education classrooms, libraries, and the yard. These physical locations inside prison have specific collections of texts that shape acceptable and required activities that occur there. Likewise, who can meet in, occupy, and act in those spaces is shaped by the writing associated with those spaces including the writing that is produced there. For example, the entrance gates control everyone who enters a prison and entry logs while extending that control by recording the names and institutional affiliations of those people for future use. Every time someone passes through prison security, entry logs are compared to other rosters that list those people who have clearance. Inside prison, dormitories use daily roll-call sheets several times a day to confirm the presence of all prisoners. Work assignments, call-out sheets, and classification forms all dictate the actions required of, and available to, prisoners. This extends to where on the compound prisoners can or cannot go. Christopher Keller and Christian Weisser point out how places like “classrooms, campuses, cities, workplaces” are given semi-stable meanings by situated writing activities. These places reciprocally affect what writing activities are performed in that place (*Locations 2*). Seen this way, prison is a network of place with situated writing. The resulting text circulates through the network of places and shapes the knowledge and behaviors of people, officers, and prisoners who occupy those spaces.

An incident report is a form of writing used by prison officials that provides a clear example of how official writing reflects the public agency of correctional officers to control prisoners. These reports are similar to many other reports found throughout prison, and serve as the “factual information of an event recorded” by correctional

officers (Guffey 5). State correctional systems and the federal prison system both use incident reports, although they differ slightly in style and visual design. However, all correctional systems' incident reports share textual features that evidence their purpose in the socio-technical network of prison.

Incident reports range from two pages to a dozen, and provide space to record the date and time of the incident, the name of the reporting officer, the facility name, rule/code(s) violated, and the name and number of the prisoner involved. Remaining pages include check-boxes and narrative sections for elaborating the details of the incident and spaces for description and explanation of the incident. An incident is an event that requires intervention by prison officials, most often a fight or an assault. The report includes the type of assault, weapons were used, injuries or deaths that occurred, methods of force or control deployed by staff, controlled substances involved, and whether a "lockdown" occurred afterward. Later pages include space for longer narratives, for statements on the prisoner's attitude, affiliations, and a space for the prisoner's own statements to be included.

These reports provide the definitive, official version of an incident. Correctional officers control when and why incident reports are produced, their perspective acts as the controlling perspective for that report. Indeed the choice of whether or not to produce an incident report is a matter of power, even though policy often dictates that any incident requires an incident report. This power relationship is replicated in the arrangement of an incident reports information: incident reports include space for prisoner statements after those sections that are completed by correctional officers.

These reports have the power to shape prisoners' social relationships by limiting physical and written contact with others as a matter of discipline.

Incident reports, and the whole corpus of official correctional writing, produce and stabilize the public/controlled place of prison. As this writing reflects, stabilizes and replicates the control of prison, it also reinforces the prisoner's place within prison and his place as separate from the public. By aligning a variety of controlling and punitive texts at their disposal, prison staff can produce the partial or complete isolation of prisoners. This institutionally produced isolation results in counter-inscriptive texts and counterpublic spaces.

Prisoner Newsletters as Counterpublic Space

In his article "Prisoners of Conscience and the Counterpublic Sphere of Prison Writing," Hauser argues that writing by political prisoners participates in an emergent counterpublic space. Writing by political prisoners is, for Hauser, important evidence of the existence and function of the counterpublic sphere. This counterpublic sphere is "an arena for hearing proscribed voices, expressing proscribed ideas, and entertaining the alternative reality they advance to the existing order" of society (36). A counterpublic sphere is a site where people can articulate and enact modes of resistance against the public sphere and public discourse. These sites emerge when public spaces become closed to whole groups of people. Counterpublic spaces allow texts to emerge that express voices, rhetorics, and meanings otherwise excluded from public spaces. For Hauser, the writings of political prisoners, or prisoners of conscience, are important examples of counterpublic texts. This writing is produced by people who are explicitly excluded from participating in civic life. Because of this exclusion, writing by prisoners of conscience forms a counter-discourse that reveals the inadequacy of traditional public

spaces to act as arenas for full public expression and participation (35). That is, prisoners' counterpublic discourse illuminates the failures of public spheres and discourse to be inclusive. Furthermore, Hauser explains that "prisoners of conscience are unlike ordinary felons in that their incarceration grows from the threat of their ideas" (37). For Hauser, political prisoners are motivated because of their incarceration and the public exclusion that results. They are forced to write under duress and in that writing they enact a counterpublic sphere and discourse.

However, political prisoners are not the only participants in counterpublic spaces. All prisoners, including "common" prisoners, are equally isolated from society and proscribed from participating in public discourse. Indeed, prison is often touted as an egalitarian form of punishment since all prisoners are supposedly equally deprived and isolated. All prisoners are isolated from public space, and as I have argued, many more write than just literate, politicized prisoners. Because all prisoners' writing emerges from that marginal space, all writing by prisoners participates in counterpublic space and discourse within the reticulate public sphere, regardless of the writer's political or rhetorical intentions.

The "Common" Counterpublic Prisoner

The United States has a vast network of state, federal, and territorial prisons that in 2008 incarcerated one million, six hundred thousand prisoners (Sabol, West, and Cooper 1). The majority of these prisoners do not self-identify as political prisoners. They are "common" prisoners, and their writing outnumbers the writings of prisoners of conscience within America's correctional institutions. What often distinguishes the two is their visibility by the public. Politicized prisoners often have many outlets to share their political writing, including many activist and academic journals.

Writings and publications by prisoners are often studied to explore the effects of incarceration upon people but rarely to determine the effect of writing on prison or the public (Novek 2005). This is partly a research-based reification of popular ideology that claims prison prisoners are not part of the public. Prisoners are incarcerated in order to isolate them from the public and to limit or remove their ability to participate in public discussions on issues of shared concern. This discursive and political isolation is referred to as “civic death” (Rodriguez 36). Prisoners are still dependent upon the public sphere and its discourses to make decisions that affect their lives. But prisoners have no voice in those discussions, no say in those decisions. For the purposes of political participation, prison transforms prisoners into the civic dead.

Prisoners recognize that in their situation writing is the best tool to resist the power of prison to isolate them from public/civic life. They are keenly aware that their political and social capacity as *communicators* has been marginalized. In response, prisoners write in ways that enact not only their outsider status but that also makes their writing accessible to public audiences. They produce texts that circulate in the reticulate public sphere that also continuously assert their participation in counterpublic discourse. This writing marks its origin as separate from “the public” and attempts to bridge that separation by speaking directly to that public about that separation. For example, in his article “Writing on the Walls: It Isn’t Just Graffiti,” Charles Hucklebury, Jr. describes his awareness of how isolated he is from the public. He explains that “writing inside of prison is often a lonely and discouraging experience if one writes for public approval” (50). Hucklebury argues that writers in prison must write for the public if they are “to alter the prehistoric attitudes of today’s electorate” (50). That is, to change the public’s

opinions about the worth of prisoners as civic participants, prisoners must write to that same audience that excludes and “vilifies” them. In a way, the manner in which prisoners identify themselves as explicitly counterpublic is rare, providing a rare example of undeniable counterpublic writing. Many counterpublic groups do not self-identify as such, but rather see themselves simply as alternative publics (“In the Name” 59). By identifying themselves explicitly as a counterpublic, prisoners can then write directly about their separation from other public spaces in ways that other counterpublic groups cannot.

Prison Legal News: Prisoner Journal as Counterpublic

Prisoner journals, like *Prison Legal News*, demonstrate how prisoner counterpublics challenge the boundary that separates powerful publics from marginalized counterpublics in the reticulate public sphere. *PLN* was started in 1992 by Paul Wright and Ed Mead to address concerns that “prisoners and their families were the people most affected by criminal justice policies but...were also the ones with the smallest voice” (Wright 80). Over the next decade and a half, *PLN* published twenty one volumes. Articles covered labor and reform issues in prisons across the country, including state and Constitutional rulings that affected prisoner rights. The journal and served as an organizing and informative tool for prisoners across the United States (81). Since its inception, numerous regional journals have been started to provide local forums for prisoners to participate in counterpublic discourse. For example, *Florida Prison Legal Perspective* provides news, updates, and analyses specific to the Florida Department of Corrections. Both *Prison Legal News* and the *Florida Prison Legal Perspective* are situated in prisoners’ counterpublic space. From that space, these are distributed to members of the public in order to affect their resulting discourse. These

journals and others like them are also subscribed to by academics, prison officials, law offices, and private prisons. However, *PLN*'s circulation to the public does not rival that of mass media, leaving them relatively powerless by comparison.

Prison Legal News also received a great deal of negative attention from prison officials. When prisoners organize themselves into a coherent group as counterpublics, they are viewed as a threat to institutional security and control, and thus as a threat to the public's safety. In this way, the counterpublic action of *Prison Legal News* brought it into conflict with the public action of correctional officers. As Wright and Mead circulated issues of *Prison Legal News* to prisons across the United States, they were subjected to retaliatory transfers and disciplinary action by the correctional staff. These transfers made it difficult for Wright and Mead to organize *Prison Legal News*, which hindered its publication and distribution. These official responses changed the way *Prison Legal News* was produced, in turn altering how that newsletter acted as a counterpublic inscription.

Official efforts to hinder *Prison Legal News* were enacted partially through writing. Each transfer and disciplinary action was enacted by official writing produced by correctional staff and circulated to other correctional staff. By using the official capacity of prison, through its powerful network of text to manifest real world effects, prison officials use their public power to reinforce and maintain Wright and Mead's exclusion. In other words, every transfer, disciplinary action, and institutional punishment was underwritten with a specific, archived, and publicly authorized written text that kept *PLN* from reaching public discourse. This not only maintained prisons' power to isolate

prisoners and excluded them from public space. It also reinforced *Prison Legal News's* status as a counterpublic text.

Prisoners are the people most familiar with prison. However, because they are isolated in their own counterpublic space, they are excluded from public conversations and debates about the role and effects of prisons. Gaucher explains:

Working as a professor of criminology for the past twenty years, I have been repeatedly struck by the incongruity between accounts and analysis of prison intellectuals and those of state and academic authorities. The prison, as described and analyzed by contemporary prisoners, does not resemble the image of the 'accredited penal institution'...nor the model institution" ("The Journal" 6).

The versions of prison articulated by current and former prisoners differ greatly from official descriptions of prison that reach the public in the form of official reports and mediated representations. Prisoners have first-hand experience of the long and short term effects of prison's isolation and punitive functions. They have lived through incarceration and are aware of its effects. Their insight would be invaluable in public discussions of punishment, prison, and crime. However, as Hucklebury points out, when they are able to reach the public, they are also mistrusted because of their status as prisoners (50). It is ironic then that prisoners' authority to speak on prison issues is derived from the same identity that leads people to deny them access to public forums and conversations on prison issues.

However, as *PLN* shows, written texts from prisons do participate in broader public discussions, albeit from a counterpublic space outside of public space. This participation challenges the public function of prisons, namely to isolate convicted criminals from the general public. But the writing of guards *and* prisoners participates in public discussions, and in discussions of their own that are distinctly not-public. That is to say, writing that

does not participate in public discussions, but that discusses a topic of “public concern,” often participates in a counter-public. The relationship between publicity and writing has been analyzed before. However, writing in prison, a subject where boundaries and identities are especially crucial, has not been considered in these ways before.

Reticulate Publics & Writing in Prison

Writing in prison participates in the reticulate public sphere. It interacts with other reticulate publics primarily through the production and circulation of writing. That is, writing produced and circulated in and around prison is the active process of public formation, organization, and conflict for prison’s interaction with the larger public realm. This writing includes incident reports, prisoner journals and newsletters, and all other forms of official and prisoner writing. People who work and live in prison are connected to the larger reticulate public network through this writing and its circulation. However, official writing participates in and enforces the opinions of Warner’s overarching public as well as smaller, powerful publics that seek to influence correctional policy. Alternately, prisoners’ writing resists the prisons’ isolation and exclusion in order to influence or refute public opinion about the people that the public incarcerates. Prisoner and official corpuses of writing interact together and separately and with other publics in the reticulate public sphere.

Furthermore, Warner’s third sense of public helps reframe the relationship between prisoner writing, official writing, and public/counterpublic formations. He points out that “the modern sense of the public as the social totality in fact derives much of its character from the way we understand the partial publics of discourse” (68). This is important for re-placing the importance of prison-based writing into a conceptual framework of publics: prisoners’ writing and official writing are text-based publics that

contribute to the social totality. Prisoner writing does so through absence and reconnection with reticulated publics. Official writing does so by enacting the power of authorized agents on behalf of society. In other words, by writing, prisoners and correctional officials contribute to the limited public space of prison. Furthermore, writing is the means by which publics and counterpublics form and interact in the reticulate public sphere.

This circulatory relationship between prisoners, officials, and the larger public is reflective of the reticulate public sphere as a whole. In the reticulate public sphere, many publics produce and circulate writing and other forms of discourse to influence one another. The relationships formed are semi-stable and enacted, forming in effect a network of relationships. Publics within the reticulate public sphere maintain cohesion and identity not just by including people but also by excluding some people from membership, as the prison writing network shows.

Counterpublic groups, like counterpublics formed by prisoners' writing, are excluded and subordinate to more powerful publics. These counterpublics demonstrate the degree to which such groups struggle to influence dominant publics and how writing enacts that struggle. Furthermore, the official writing of correctional staff shows the degree to which agents of the public will go to protect and even extend conditions of exclusion. As exclusionary groups, publics use control over language, particularly control over the production and circulation of writing, to enforce the privilege and power that come with exclusivity.

Other locations demonstrate the connections between writing, publicity, and counterpublicity. In academic settings, public(s) formed by groups of academic writers

have historically been exclusive of others, as Bleich persuasively shows in “The Collective Privacy of Academic Language.” In their own space, academics worked together to produce a “a language few others in society knew” (79-80). This linguistic isolation allowed and continues to allow academics a privileged position within society that affords them access to a unique power (80). The university is developed and is stratified in a manner similar to prison: a dominant, powerful group uses language (access, production, distribution) to exert power, influence, control, or to exclude subordinate groups, like students. As in prison, counterpublic actions resist the power of the dominant groups to define them. Some scholars might object that students are not a counterpublic because the actions they resist are intended to benefit them. However a similar kind of paternalistic claim is made about prisons. Seen in this way within the structure of academia, students act as a subordinated, often excluded group. That is, students can and have formed a counterpublic space. Like prisoners, students find alternative and resistant means to write and circulate discourse, like blogs, journals, etc. that challenge the textual and knowledge standards of academia.

The examples of *PLN* and official incident reports show how writing circulates within and between prisons, between prisoners, correctional staff, and individuals who are otherwise disconnected from prisons. Circulating texts have practical, real-world effects on the lives of prisoners and on free people. Their production and circulation contributes, when able, to public discussions about the role of prisons in society. Official writing and its reports also influence those discussions through authorized and direct avenues like public reports. Such official writing also influences academic communities and how they construct knowledge about prisons and prisoners. Efforts to even the

power structure between these textually-enacted publics and prisoners are met with resistance. Correctional officials try to control how and when prisoners communicate just as academics control how and when students write. And, in both prison and academia, language rules are attended by systems of punishment.

So how does the circulated writing of prison fit into discussions of public spaces? Is writing that prisoners produce part of a public space if it reaches a public forum, regardless of how it is by readers? Is the prison itself a public space, albeit one where the public is not routinely welcomed or allowed? Or, as criminologists and penologists conceive, is the prison a non- or un-public space, a place where people are forcefully excluded from the public as punishment? If that is the case, does writing in and around public always participate in the formation of alternative public or counterpublic space?

In prison, writing is a substantive, powerful way of identifying and participating in “public spaces” because it is the action of public discourse; writing is public discourse, and as such public writing should be seen as the material of publicity. The production, distribution, and consumption of written text are powerful tools not only for creating, maintaining, and acting within boundaries of social and political identity, but also for penetrating those boundaries. Where previous models of public space treated writing as a “supplement to speaking” in matters regarding public rhetoric, a model based on the interaction of reticulate publics and counterpublics places writing at the center. To write is to be public. Furthermore, in prison, public authority is anchored in written and circulated text. Prison writers’ connections to other reticulate publics emerge and operate largely through their writing.

The prison writing network connects prisons to the reticulate public sphere. In prison, publicity and counterpublicity, public authority and subordination, social inclusion and exclusion, and identity are enacted through writing. This view of textually-enacted publicity inverts traditional explanations of public and counterpublic space, spheres, discourse, and identity. Writing is publicity and counterpublicity. These things emerge from writing and do not exist prior to writing except to the degree that they were already “written.” Civic life, and civic death, are possible to the degree that writing can be produced and shared, or interrupted and silenced. In prison, this means that positions called “correctional officers” and “prisoner” are enacted and reciprocally reinforced by writing and its circulation.

CHAPTER 4 SWARM AND EXPLOIT: WRITING AS CONTROL AND RESISTANCE

Introduction

In prison, the power to control and resist is manifested in writing. This writing can be used to control the behaviors of people in prison as well as to resist those same attempts at control. Administrative segregation provides a salient example. Correctional officers can produce and distribute writing that allows them to extract a single prisoner from their normal space in the prison and place them in administrative segregation, also called “the hole.” This action not only demonstrates and reinforces correctional officers’ power to control prisoners’ lives, it also effectively isolates a single prisoner from other prisoners, thereby muting their relationships with the general population and suppressing their role in any social activities. This segregation requires correctional officers to produce and circulate their writing through “official” avenues. Otherwise, the power required to enact an “administrative segregation” will not manifest. By producing the correct texts, and distributing that writing to the proper places, officers can completely isolate a prisoner beyond even the isolation prison already produces. Furthermore, prisoners that are segregated do not always have direct contact with those texts that lead to their isolation. The texts remain invisible even as the effects are immediate and strong. In this way, power is enacted through text even when it is not entirely visible.

Academic and public discussions do address the issues of security and control in prisons. However, rarely does the role of writing emerge in these discussions. Rather, security and control become important topics following periods of tension and violence in prison, often caused by overcrowding and unaddressed racism. After such events,

control and security, the public often demands increased attention to security, which of course results in stricter control measures in prison (Perotti 371). Prison riots in particular are the most visible and severe loss of control and the culmination of prisoners' efforts to resist and overthrow that control. Always in response to riots and resistance movements in prison, stricter controls are implemented at the institutional levels as well as in governmental policies. Still other forms of control often coincide with prison reforms as with the Prison Rape Elimination Act. This legislation responded to criticisms that assaults in prisons had become a serious threat to security. To address this issue, the legislation established stronger surveillance and control over prison populations.

Control and resistance are clearly related to writing that is produced in prison. Scholars like H. Bruce Franklin and Ioan Davies both explore how writing functions as a means to express resistance. Writing as a means of resistance is also reflected in prisoners' writing, as demonstrated by the memoirs of Michael Santos and Dwayne Betts. Their work not only explores writing as resistance but also provides the material evidence of that resistance. That is, the very existence of writing by prisoners challenges the power of prisons to silence and control them. In this way, resistance and control in prison are interconnected through writing.

I wish to make my point clear: I am not arguing that writing directly causes or prevents riots or sexual assault in prison. I am arguing that writing operates in a network that shapes how events occur and human actors respond, including riots and acts of sexual assault, as well as many other kinds of controlling and resistant acts. Writing is

an important object that allows institutional power to emerge in a form that allows one to direct and use that power. In prison, writing is power given shape and direction.

In Chapter 4 I argue that control and resistance in prison are enacted through the prison writing network. In this network and the relationships it enables, writing materializes power that can be deployed either as a form of control and restraint or as a form of resistance. I consider several examples of writing in prison, such as volunteer application forms as well as prisoners' "kites," to trace how control and resistance are enacted in this network. I also show how the prison writing network enables a power struggle between correctional officers and prisoners across the institutional level as well as in more local manners that involve and affect individual prisoners and correctional officers, as well as people who are not so closely connected to the prison.

Writing as Control

Every person who enters a prison in the United States is controlled by its power. That power is invested in the walls, in the organization, and especially in the writing network. Prisons are institutions that require strict and total control over bodies, knowledge, and meanings within its walls. This focus on control is constantly evident. Each prison facility contains and controls the flow of bodies and information from the moment they step on the grounds. Its policies strictly control how people behave and interact with one another. This power to control circulates between the various elements of prison, from the correctional officers to the architecture of the walls, gates, and fences. Prison's control is total and explicit.

After all, prisons are first and foremost the places where society has decided its ideology of punishment is to be carried out. Depending on what criminological theory dominates public opinion about crime and punishment, prisons may be intended to

punish the prisoner or merely to deprive them of opportunities to offend against the general public, approaches that are part of the “retributive theory” of incarceration (Ubah and Robinson, 2001). Or, the purpose of prison may be to isolate prisoners from their original social circumstances and the individuals they associated with. This isolation from those elements that contributed to their criminality allows specialists, therapists, counselors, and educators to intervene and “correct” prisoners’ behavior. The goal of this intervention is to rehabilitate them so they can be re-introduced into society. Whichever theory dominates public opinions about the role of prison, prisoners often are subjected to both punishment and correction.

Regardless of which ideology of punishment holds sway, prisons always remain places where men and women (usually) convicted of crimes are isolated and controlled. This isolation is created and maintained in deliberate, explicit, and powerful ways. By exerting overwhelming power, prison controls everyone who enters, including the official writing produced by correctional officers, administrators, and other employees of the prison.

Writing helps to manifest this control by “enclosing” the entire prison as a network. As a result, correctional officers, prisoners, and others who enter into the physical and textual space of prison are required to interact with writing at some point. This interaction is either to produce new writing, such as filling out paperwork, or to confirm information that is already written. Furthermore, different people are controlled by writing in different ways in prison. As a volunteer, my interaction with the prison writing network was different than a visitor’s interaction. This is not to say I was less controlled by that network, but rather I was controlled in a different way. Because of this variability,

official writing produces a fluid control, or what William Bogard terms a “flexible enclosure” (“The Coils”). Written texts are not walls and can exert control only as far as they are treated as powerful, which in prison is frequent. The power that writing produces to control people is socially-derived: writing controls behavior as long as people allow it to control them or as long as it is enforced. People who wish to enter prison must interact with the writing network there because it is (written) policy to do so. Following this policy then allows them to enter the prison dictated by their written identity. Bogard explains that these flexible enclosures “promise to counter the resistance of populations to confinement by instituting a kind of mobile and free form of enclosure” (“The Coils”). Essentially, people control themselves because writing has “convinced” them to act a certain way.

Eventually, writing’s power to control becomes disconnected from specific people and becomes institutionalized. It becomes semi-autonomous and exerts power “on its own.” People end up responding to text, rather than other people. For example, prisoners fear incident reports and their effects far more than individual officers precisely because an officers’ power is limited while incident reports, as part of the writing network, extend across the whole prison. Writing extends its free-form enclosure over even physical enclosures of the prison walls, fences, and razor wires. Both physical and textual enclosures control people within their boundaries. While the physical barriers control bodies, the writing network controls the entire prison and those within. Because writing encloses the prison in this way, official writing in prison can exert its control over anyone, prisoners, correctional officers, visitors, volunteers, etc. Writing functions as an object that controls, restrains, and enables the actions of people

and texts within prison. Simply put, writing in prison exerts social control that operates with, and independent of the physical controls of prison. Prison walls exert control in direct and physical ways, and correctional officers direct power in through their immediate relationships. However, writing links spaces and people together as it extends its control throughout prison.

Writing Workshop Volunteer

To explore writing enables and exerts control, I want to draw on my own experiences as a volunteer teacher in a prison writing workshop. I teach a bi-weekly writing workshop at the Lawtey Correctional Institution in Florida, a program that started in October 2009. Lawtey C.I. is one of four Faith and Character Based Initiative facilities in Florida, a classification of prison that offers rehabilitative and counseling programs to prisoners, frequently situated in the material and themes of religion. In her article “Religious Literacy in the Faith-Based Prison,” Tanya Erzen shows how religion dominates Lawtey’s educational and chaplaincy programming. Erzen notes that:

The process of attaining religious literacy occurs through repudiating the self that was criminal and becoming a redeemed person. The faith-based classes teach that imprisonment is the failure of the individual to live in the doctrines of a particular faith and that therefore the cure is fidelity to its teachings (663).

Here we can see how the prison writing network connects to other networks of information, in this case a religious network. But this linkage extends its influence into the prison writing network. This emphasis on religious education affects the writing produced by students, shaping their writing in ways that reflect religious topics and interpretations. Furthermore, these educational materials emphasize an ideology that blames crime on individuals. I argue further in Chapter 5 that this ideology tacitly

supports power of prisons rather than by producing genuine opportunities for critical education.

Before I began volunteering at Lawtey, I received several emails from the Chaplain, William Wright. This emails had several pages of waivers and application forms that the Department of Corrections required me to fill out (see Fig. 1). I completed these forms and returned to the Chaplain Writing. To my view, these forms simply disappeared into the black-box of the prison. However, I know that Chaplain Wright submitted them to the Florida Department of Corrections main office in Raiford.

A series of processes were begun. To confirm that my information was accurate, a National Criminal Information Center (NCIC) background check was conducted, and an official file containing information about my criminal record (none), my education (some), and my purpose for applying to be a volunteer was opened. After my NCIC check was completed, I received administrative approval to begin entering Lawtey to teach the writing workshop. These texts shape the identity I possess in prison as a volunteer, which immediately begins to shape and limit my behavior there. As an educational volunteer, I am subject to different kinds of controls than the correctional officers and visitors. I am allowed to bring large quantities of writing materials to distribute, books to share, and even once a compact disc (electronic storage devices are strictly controlled).

Every other Saturday, I enter Lawtey's front gates, walk through the metal detectors, and start a long process of getting to the education building to teach. I must pass through four large metal gates, three of which are electronically secured, and the fourth is secured with a padlock and key. However, I the main gates I am stopped so

officers can confirm my NCIC file and information are correctly retrieved by Lawtey's computer network. This file and its information represent my key to be able to enter and act as a writing class volunteer. The main gate is remotely opened by the lieutenant on duty, who must physically see me at the gate and "buzz" the lock. Inside the first sally port, I empty my pockets of keys, wallet and pens, and my bag of books is spread out by the sergeant working the gate.

If I have not brought contraband in (including my cell-phone), the sergeant directs me to enter my Department of Corrections PIN number into an electronic keypad. This keypad includes a sensor that reads and confirms my handprint against a handprint sample I provided on my first entrance. This comparison confirms I am the person assigned to that PIN. Inside the control booth, my picture appears on a screen along with the demographic and National Criminal Information Center data collected during my application and background check, confirming my identity and that I have permission to enter as a volunteer. I am told that this handprint works equally at all the prisons, but that I am still only authorized to enter Lawtey.

In the second sally port, I turn over my driver's license and sign a log-book, noting which program I am volunteering for and which institutions I represent (Santa Fe College and University of Florida). I am given an alarm wand to hook to my belt and a volunteer ID badge to clip to my shirt, and am allowed to pass through the sally port's exit gate, onto the yard. I frequently have no escort across the yard. Without the appropriate volunteer badge displayed on my shirt or belt, I will be stopped by correctional officers to confirm my identity and that I am indeed supposed to be there. Even with such a badge, I am only allowed in the educational center or the chapel

annex unescorted. The rationale, as with most reasons for such control, is security. My badge symbolizes the body of writing and its power that collectively enable me to teach writing in prison.

The education building itself houses about a half dozen classrooms, a regular library, and a law library. A board outside the library displays articles on general interest issues clipped from local and national newspapers. These articles rarely discuss issues related to the prisoners either because the library staff simply chooses not to post such articles or because newspapers do not publish articles about prisons as frequently as articles on other topics. My class meets in classroom C, not because we chose this room or even prefer it, but because simply because, when we arrive in the education building, classroom C is already open. Inside this classroom, motivational posters and calendars from the different women's athletic teams cover the brick walls next to signs that demand "Do Not Put Chairs Against Walls." Homework assignments and tests from Adult Basic Education classes are stacked on the table in front of the white board. These assignments often refer to Biblical passages and characters, demonstrating Erzen's observation that education at Lawtey is greatly influence by the study of religious texts and personal-faith course materials (659).

My entry into Lawtey is long yet relatively clear. To enter Lawtey as a volunteer, I must interact with a number of texts that control my identity and behavior inside prison. Some of these texts I can act upon (log-book) and some of them only act upon me (NCIC background records). However, other people who enter prison experience the power of prison's control differently than I do. For example, one Saturday I was teaching, a mother and her young son from Tampa were trying to get in to visit the son's

father. The young boy, no more than ten, was wearing camouflage pants. As he attempted to enter with his mother, the officers pulled out a binder that contains memos and handbooks on the policies that govern the daily operation of prison. The officer in charge of the entry port pointed to the policy memo that states camouflage pants were recently determined to be unacceptable attire for visitors. The memo she pointed to, I later found out, was an update to existing policy memos regarding visitor dress. The memo she had pointed to was the most recent text in the network of texts that collectively formed the policy of Florida's prisons. The mother protested, but the officers were bound by the policy. The mother and her son were not allowed to enter even though they had travelled four hours for their visit.

Writing played an important role in this example of control. The mother and her son were denied entrance not by the officer alone but by the combined power of a textualized policy embodied and enacted by the accreted memos. The officers had little power to choose their own actions at the time. Instead, the power of prison to control was textualized into writing that was physically presented.

Regardless of how action is directed to enact power, both are shaped and directed by text. Of course, this often becomes visible only when those texts arrest or interrupt behavior, as in the case of the woman and her son. I personally experienced this arresting power one year after I began volunteering at Lawtey. After a year, my NCIC background check had expired. Consequently, I was not allowed to enter until it was renewed even though I had since developed a strong working relationship with the officers who regularly worked the front gate. To renew my NCIC clearance, I wrote to Chaplain Wright and asked him re-submit my background check paper work. Whether

this actually happened, I do not know. But the next week my NCIC status was renewed, presumably because the chaplain produced and circulated writing, actions that were concealed within another “black box.” I was then allowed to enter and teach writing again.

As the examples above demonstrate, some of my actions in prison are authorized because I am a volunteer. However, this identity and the response of other agents in the prison are the result of my complex, networked relationship with the prisoners, the correctional staff, and a constellation of linked texts and technologies. Writing is central to my actor-status as a volunteer. Within the prison writing network, writing transforms and mediates me and other actors, and is in turn transformed by our actions. These actions include attempts to control the environments and situations of other people. For example, prisoner entry and transfers depend greatly on the production, circulation, and direction of appropriate texts within the prison writing network.

Transfers and Intake/Entry

The prison writing network controls the process of introducing new prisoners into a correctional institution. New prisoners are first taken to a classification and receiving office. In this office, a correctional officer records their legal name and assigns them a new alpha-numeric code to supplement their given name in all future prison files. They are subjected then to a body-cavity search to confirm that no contraband is being smuggled. These prisoners are made surrender their civilian clothing and possessions, all of which are stored in cardboard boxes. They are instructed to shower with delousing powder and are issued their new prison clothes, a standard wardrobe that often includes “two pairs of navy-blue pants, two blue shirts, three T-shirts, three pairs of boxer shorts, three pairs of socks, a blue winter coat, a blue summer jacket, two towels,

and a pair of brown shoes” (Hassine 16). Except for their shoes and socks, all new prisoners’ clothes are stamped with their department of correction inmate ID number. Prisoners are then given medical and dental exams and are issued their bedding and amenities that includes disposable razors and rolling tobacco. Finally they undergo psychological and literacy assessments that determine whether they should receive special work release or assignments.

Each action in this process draws on a range of texts that will dictate the proper steps and responses. But more than that, each action also results in more writing. Each form and report produced during this process adds to the prison writing network. This collection of writing includes information about their possession, medical information, educational and psychological assessments, and skills. It will shape and control the prisoner’s life including where they live, what jobs they work, and what privileges they will receive. These texts will control the future of that prisoner, dictating where they can go and what they can do. When they are brought into the prison, their first encounter is with the prison writing network, an encounter that irrevocably link them other texts and situations. The result is that the prison asserts its power of each inmate in ways that cannot be immediately seen but which later can be extended through more writing.

Prisoners who are transferred between facilities are also controlled by writing. These transfers require correctional officers and wardens to write transfer orders, classification forms, and incident reports, all of which become part of the prisoner’s file. This file of accumulated writing and records forms a node that links the prisoner to the controlling correctional officers and administrators as well as to other texts that give context and meaning to that file. The prisoner arrives at their new facility preceded by

this file. When the prisoner does arrive, more writing is produced and placed into it. This new writing includes forms that link the prisoner's old status and classification to their new role in their current facility. This serves not only to reinforce the already existing control over the prisoner but to extend that control to the prisoner's new place in prison.

Furthermore, that writing not only shapes the prisoner's lived conditions by moving them between institutions, it also shapes the behavior of correctional officers who actually move the prisoner. That is, while correctional officers use writing to control prisoners, they themselves are likewise controlled by writing. Although they use writing to move prisoners between facilities, that writing also requires officers to act in certain ways that reinforce the authority of the prison and its writing network. For example, during a prisoner transfer, correctional officers are continuously required to produce writing that conforms to the established protocols and policies for prisoner transfers. They must then circulate that writing to the proper people who are often in multiple different places. Infirmary staff must also complete medical evaluation reports before releasing the newly transferred prisoner into the general population. Correctional officers in charge of dormitories, cell-blocks, and at the main gate must update and their detailed logs of entries and make certain that new rosters are distributed. In effect, writing that already exists and writing that is produced throughout a transfer control the actions of both prisoners and correctional officers. In this way, we can see that prison's power to control occurs through its circulated text and the power those texts exert over people, behaviors, and knowledges within.

Education as Control

The control that writing exerts in prison extends into educational programs and individual classes. In these settings, writing and the ability to write give shape to multiple

kinds of power and control, including control over identity. This control is described well by Andrea Mayr in her study of Scottish prisons and their educational “social adjustment programs (56). Mayr argues that in prison education, who controls the educational materials, especially textbooks, is crucial. She observes that textbooks in prison use terms that construct and control meanings according to dominant ideological assumptions. For example, the handbook used by the Scottish prison systems *Reasoning and Rehabilitation: A Handbook for Teaching Cognitive Skills* selects key words to describe criminals and prisoners in ways that imply crime is best explained as a cognitive deficiency, rather than a result of socio-economics. Mayr shows how the handbook adopts nominalizations rather than personal nouns and pronouns to emphasize the actions of prisoners rather than their status as people. This lexical emphasis also allows the textbook to attach judgmental adjective to those nominalizations, forming terms like “anti-social lifestyle” and “impulsive/egocentric/illogical thinking” (Mayr 61).

Prisoners have no control over what textbooks are used in their education. The effect is that prisoners who must use this textbook rarely encounter the term “offender” or “prisoner” as an active agent except where crime is attributed to their decisions and cognitive abilities. This arrangement of lexical and ideological control also influences how correctional officers teach from the textbook and how they come to view offenders. These officers can be influenced by the ideology that offenders commit crimes for individual and cognitive reasons rather than social ones. Furthermore, this textbook is used across a large educational program implemented throughout Scotland’s prison system, a system in which prisoners have no direct curricular input.

Writing as Resistance

Prisoners do not sit idle or passive and let the prison control their lives. They resist the control of prisons and correctional officers by writing and circulating their own texts. Their writing enables them to confront and reject the control of prison in direct and indirect ways. By writing, prisoners are also able to re-empower themselves and re-engage with the world through personal relationships and through broader social paths often related to prison reform. Their resistance is often grounded in the production and circulation of writing. This writing confronts or bypasses “official” forms of writing to wrestle over the control those texts allow. That is, prisoners’ writing forms a second corpus within the prison writing network, one which enacts their resistance to the prison and to the writing produced by correctional officers.

“Unity Walk” Protest

Direct resistance is difficult in prison, but it is possible. Prisoners can resist the overall power of prison by directly rejecting its control over certain aspects of their lives. For example, in 1991, three hundred prisoners at the Indiana State Reformatory began a “unity walk” to directly challenge the attempts of prison officials to divide the prisoner population. During this event, prisoners assembled silently and marched around the prison yard to as a way to show solidarity and to demand reforms in the institution. This “unity walk” was coordinated with a letter-writing campaign by the prisoners that had expressed concerns about increased security as well as violence by prisoners and correctional staff. More prisoners repeated this walk during the next week. To reassert control, correctional officers locked the prison down even though “technically not a single DOC [Department of Corrections] rule had been violated” (“The Unity” 382). The prison was locked-down for months, during which time the prison staff conducted a

massive search of the 1,500-man facility. During the lockdown, prisoners were not allowed visitors, phone calls, or canteen purchases to supplement the brown bag meals they were served. Some of the older prisoners who led the unity walk were placed into administrative segregation as “predators.” During this lockdown “thousands of letters from the prisoners and their families had been sent to the papers” to raise public awareness and increase the media’s coverage of the treatment of prisoners at Indiana State Reformatory (383). This “unity walk” had social and political significance. It contradicted popular conceptions of prisoners as irrational, violent, and territorially fractured. Prior to the sociological and political explanations of this event, however, it is helpful to consider how control of prisoners and their resistance to that control during and after this “unity walk” depended on writing and the circulation of that writing.

This “unity walk” demonstrates the subtle role that writing plays in acts of resistance, a role that is often overlooked. In the months preceding the “unity walk,” prisoners circulated copies of Thoreau’s *Civil Disobedience* (sic) along with essays they had written about the non-violent tactics of Ghandi and Martin Luther King, Jr. (381). This writing linked the prisoners together and galvanized their resolve to resist the prison’s unnecessary attempts to control and divide them. The relationships that emerged through this circulating writing enabled those prisoners to work toward a unified goal of resistance and institutional change. Furthermore, in order to manifest the institutional power of prison as a lockdown, correctional officers had to produce and circulate their own writing as well. They wrote incident reports, log-books, and memos to re-frame the prisoners’ “unity walk” as a security threat. This allowed officers to enact and maintain a total lockdown that effectively reasserted their control over the prisoners.

To maintain their resistance to this prison and even extend it as resistance to the lockdown, many participating prisoners and their families continued to write letters to prison officials, politicians, and state newspapers. Indeed, Jon Marc Taylor's article about the "unity walk" is itself an articulation of that continued resistance. It is an example what Dylan Rodriguez calls the "creative new languages and embodied spaces, visions, and fantasies of liberationist political struggle generated by imprisoned insurgents, insurrectionists, and (proto) revolutionaries" (*Forced 2*). His article challenges official versions of those events and legitimizes the resistant activities of the prisoners involved. At all points, the "unity walk" was enacted by and responded to with writing. This writing first enabled prisoners to resist what they perceived to be oppressive conditions. As their resistance continued and the correctional officers reasserted control these prisoners continued to resist by producing new forms of writing and circulating them within and beyond the prison.

Flying Kites: Moving Writing Through the Prison

The resistance of prisoners is not always enacted so dramatically. Because prison attempts to control every aspect of their lives, prisoners must struggle to maintain their connections other people. This leads them to resist prison's control in order to retain these relationships and their identities based in those relationships. To enact this resistance in the total control environment of prison, prisoners turn to writing. There are daily written acts of resistance produced through more common textual forms that allow prisoners to maintain their relationships. These daily acts do not have the dramatic quality of prison-wide acts of resistance. However, in many ways these small acts of written resistance are more important.

Prisoners use daily forms of writing to resist the imposition of an “inmate” identity while they struggle to maintain their own identity and the social relationships that they desire. For example, in *Running the Books*, Avi Steinberg shows how prisoners at a Boston prison maintained their social lives by circulating “kites” through the books in the library where he worked. A kite, Steinberg explains, is

a tidy metaphor for a letter...a physical object – unlike most forms of letters today –folded up and sent out into the world for another person to see from afar. Sometimes these letters were addressed to a specific person, sometimes they were left for whomever found them (*Running* 80).

Steinberg explains how these letters would frequently appear in the books throughout his library, written in coded ways that presumably were intended to be deciphered by the intended recipient. Regardless of the intent, however, these kites violated the security policies of prison. Letters, even to other prisoners, were required to go through the mail system. Letters that evade this system, especially secret letters within the prison, were seen as a threat to security. To enforce these policies, Steinberg removed most of the kites he intercepted. However, he would occasionally allow them to remain, letting them circulate through the library presumably on their way to their intended reader. Those kites then reinforced the social relationship that motivated the letter in the first place. Dwayne Betts describes another way that kites circulate in his memoir, *A Question of Freedom*. Betts explains that kites allow prisoners to circulate information and organize direct actions while isolated in their cells (167). In their separate cells, prisoners would fold short letters into paper airplanes and “fly” them between the cells as a way to share information silently.

Kites demonstrate how prisoners use more common forms of writing such as letters to enact their resistance. Whether or not they reach their intended readers, kites

and other forms of writing allow prisoners to share information and build social relationships entirely in an environment that regularly suppresses such relationships. By circulating kites and other forms of writing to maintain their social relationships, prisoners can resist the imposed silence of the prison. This form of circulating writing suggests that writing is important not just as a vessel of communication but also as an object that maintains the physical evidence of relationships. When writing circulates, relationships flourish, and when it fails to circulate those relationships wither under the control of prison's power. Circulating kites between people in prison challenges the control that prisons otherwise exert on social relationships. They also demonstrate how prisoners necessarily turn to writing as a tool of resistance to maintain their autonomy and identity as social beings. Prisoners resist the degradation of their social identity by writing and circulating that writing through the prison writing network.

Prisoners also use writing to resist the banality of prison life. For example, Gregory J. McMaster explains how writing helped him overcome the quotidian atmosphere and deeply cynical culture of prison. Writing allowed him to resist the boredom that often occurs in prison as well as the negativity that permeates prisoner culture ("Maximum Ink" 64). For him, the action of writing and sharing that writing formed a psychological bulwark against the "fatalistic demeanor of everyday carceral life" (64). McMaster further explains that writing also helps prisoners resist the marginalized status that the public places upon them. Rather than merely accepting their identity as passive "inmates," he explains that

as writers we suddenly have the ability to influence others and assist in bringing about change. Heady stuff when you stop to think about it, especially when we are cognizant of the fact that we can stabilize or incite.

The old adage 'the pen is mightier than the sword' finally makes sense to us (65).

By writing, prisoners can reclaim their active role as humans rather than remaining passive possessions of the prison. They recognize that writing allows them to change the conditions of their world. Through their writing, prisoners can enact two important forms of resistance. First they can resist prison's control over their social relationships. Second they can regain a degree of agency to participate in discussion of important issues, like those discussed at prison conferences.

Prisoners can also write to enable their own forms of social activism on issues relevant to prison. They can even influence significant issues such as capital punishment. For example, Victor Hassine explains how he submitted his anti-death penalty play, *Circles of Nod*, to the PEN Prison Writing contest. After winning Honorable Mention, Hassine was allowed to stage the play at Pennsylvania's death row prison; "no less than 100 yards away from where the State had executed hundreds of condemned men, a dozen men acted out a protest against State-sanctioned murder before 500 prisoners and community members" ("Letter to Joanna" 63). This performance occurred in part because the play had been given legitimacy after the script circulated to another network. That network, the PEN group, returned and honored the script, providing it with the critical legitimacy that led to its being staged. Other prisoners have also written articles, letters, and essays on the violent and inhumane process of capital punishment. Their writing is found in books like *Welcome to Hell*, a collection of personal letters from death row inmates that describe death row life and state-sponsored executions in ways that are not otherwise available. Their letters, and other forms of resistant writing,

circulate, within and beyond the prison walls to raise awareness about the death penalty and resist public perceptions about its necessity and humaneness.

By writing, prisoners can also resist the financial strains placed on them and their families by prison. Prisoners can publish and sell their writing, provided that their writing does not violate state and federal laws prohibit prisoners from profiting on their crimes. Prisoners can also “sell” their writing skills to other prisoners. Homemade greeting cards, poems, legal documents, and editing are all sold and traded in prison for other goods and services as part of an institutional market that is technically against the rules. A prisoner who can wield words and knows how to circulate that writing through the network can gather power and prestige, all of which refutes the prison’s power to isolate and control them.

Writing by prisoners in the prison writing network resists prison’s control over communication, identity, or money. Rules that proscribe the circulation of writing and open communication are flouted by kites and other texts that prisoners pass between their bars and through their books. Writing opens up numerous avenues for resistant acts that challenge the prison’s control over them and that often result in more writing as resistance. While official policies adapt to prisoners’ actions, and correctional officers continually re-impose their control, prisoners also continue to write and circulate that writing. Control and resistance seem locked in a dialectical conflict, but are actually two collections of writing that are part of the same network. Each requires the other to exist. Resistance needs control, control needs resistance, and both are enacted in prison by writing.

The Prison Writing Network and Power: Control/Resistance

To understand the relationship between writing that controls and writing that resists in prison, produced either by correctional officers, administrators, volunteers, or prisoners, I turn back to network theory. Networks are organizational assemblages that are producers of power, rather the results of power (Spinuzzi 10). Spinuzzi explains that power is a result of the ongoing transformative action of networks. As networks conduct their work of forming and revising semi-stable relationships between actors and nodes, these relationships allow power to emerge in the form knowledge, transformative actions and effects, and in the replication of the network.

In networks, writing is a crucial enactment of that power. Power that manifests in writing can be traced, acted through, and observed. Furthermore, actions such as control and resistance are enacted in texts that circulate to and from different nodes in the network. In networks like prison, as writing moves between people and situations it transforms them in ways we can see and trace. It is possible for forms of writing that “should” exert control as part of the prison to instead resist the prison’s power. For example, conflicting incident reports by different correctional officers can result in no official action being because contrary “realities”. Likewise, letters written and mailed by prisoners to family members may decry the control and censorship of the prison, but the existence and circulation of that letter always disproves that control to a degree.

The material writing that grounds power in prison also provides a measure of semi-stability to relationships in the network that use writing to direct power. Relationships that use writing to direct power successfully are more likely to re-occur in the future to accomplish similar goals. Once again, incident reports are a telling example of how texts contribute to the semi-stability of a network’s relationships. These

reports link correctional officers to prisoners in ways that assert the control of officers over prisoners. Over time, the collection of incident reports written by a particular officer or about a particular prisoner gives gravity to the relationship between them. They become linked in the network and this will makes interaction between them more probable. They have a history together. In such a case, the body of existing incident reports make it easier to write future reports about that prisoner because they have “a record.” Likewise, prisoners who write frequent letters to family members or who publish articles in prison newsletter strengthen their relationships through that writing. Writing, as an act and an object of power, gives “momentum” to the relationships between officers and prisoners.

But writing is not connected to a single human actor. In prison, writing produces and deploys power either for control or resistance in ways that disconnect that writing from any single writer or author. Indeed, this is because writing circulates on its own, floating freely between situations and actors, power result from the network and not from human action alone. In prison’s writing network, control and resistance are the results and goals of written texts regardless of human meaning and intention.

This is not to say that writers in prison have no agency in their own acts of control and resistance. Rather, people and their actions are shaped, enabled, identified, controlled, and liberated by writing and its circulation. Humans and texts are equal participants in acts of control and resistance. Furthermore, humans can choose to interact with the network of circulating writing in ways that produce effects more in their favor. For example, Steinberg explains that during his tenure as prison librarian, he was charged with assault on a correctional officer, having poked this officer in the chest

during an argument. The officer responded in writing. He produced and filed an incident report against Steinberg. Steinberg resisted this officer's enactment of power by writing and filing his own report. In this situation, two human actors drew upon and deployed incident reports to direct institutionalized power. The officer's report was an attempt to control Steinberg while Steinberg's report attempted to resist that control. In this way, humans interact with writing in the network so they can direct that power for purposes of control and resistance. But in a complex network, humans are no longer the unitary source of control or resistance. Writing is an actor all its own in the prison writing network. It is neither liberated from, nor dependent upon, humans to exert power.

Swarms and Exploits

The prison writing network is political: it produces and circulates power. Alexander R. Galloway and Eugene Thacker describe how networks like the prison writing network operate to exercise and arrange that power. Their description de-emphasizes the role of human control in networks and instead considers networks as self-organizing political systems. Galloway and Thacker point to the globalization of labor, goods, and information as examples of networked activity that exert control over humans. Within a globalized network, labor is disseminated through numerous agents in one network while another network, such as the internet, allows rapid communication across the globe to connect those agents. Galloway and Thacker also point to the conflicts between hierarchical models of power, modeled best by military and police power, and networked insurgencies. Many organizations that originally arranged power hierarchically now do so through networks. For example, the increasingly networked atmosphere in military and law enforcement groups allows these groups to use systems of information, surveillance, and weapons to act in the world in ways that traditionally

were manifested through top-down hierarchies. By drawing on these examples, Galloway and Thacker explain that networks have become “a medium of contemporary power” that facilitates and resists absolute control: “networks, by their existence, are not liberating; they exercise novel forms of control that operate at a level that is anonymous and non-human, which is to say material” (5).

Galloway and Thacker see networks as a problem for human control. We can no longer control the networks in which we participate. And yet, we require them to function in the globalized world. We are interwoven with networks in ways that eliminate the possibility of total control and liberation. Galloway and Thacker explain this contradiction:

The self-regulating and self-organizing qualities of emergent networked phenomena appear to engender and supplement the very thing that makes us human, yet one’s ability to superimpose top-down control on that emergent structure evaporates in the blossoming of the network form, itself bent on eradicating the importance of any distinct or isolated node (5).

While networks enable our interactions with others, they also deny us control over how those interactions occur. When there is no hierarchical control, some networks “spiral out of control” (5). We are often unable to regain total control over those networks because they are not actually out control but are “networks that work too well” (5-6).

The prison writing network is an example of this kind of network that paradoxically enables relationships between people and resists attempts to control it. “Official” writing in prison often attempts to impose this kind of control. However, such control is intended to impose a hierarchy of control. This is reflected in policies that dictate and control when prisoners eat, read, see visitors, sleep, receive medical care, and write. This network of policies and people is undergirded by a network of writing, including official genres like entry and exit forms, logs, policy books, incident and disciplinary reports,

grievances, attendance logs, and many others. To adapt to the increasingly complex relationships in prisons, official writing now manifests control through “swarm” tactics (13). That is, official writing attempts to establish total, homogenous control over prisoners by addressing every aspect of their lives. This homogeneity works over a short period of time to establish a prison inmate-identity during entry and classification, when prisoners are first incarcerated. During the course of incarceration, this total control reinforces itself, reminding prisoners of their identity as a product of the prison’s total power and control.

Furthermore, this networked total control is maintained by protocols that are grounded in writing. “Protocols” are the logics by which the prison writing network establishes and maintains its enclosure-based control (29). Protocols emerge as patterns of semi-order in the network and keep it from erupting in chaos. In prison, official writing controls a body of textualized information about each prisoner (and often former prisoners or parolees who are outside the walls). This control leads to greater control over their physical bodies and the ways in which they can act. This control is then maintained by a constant swarm of official writing that follows and adapts to protocols of textual production and circulation. Relationships follow certain textual patterns: for example a prisoner will never be able “start” an incident report. However, prisoners can write grievances against correctional officers. The “grievance” is a text that emerged over years of prison reforms that slowly changed the network’s protocols. As the protocol changed, the possibility to write in new ways emerged. This change in protocol illuminates Deleuze’s point that control societies are organized by systems of power that “can be quickly and easily reconfigured to regulate access” (“The Coils”).

This control can be so effective that prisoners often discipline themselves by internalizing control and protocol, a process well described by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*. For example, prisoners *can* write and file grievances but often do not in order to avoid “rocking the boat.” Writing a grievance is a textual action that makes one stand out and many prisoners may fear retaliation.

However, the “total control” attempted by the “swarm” of official writing is not possible. Prison itself remains a hierarchical system, where its network qualities, like the prison writing network, are slowly emerging in more noticeable and powerful ways. In hierarchical systems, stronger controls tend to magnify available methods of resistance and make them more effective. As a network like the official writing in prison swarms and controls its participants, the weaker and more vulnerable the network becomes at individual points and nodes. This is the principle that guides resistance in a network: a single act at an individual node can penetrate the power and control of the overall network. The power relationships between networks that control and resist are marked by this asymmetry. A single text can resist the total control of official writing. In doing so, that resistant text exploits the distributed nature of the network, and brings power to control and define into temporary instability. In other words, single texts like George Jackson’s *Soledad Brother* or Leonard Peltier’s *Prison Letters* penetrate the control of the prison and escape. These texts refute power that was previously deployed by the prison’s official writing network, located in the corpus of “official” texts. Control is shown to be less than total. Although Jackson and Peltier’s works are often read as resistant, they are truly resistant not because of what is written in them but because they exist at all.

Of course, networks are not stable. They adapt. The resistance that occurs at exploit points cannot last. The network will adjust to shore up its spots, and resistance will shift to other points of exploit. The writing network re-establishes control through textual swarms. It adapts and the official writing reasserts control over acts of written resistance if it can. New policies are deployed that control or eliminate access to previously resistant texts and textual forms, an act often described by prison reform advocates as censorship. Prison officials argue that such control is necessary for security. These kinds of control are also seen in educational policies and in public laws that slowly constrict the textual lives of prisoners and their writing. In some states, for example, prisoners are not allowed to receive newspapers while in others prisoners are limited to writing on postcards. The result of these adaptations is greater textual control in the prison writing network.

Galloway and Thacker point to the material components of networks as an important way to ground and trace these semi-stable and rapidly adaptive power relationships. As the material components of a network act we can see the effect the network has upon the materials and actors that participate. While many networks share similar material features like computers, fiber-optic lines, wood, plastic, glass, and people, I would argue that any network that involves humans as nodes also necessarily includes writing. Writing occurs in almost all networks that involve humans as well (and possibly also in some networks that are entirely non-human, depending upon how writing is defined).

Galloway and Thacker explain that networks are not controlled by human actors rather they function and act on their own. Human actors can temporarily direct the

power of a network to affect the world in an impermanent way. But networks manifest their own power and are too complex for human intervention on a total scale. This uncontrollable complexity is true of the prison writing network as well. Humans interact with one another through the prison writing network, directing or resisting the power produced by that network when they can. But the network's signature function is to operate on its own, to produce power and knowledge through writing interdependently with human actors. Thus, the prison writing network operates through dual, asymmetrical networks of writing, one official the other un-official, which emerged as protocols and means to direct power. One writing network establishes and maintains control through widely distributed ("swarmed") writing nodes, while a resistant network of writing penetrates at individual points of weakness, challenging small points along the network in order to resist and disrupt that control.

Prison Writing Network and Capillary Power

Networks of writing, such as I am describing in prisons, also provide an important example of what Michel Foucault has called capillary power. In *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault explores how arrangements of power lead to knowledge and truth in ways that reciprocally justify those same arrangements of power. He claims that to understand how power in society works, we need to attend to power in "its most regional forms and institutions" (27). At the extremities of society, as power becomes invested in institutions, techniques and systems of relations, it becomes capillary (28).

Of course, writing enacts this kind capillary power in other locations as well. For example, first-year writing programs are a familiar example of writing-based capillary power located in colleges and universities. These programs are invested with a great deal of social power, power that is expressed through numerous techniques,

professional organization, institutions, materials, and relationships. Far from being merely educational, writing programs exert considerable power over both students and instructors in ways that are not only meant to control but also to produce knowledge. An example of this is the knowledge first-year writing program construct about student writers as individuals and as a collective. The collected knowledge about students and how they write leads writing instructor to make claims the role of student writing in the academy, and, ultimately, claims about the student and the academy themselves. Individual writing students then find themselves categorized and acted upon by this system. Their writing is assessed and corrected, and the students themselves are evaluated and controlled. The capillary power of first-year writing programs is not produced by individual directors or administrators. They merely direct that capillary power at their “targets.” Rather, it is the protocol and the network produces power. This power emerges from a distributed network of requirements, textbooks, and people.

Writing is a capillary object. In the prison writing network, power is enacted and embodied as both control and resistance in texts that circulate throughout and beyond the prison. In older prisons, Michel Foucault explains, “the power to punish was embodied in a certain number of local, regional, and material institutions, such as torture or imprisonment” (28). But in modern prisons, capillary power is invested in institutional practices, behaviors, and actions. To “study power by looking, as it were, at its external face” requires us to look at those places where power produces real effects on people (28). Capillary power is embodied in the actions of those people who work and live in prison, and also in the ways those actions affect other people and situations. In prison, writing provides us with a concrete object, an “external face” so to speak, to

see and study the production, circulation and effects of capillary power. To study power as control and resistance in prison requires us to studying how writing is produced and shared, and how that writing reproduces power (and itself) at the many links and nodes through which it travels. In this view, writing becomes the producer and conveyor of power in the prison writing network.

The prison writing network manifests as two collections of writing that both produce powerful effects upon humans and other texts. These two collections are generally aligned against one another, one to control the other to resist. The writing that enacts control does so by swarming, while the writing that resist must align itself at points of exploit in the network. Both collections of writing produce and distribute power. This power act not simply because it is exists but because it circulates.

Beyond Composition's "Tragic Trope"

A network view of writing and resistance differs from previous concepts articulated by composition scholars. Resistance has historically been treated "resistance" as a concept to be deployed in writing classrooms. As such, resistance was always an action located in a student-subject. That is, in this view, students resist the knowledge and power of school in general and resisted the writing class and teacher especially. From this assumption, composition scholars explore resistance relates to the teaching of writing and discourse conventions in colleges and universities and how writing classrooms can respond and even incorporate students' resistance in their pedagogies.

For example, C. Mark Hurlbert and Michael Blitz's argue that resistance is and should continue to be a crucial component of writing classrooms. For them, the goal of resistant composition classes is to help students write in ways that don't "underwrite" the university. They want their students to write in ways that cannot easily be gathered

or assessed by, dominant codes that govern how writing is evaluated and used (7). The role of writing instructors in this model is to prepare students for rhetorical participation in the discourse of the academy in ways that protect personal identity and value against the coercive forces of academic writing and discourse. This preparation includes teaching students how to resist elements of academic that might be personally troubling or that might challenge their own ways of speaking and writing. This approach to resistance is less about writing and resistance and more about the disciplinary emphasis on teaching methods and resistance. That is, this collection examines the concept of resistance within a particular, pedagogical setting, but it does not consider how writing enacts and enables resistance in those same settings. The object of Hurlbert and Blitz's attention is not writing, but students. While Hurlbert and Blitz establish the importance of resistance for writing scholars and teachers, they do not really examine writing as an object or tool for resistance. Instead, they attend to the pedagogical and social issues of resistance in university writing classes.

In more recent work, Andrea Greenbaum seeks to expand composition and rhetoric's concern with resistance by drawing on ideas from critical education theory. For Greenbaum, resistance is more than a classroom-based concern. She argues that after composition imported resistance theory from theorists like Paulo Freire, it took up the task of teaching students to "create critical texts and to engage in self-conscious writing practices that always consider context—history, locale, politics, culture, gender, race, and class" (*Insurrections* xiv). Writing teachers and scholars began to treat resistance in a writing classroom as more than a concept, but rather as something enacted by writing critical, context- and audience-sensitive texts that respond to

fragmented audiences, rhetorics, discourses, and purposes (*Emancipatory xv*).

Greenbaum also draws on neosophistic rhetorics, cultural studies, feminist theories, and post-colonial studies to articulate what she calls a “rhetoric of possibility in composition classrooms,” a resistant rhetoric that can propose that which is not (*Emancipatory xv*).

While Greenbaum does emphasize writing as the means to resistance, her emphasis remains on the classroom. However, she argues that many subaltern discourses resist and appropriate dominant conceptions of their literacy by a “pretense of compliance,” (81) appearing to reify the authority of dominant discourses while engaging in other, often subversive actions. That is, groups of writers that are controlled by another more powerful group of people often fake compliance with rules of writing in order to engage in other, less obvious acts of resistance. To deploy this concept in the prison writing network, it would be necessary to show how texts like “kites” reflect such a pretense of compliance.

Joe Hardin also examines resistance in the writing classroom. However, he sees the writing classroom as a space for helping students learn how to resist. In particular, Hardin argues that writing classrooms need to adopt teaching practices and theories that allow students to resist the unconscious reification of values encountered and inscribed in texts. This teaching method links ideology and power to language, particularly as they are ossified in writing and writing conventions. He argues that a different model of writing classes could allow students to learn to resist “the unconscious reification of values,” rather than acculturate them into the dominant values of society. According to Hardin, teaching resistance in writing classes also allows

students to critically examine and participate in forms, genres, conventions, and methods of discourse, allowing the critical position of “author” to be available.

To create a space for such a critical pedagogy, Hardin draws on the concept of hybridity. He argues that “the goals of critical pedagogy can only be truly radical if they reject oppositional and emancipatory formulations” (111). Critical writing classes must resist rigid constructions of both controlling and resistant discourses, focusing on forging “hybrid text[s]” that blend together discourses of control and resistance. His argument for hybrid texts illuminates the theoretical meeting points between the prison writing network’s material actors and the two collections of writing that control and resist within that network. That is, the moment of exploit that challenges the swarm-control could act as such a space of hybridity. Such moments already occur in prison when the texts of control are co-opted by prisoners. These instances include prisoner-produced memos and grievances against correctional officers, texts that are meant to control but instead act to infiltrate the networks control. Other hybrid texts might include personal writing by correctional officers.

As theories and theories of power in composition studies developed, they focused primarily on understanding discursive and interpersonal power in the classroom. They explore the power relationships between teachers and students through writing, but not how writing manifests or directs power as resistance or control. More importantly, these theories explain resistance in individual classrooms and in writing programs but do not help explain resistance and control in networks of writing. By looking to the prison writing network, and revisiting these theories of resistance, perhaps we can build on

these field specific explanations to deepen our understanding of writing and control or resistance in both settings.

Conclusion

In the prison writing network, text shapes and directs power by enabling acts of control and resistance. That is, writing circulates, and as it does so, it acts upon people and other texts. It controls behavior, knowledges, and identities throughout the physical and informational space of prison. Prison is overlapped by a network of writing where control is enacted through overwhelming swarms of text. In contradiction, writing that circumvents, refutes or antagonizes this powerful control does so at points of weakness in the network. This writing confronts the “swarm” control by seeking out the “exploit,” that point of weakness in the network where alternatives and challenges can emerge.

It is clear that resistance is an important concept in composition, allowing theorist and teachers alike to conceive of the writing classroom as a resistant space where students can critically engage with, and create their own, rhetorics of possibility. These theories are romantic, however, and focus on a concept of resistance which is reductive. John Trimbur argues in “Resistance as a Tragic Trope” that resistance was imported as a romantic term to relieve and forgive composition instructors for the failures of process theory. However, “actual moments of resistance invariably involve very real dangers—of death, torture, jail. What makes such acts heroic is the recognition that, no matter the consequences, there are times when resistance is unavoidable” (10). Prisoners live in the conditions described by Trimbur. For that reason, I argue that the prison writing network could contribute much to how composition understands resistance.

CHAPTER 5 CLOSING THE NETWORK: TEACHING AND RESEARCH IN PRISON

Introduction

Teaching writing at the Lawtey Correctional Institution in Florida has allowed me to see the intricate occurrences of writing in prison from a new perspective. My experiences with the multiplicitous forms of circulating writing and the relationships between writers helped me see that writing was central to prison. This perspective allowed me to observe the connections between writing and writers embedded in their shared situations. Two events crystallized this for me while I taught at Lawtey. One event involved a prisoner, the other a correctional officer, and both involved writing.

A few months after I began teaching a writing workshop, one of the men in my class was transferred to a local jail to face charges. He was accused of violating several Department of Corrections policies as well as the particular policies that governed conduct at Lawtey. He not only faced more prison time, he also faced transfer out of Lawtey to a higher security, less comfortable, prison. This man had been offering his services as a “jailhouse lawyer” and kept a folder of documents on his and other cases with his belongings. When correctional officers searched his belongings, which included this folder, they found documents that related to other prisoners’ cases. Having these papers in his possession was a violation of DOC policy. Although his intent was to help his fellow prisoners with their legal work, the officers are required to see this possession as a theft marked it as such on the incident and disciplinary reports. And so, this man from my class had been shackled and transferred to a local jail to face new charges. I learned of his transfer when the remaining men in my workshop told me what happened. The student’s transfer was confirmed when I received a letter from him a few

weeks later telling me he would not be back to Lawtey. Sadly, he was not the first or the last student in the writing workshop to be transferred out of Lawtey.

Later that month, as I waited for the security station to gather paperwork together that would allow them to start admitting visitors, I spoke with a correctional officer at the receiving gate with whom I had developed a rapport. In the past, she had patiently answered my questions about report writing and the general writing atmosphere of prisons. She had helped correct many of my misunderstandings about writing in prison. That day, she and I were talking about the perceived benefits of teaching writing to felons and I asked what kind of writing instruction she and other officers had received as part of their job training. She explained that officers received a brief training class about the specific forms they would be required to fill out for certain situations that regularly occurred as part of their specific jobs in the prison. Beyond this basic introduction to common genres, she explained, they received very little training. She felt that most officers were very poor writers and could use more work or instruction. I asked if more officers would be interested if I offered a free technical or professional writing class. She felt that most of the officers would not be interested. Rather, they would just want to get through their shift and go home, not go to class.

After these experiences, I had a realization: writing classes that are based on college writing classes could not adequately address the conditions and situations that regularly occur in prison. The pedagogies and goals do not transfer. First, most writing classes in prison are directed toward prisoners. Correctional officers and their writing are largely ignored. Second, the pedagogical focus of writing instruction for prisoners is fragmented and uncertain. The goals of writing classes are disconnected from goals

that emerge from prisoners' lives. That is, the pedagogical methods and goals of prison writing classes are imposed by writing teachers from the outside. This recalls Anne Reuss's observation that prison education is necessarily a kind of chaos born from the confusion over purpose (113). Prison education, including writing instruction, cannot decide whether it should develop moral and cognitive character or whether it should compensate for remediate inadequate education, thereby helping prisoners improve their opportunities once they are released. The pedagogical approaches and methods of "traditional" writing classes and workshops imported from higher education do not address the issues important prisoners, correctional officers, and the prison writing network. I began to rethink how writing occurred and functioned in prison, including how writing pedagogy there does or does not address its unique and shifting conditions.

Writing produced by prisoners often is produced in writing classes that are either part of formal education curricula or are offered as volunteer, non-credit classes such as the class I taught at Lawtey. There are two pedagogical goals common to both class types. The first is to help prisoners learn to write as a way to reflect upon their lives and to negotiate the stress of living in prison. Gregory Shafer claims that this kind of writing class "transcends the scholarly and pragmatic concerns of the typical student and often becomes a kind of instrument for exploration" (75). The second purpose of writing instruction is to teach writing as part functional literacy skills. According to Bill Muth, the Education Administrator for the Federal Bureau of Prisons, these skills can address

literacy needs [such] as communicating with children and loved ones at home, improved reading skills and strategies, earning a certificate of General Education Development (GED), reflecting on one's life, and preparing to re-enter society ("Two Ways")

In this model, writing is a vocational skill to be learned that enables other educational goals, but ultimately to serve rehabilitation models.

But these pedagogical emphases do not address the lived conditions of prisoners in prison. That is, they do not help prisoners write in ways that allow them to act in the prison writing network, with all of its complexities and relationships. How can writing be taught ethically and effectively as “self-expression” to prisoners in a space where writing and bodies are equally controlled and expression is limited, if not dangerous? Shafer poses this question when reflecting on his experience teaching writing in prison. He asks what he “could do to make this class responsive” to their lives and situations, a question that all writing instructors in prison need to reconsider (76). Likewise, how can writing be taught to correctional officers who are in tense and dangerous positions every day, whose priority understandably is to get through their shift? The methods of higher education that are imported into prison do not effectively address the conditions of prison because the settings and the students are so different. This misapprehension in pedagogy alienates prisoners while irritating correctional officers who see such methods as disconnected from the reality of working in a prison. A new pedagogy is required to teach writing in prison in a manner that is relevant to the prison and that will address the conditions of its writing network. This pedagogy needs to enable critical analysis of the connections between writing and prison, and empower writers in that network to act. Such action does not mean controlling the network, but rather being aware and responsive to how writing can help negotiate relationships and situations that emerge through the network.

I do not want to propose new classroom methods or lesson plans. First of all, such an attempt is beyond the scope of this theoretical work. Second, writing in prison participates in a network whose relationships are semi-stable and semi-predictable. Any methods or lessons developed outside the context of that network would be theoretically unsound and practically unwieldy. Furthermore, methods and lessons developed and imposed from outside the prison network would be ineffective and would extend what Dylan Rodriguez calls a “philanthropic project” that asserts the power and control of prison further over prisoners (93). Writing instruction should not reinforce or extend the power of ideologies or, in this specific case, the prison. It should provide a means to address and respond to those ideologies and the conditions and relationships in which they emerge through writing. Rather than proposing a curriculum with lessons from outside the prison writing network, the methods and lessons for a network-informed pedagogy should emerge from the conditions of the network as it occurs in reality.

I want to reconsider writing instruction within the prison writing network to imagine a new pedagogical theory. There are many questions that such a pedagogy would need to consider: what would the goals of a network-sensitive writing class be?; how would such a class and the writing produced there connect to the network that surrounds them?; how would such a network-pedagogy differ from, or even improve upon, previous pedagogies that have influenced education and especially writing instruction, in prison?

In Chapter 5 I propose a new pedagogical approach to teaching writing in prison. This pedagogy treats all writing and writers in prison as participating in the complex network of human/textual relationships. I identify the necessary theoretical groundings

for such network theory-informed pedagogy, and compare this approach to the two pedagogical theories, rehabilitative and remedial, that currently guide most writing instruction in prison. A network theory-based pedagogy not only has its own inherent advantages but also addresses the most important issues with existing writing instruction as they occur as part of prison education programs. I also address the link between teaching and research in prison writing classes. Such writing research conducted through rehabilitative and remedial writing classes is frequently limited and biased because those writing classes do not address the full conditions of writing in prison. I will then argue that standpoint theory should be connected with network theory for future research based in prison writing classes.

“Network” Pedagogy in Prison

Since writing in prison occurs in a complex network, writing should be taught as part of that network. Within the prison writing network, texts act with a degree of agency equal to the prisoners and correctional staff who interact with that writing. Prisoners, guards, and writing interact through continuously shifting relationships. Each textual and human actor affects and is affected by other actors that participate in their relationships. However, writing instruction in prison is conceived and delivered in relatively narrow terms. Such instruction teaches personal and basic writing to prisoners and teaches technical writing to correctional staff. The larger relationships between writing, prisoners, correctional officers, and the prison are ignored. Consequently, traditional writing instruction in prison does not address the networked conditions of writing in prison, or the issues of action, agency, and circulation that necessarily emerge from those conditions.

Writing classes should be informed by network theory to account for complexity of the prison writing network and its relationships. The goals of this pedagogy are to identify humans and texts as actants within the prison writing network and to teach how to produce texts that act rhetorically within that network. In order to address the conditions of the prison writing network, a network-informed pedagogy should focus on three pedagogical principles: 1) writing classes should explore the concept of “networks” as complex, self-organizing, and semi-predictable formations of relationships that include writing; 2) writing classes should explore how humans and texts are actors within that network; 3) writing classes should teach writers to produce texts that act within the prison writing network and to use those texts as a means of critical and effective action.

Principle One: “Networks”

Writing pedagogy in prison should first explore the concept of networks as complex relationships between various actors, relationships in which writing is crucial. This concept is the foundation of a network-informed pedagogy, since writing in prison occurs as part of a complex network that is composed of both human and textual actants that connect in semi-stable relationships. This concept of semi-stable relationships between actant-nodes helps identify writing and writers as actors that have mutually affective, though not always symmetrical, agency. In a network, writers and writing act upon one another by forming temporary relationships. From these relationships and the actions they enable, “net-work” occurs to transform the actors and the conditions of the world around them. In prison, writing and writers link together to act and transform the world in semi-predictable as well as sometimes unintended ways. Using networks as a pedagogical grounding helps identify how writing accesses and

deploy power inside the vast and chaotic order of prisons. Furthermore, writers who are aware of their position and relationships within a network can begin act upon and through that network more effectively.

A network-informed writing class in prison is necessarily embedded in the prison writing network. As a result, the actors and actions of such a class participate in the activities of the writing network they set out to explore. To address this, such a class ought to explicitly locate itself within the prison writing network as a node, a congregation of actors to do work within that network. This would allow such a class to supplement and expand on traditional concepts of context, audience, and purpose through the concept of networks. The explanatory power of networks includes all three of these concepts and shows how each of these concepts are conceptual divisions of reality. The network *is* the context for writing and writers, at macro and micro levels. Writing does not merely respond to context, it requires and is shaped by that context even as it transforms the contextual conditions for future writing and writers. Furthermore, audience and purpose emerge from the network as well. This is not meant to indicate that writers and writing are trapped in the network. Rather, networks are a descriptive concept for what already occurs when writing is produced and circulated. In other words, context, audience, and purpose are all distributed as formative and emergent parts of the network itself.

Teaching writing as part of complex, emergent network of relationships removes the source of agency from individual writers and re-replaces it with writers, writing, and their relationships to other actors in the network. That is to say, agency in a network should be taught as distributed across the network, not localized in unified subject like a

writer. This pedagogical approach would emphasize to students that writing does not derive from a unitary subject but rather from the writer, other writers and texts, and a myriad of influences that collaborate together. In this way, network-informed writing pedagogy better addresses the conditions of writing's emergence and circulation in prison.

Principle Two: “Actors”

A network-informed writing class would also need to teach networks as an aggregate of complex interactions between *multiple kinds of actors*. In the prison writing network, key actors are writing (the varieties of texts that act in prison) and writers (prisoners and correctional officers). The prison writing network emerges in the interactions between these human and non-human actors. That is, social interaction in a network between humans is rendered durable and extended by the objects that intercede and interact as well (*Reassembling* 68). Bruno Latour is careful to point out that objects are not determiners of action in a network, but rather are participants in action (71). In a network, agency is distributed between writing and writers and across the relationships that link them together. Neither writing nor humans are the source of action alone.

Latour also claims that in networks of association all participants that shape the actions of others are actors (*Reassembling* 68). As Latour argues, non-human actors participate in networks not as intermediaries but as mediators. Objects that are intermediaries do not transform the things they interact with and stop acting when they are no longer addressed by other actors. Intermediaries are passive objects that cannot affect on the network on their own. Mediators, however, are not passive participants in their relationships (37). As Latour puts it, mediators “transform, translate, distort, and

modify...the elements they are supposed to carry” (39). Mediating objects like writing act with and upon the humans with whom relationships form. If writing is taught as an intermediary, then writing classes ignore how writing transforms the things it interacts with. This view renders writing as merely a vessel that carries meaning between people. This is how writing is conceptualized and taught by rehabilitative and remedial pedagogies, as an empty object or remedial skill to be used in service of other, more important things. But in a network-informed writing class as I am proposing, writing would be taught as a mediator that transforms the things it contacts, whether those things are human or other mediating objects like other texts.

This distribution of agency is crucial to network writing pedagogy in prison. Often, prisoners’ lives are transformed in ways that appear to be source-less: prisoners might be transferred from one facility to another, their dormitories or cells might be searched, their visitor rights might suddenly be suspended or a particular visitor may be barred from entering. In prison, the source of actions against prison is black-boxed by the official elements of the prison writing network. If disciplinary action has no source then there can be no focal point for prisoners’ responses. Actions and their motivations are distributed throughout the network, enacted and mediated through the network by written text.

This distribution is demonstrated in the case of imprisoned climate activist Tim DeChristopher. DeChristopher was recently transferred from a minimum security federal detention facility to the Special Housing Unit at Herlong in California (Graves, “Tim”). While his transfer was physically carried out by correctional officers, these officers’ actions were mediated by the written instructions they received that authorized and

required this transfer. These transfer orders were written by prison officials at the request of a U.S. congressmen, who himself received an email from Tim DeChristopher that the congressman deemed threatening (Graves). The links between the actors in these events include DeChristopher and the other people involved, but also includes links between these people and mediating actor-objects like emails, transfer orders, and other texts. These links between humans and non-humans are materially traceable. However, the agency that enabled the actions that collectively resulted in DeChristopher's transfer are distributed and mediated by the network of people and texts. Even the restraints and the vehicles used to move DeChristopher, as well as the bars used to cage him, acted as mediating objects. There is no single source to which we could point and attribute agency in this event.

By teaching that objects *and* humans are actors, writing classes in prison could critically engage with writing environments in more realistically responsive manners. That is, writers would no longer attribute agency to a single individual in the network. Rather, emphasis would be on writing and writers sharing agency in ways that affect and are affected by the complex range of relationships in which both are embedded. Students would attend to writing as a thing to act through and that acts upon them in reciprocal relationship. Writers could then direct their actions with a degree more predictability by recognizing the semi-patterns of action in the network, patterns that are observable through the human, textual actors, and the relationships between them.

Principle Three: Textual Production and Circulation

Writing classes in prison should also teach that writing is *an object that circulates* throughout the prison writing network. Network-informed writing classes should teach the various textual forms that are commonly produced and circulated within the prison

network. This would include those forms that are regularly included in rehabilitative and remedial writing classes as well as official forms like incident and disciplinary reports. Following from principles one and two, this emphasis on the act of writing would ground network theory in a material object. This object of writing and its circulation are the evidence of the prison writing network and its social-political power.

Writing is simultaneously the formation of a mediating actor (text) as well the action of an existing actor (writer). As the “object” of this network, writing allows us to observe and trace the network as a series of circulating and shifting links between humans and non-humans (Latour 82). This third principle of a network-informed pedagogy resembles the pedagogical principles of traditional writing classes since it focuses on teaching writers what to write and how to write it. However, this knowledge would be shaped through the first and second principles, namely that knowledge of writing and the object of writing are embedded in the prison writing network. Practical writing knowledge is of critical importance and would not be provided by only including discussions of genre, context, or audience alone, all of which are concepts that networks include and surpass.

These three principles would allow writing classes to address the emergent relationships between writers and writing that mediates those relationships, as well as the consequences of writing in a network. This pedagogical approach would also allow writers in prison, both prisoners and correctional officers, to reflect upon their “places” in the prison writing network and to act and write in rhetorically effective ways.

Prisoners & Network Writing Knowledge

The importance of a writing pedagogy informed by network theory cannot be understated for prisoners. Prisoners who write in and about prisons do so at great bodily

and legal risk, and yet are prolific writers. In this "total institution" of prison, where strip-searches are routine and visitor privileges are revoked for any reason, where prisoners are harassed and beaten and sent to solitary confinement or "the hole," writing constitutes a small yet powerful act of resistance and power. Even learning how to write in prison can be deadly for prisoners. In his preface to *Welcome to Hell: Letters & Writings From Death Row*, Clive Stafford Smith explains that an inmate "may struggle to help educate his friend, without realizing that society is more likely to execute a retarded person who learns to read and write" (Arriens *xiii*). This demonstrates the degree to which literacy in prison is considered a dire matter and articulates the stakes for prisoners who choose to learn to write. Despite these dangers to their mental and physical well-being, prisoners continue to produce letters, essays, memoirs, poems, short stories, novels and articles to fulfill a plethora of needs: for self-expression, to remind the outside world of their existence, to name for themselves the injustice of the justice system through their perspective, or simply as a way to escape the paradoxically violent and quotidian realities of incarceration. As one inmate wrote, "I write because I can't fly...writing is my way of sledhammering (sic) these walls" (Chevigny *xiii*). Prisoners want to write, do write, and struggle for the freedom and space to do so.

Prisoners will occasionally organize into groups on their own to write together, forming a node within the prison writing network. These nodes act within the network to affect other nodes in a stronger, more focused way. However, these nodes and the relationships they form are semi-permanent. They can be also be affected by other nodes such as the concerted efforts of correctional officers, other prisoners, and their texts. Teaching prisoners through a network theory-informed pedagogy would inform

their ability to do these things. Prisoners who learn to write to the network could begin to perceive the diverse and complex ways in which writing operates. This would allow them to produce and use that writing to act in the prison writing network for self-expression, reflection, or to “sledgehammer.” Prisoner-writers would be able to see the links between themselves, their writing, and the official texts that mediate and control the conditions of their lives. Meanwhile, prisoners would become critically familiar with writing that affects them as well as the kinds of writing that are available to them as viable means of action. For example, a network theory view of “incident reports” would allow prisoners to perceive these reports as networked objects where prisoners, correctional officers, and text meet. This triangular relationship (prisoner-officer-incident report) and the multiple effects of incident reports are exemplary of the way writing brings together multiple kinds of actors in prison where the source and direction of agency remains distributed and elusive.

Even prisoners who write outside of classes or other nodes can use the concept of the prison writing network to locate their writing in the web of relationships and actions that comprise that network. For example, recognizing that “kites” participate in that network can help writers produce kites that move through the network and thus transform and mediate relationships more effectively. This could be accomplished, using awareness of genre’s role in the network, by mimicking a textual form that operates as an “official form” within the network, and parodying it as a “kite.” This kind of hybridity and appropriation does occur but often as an emergent accident rather than as an intended rhetorical (and resistant) choice.

Correctional Officers & Network Writing Knowledge

Correctional officers receive writing instruction that prepares them for the writing tasks and genres particular to their jobs. However, this training is not extensive and many officers feel unprepared to write for their jobs. Complaints that fellow correctional officers are poor writers are common. As part of training programs that often include legal training, weapons and restraint training, and “interpersonal skills” training, officers only receive minimal writing and communications instruction. In Florida, the courses that teach writing to correctional officers amount to 42 of the 552 hours of training that new correctional officers are required to undergo. An additional class that focuses on report writing provides an additional 4 hours of training. These classes emphasize principles of professional writing and teach forms that are used by the employing law enforcement agency as well as the technologies that are used to complete those forms (“Criminal”). The main principle of writing that correctional officers are taught is that text determines reality; “if it’s not written down, it doesn’t exist” (Brown and Cox xi). The goal of professional writing in corrections is to produce accurate and precise forms that control the official reality of prison.

These classes are frequently taught by instructors from colleges and universities near prisons. As a result, the instruction methods that are used in these classes reflect college writing pedagogies. Correctional officers are taught that writing occurs in a codifiable process of stages that, when used these stages systematically, will allow them to produce ordered and clear reports for others to read. These officers are aware that their primary readers are their superior officers and that there are standards of writing to which they will be held. This method of teaching writing is informed largely by process-theory, the theory that writing occurs in codifiable stages and can be taught as

such. This emphasizes the point that correctional officers are taught to write as if they are college students, not employees who work in prisons.

Furthermore, correctional writing instruction is *correctional*. Correctional officers learn to write by having their mistakes marked and corrected by a knowledgeable instructor. These classes emphasize rote reproduction of acceptable texts, not critical understanding of writing in the unique setting of prison. The rationale for this is that reports are codified texts that must be accurate in order to function as expected in prison. This explicit codification of forms as socio-cognitive genres (Berkenkotter and Huckin 4) leads to more resilient semi-stability within the network, and thus more potent effect in the network. Put more simply: reports that are written correctly are more powerful and more effective because the paths and links upon which they operate are already institutionalized.

Transforming writing classes for correctional officers from process-oriented pedagogy to a network-pedagogy would help those officers to write more effectively within the network. Correctional officers could shift their focus on individual texts as isolated objects but to see themselves and their writing as linked to other actors and writing within the network. Writing becomes more than quotidian paperwork; it becomes a means to act within that network. This pedagogy would reflect the professional standards of corrections writing that “knowing *why* you write will positively influence *how well* you write” (Brown and Cox 4).

Network Pedagogy and Rehabilitative and Remedial Pedagogies

A writing pedagogy based in network theory would have many benefits for writing instruction in prison. First of all, this pedagogical approach identifies the complex role of writing in prison. This would allow teachers and students to escape the dual pedagogies

of rehabilitation and remediation that currently dominate prison-based writing classes. Such a change in pedagogies makes writing classes relevant to prisoners and to correctional officers by responding to the reality of writing in prison and to the complex interactions between human and textual actors. That is, network-informed pedagogy is relevant because it reflects and teaches the relationships between human and writing in prison.

Most existing prison writing classes teach creative or imaginative writing alone. These classes are modeled on the creative writing classes often found in colleges and universities. Creative writing classes certainly provide prisoners with means of self-expression and personal reflection. Other writing classes teach remedial writing as basic literacy skills. In these classes, writing skills are taught as way to correct literacy deficiencies that are commonly identified among prisoners. This kind of “correction” is most often justified as a way to prepare prisoners for release back into society where the job market demands a certain level writing skills to qualify for a job. These are the two rationales for teaching writing in prison: creative writing helps humanize the prisoners, and writing skills corrects literacy deficiencies for employment. As a result, much writing that could be the subject of a writing class goes un-examined and un-taught. For classes that include only prisoners, the most powerful kinds of writing in the prison writing network, professional reports, could be relevant material for prisoners to study and learn to write as part of the prison writing network.

Using network theory pedagogy to teach writing in prison illuminates the prison writing network and its circulatory effects so that class participants could act as critical and effective participants within that network. Prison-based writing classes that use

rehabilitative and remedial pedagogies have overlooked the prolific and rapid production and circulation of writing in and around prison. Such classes do not account for the complex relationships between writing and writers in correctional institutions. Teaching writing as part of network would move writers beyond the perception of writing as a means for individual expression and communication only toward a more critical engagement with writing.

Another benefit of teaching writing as a networked activity is that radical and critical projects could emerge through such prison education. Dylan Rodriguez argues that rehabilitative and remedial writing classes support the prison regime's focus liquidating and preventing critical and hegemonic forms of "prison praxis" (102). Writing classes based in network theory would not do this. Rather, network-informed writing classes would invite writers to critically examine the relationships between their own writing, writing that affects their lives, and the conditions of their lives. That is, revealing the prison writing network shows how that network could be used to criticize the conditions of prisoners' lives. This focus re-dedicates writing instruction away from rehabilitation and remediation and more toward what prisoner-scholar Juan Riviera describes as "an empowerment process which allows individuals to transform themselves" and the conditions of their existence, in and out of prison (121). In prisons, teaching writing as a network would help writers there act more effectively by making them aware of their role as actors and how their relationships are mediated by and through writing.

Standing in the Network: Research, Standpoint Theory, and Teacher-Researcher Ethics

Prisons are linked to colleges and universities through the research agendas of professors and other agents of higher education. This is obviously true for fields like criminology and penology that take the prison and its occupants as explicit objects of study. There are numerous publications about the fields of corrections and criminology that link law enforcement agencies to academia. While the situations of prison and higher education may seem distant from one another, they share very real textual and intellectual connections. They are in fact two networks that are intertwined at their peripheral boundaries. Researchers frequently conduct their studies by utilizing the access that prison education affords them. This is also true of writing education. Many of the articles cited in this dissertation were started because the writer had the experience of teaching a writing class at a correctional institution. There is also extensive research in the fields of education and, more recently, composition and writing studies that use writing classes as spaces to conduct research.

The purpose of prisons has always been partly educational. This educational function is not separate from the punitive or corrective purpose of prison, but rather extends the prison's incapacitating power. As Jean Trounstein puts it, "the unspoken aim of the education department [is] to reform...to enlighten them on what society says is the 'best' way to be, to teach socially accepted behavior as an antidote to crime" (674). Prisons isolate people from society. This isolation allows programs of corrective education to intervene in and re-shape prisoners' behavior and morals. Prisoners are re-educated in a manner more befitting the demands and expectations of society. Over time, the content of such education has transformed from moral and religious education

to include practical and intellectual education, a shift from cognitive and spiritual development to corrective model that remediates prisoners' lack of jobs skills and knowledge.

Prisons and Universities

Prison education programs are often affiliated with nearby universities and colleges. Teachers from colleges near prisons volunteer their time to teach classes like writing workshops for prisoners. Training for correctional officers is often provided also by those institutions with close ties to nearby prisons through contracts and research connections. In both instances, the theories and values of university system regarding education are imported into prison and reshaped to support the ideological role of corrective incapacitation.

Prison and academia are connected by the work and agendas of researchers who enter prison to study writing, literacy, and socialization through prison education classes. The agenda of academic research exerts power over the prison by superseding the knowledge that prisoners themselves would claim. Academic descriptions of prison and prisoners form a body of knowledge that society legitimizes over the claims and descriptions of prisoners. In this relationship, prisoners' claims about themselves and their situations constitute a body of subjugated and illegitimate knowledge in contest with the claims of academics (Foucault, *Society 7*).

Furthermore, writing that circulates between prison and the academy binds prisons and prisoners to teachers and researchers in academia through the relationships that writing enables. Prisoners often write to faculty and students seeking mentors, legal assistance, or recognition of their writing as legitimate claims about prison. There are also numerous journals devoted to the publication of scholarship on prison issues that

frequently publish prisoners' writing. Prisoners also submit their work to literary journals, though they have a difficult time finding accepting audiences in these journals because of their status as prisoners. Victor Hassine points out that "one of the greatest obstacles faced by today's prison writers is their status as common criminals because it muffles their voice in a thick atmosphere of disbelief" ("Letter" 59). Submissions by prisoners to literary journals are often rejected immediately, a situation which Charles Hucklebury, Jr. describes as a "literary black hole reserved for the manuscripts of convicts" ("Writing" 53). Yet despite the difficulty prisoners have being accepted for publication in academic or creative forums, there are still numerous published and unpublished textual connections that bind prison and higher education together.

There are further links that extend even beyond academia and prison. Talking with other writing teachers who teach in prisons, I learned that many of them gather writing their students' writing and publish it as edited collections. These collections contain writing produced in prison, shaped by the writing network and its conditions. But the collection also draws on the publishing conventions and standards of academia, and even bears an affiliation with the institution where the teacher works. These self-published collections form strong professional and textual links between prisons and academia.

When I began teaching writing at the Lawtey Correctional Institution in October, 2010, I began to see how complex the interactions were between writing and writers, and between prison and the university. At the same time, I became enmeshed in both networks. From that perspective I began to see how the connections between academia and prison are grounded in the networked circulation of text.

Research and Teaching: Ethical Dilemmas

Research on writing in prison faces two dilemmas. First, such research tends to overlook much of the writing that participates in the prison writing network in favor of more predictable writing. Existing research often examines writing that is produced by prisoners, not correctional officers. Furthermore, this research examines writing to study literacy, socialization, and political philosophy rather than writing itself. This focus on writing-as-meaning has led many scholars to overlook or ignore the intricate connections between the vast range and depth of writing in prison.

Second, in prison, the relationship between researcher and subject is inherently asymmetrical. This asymmetry should raise concern about who this research benefits and whether prisoners are able to give their informed and un-coerced consent. The asymmetry between prisoners and researchers raises doubts about the validity of research that exclude prisoners (or correctional officers) from the process of its production. After all, can prisoners give consent if they have no control over their own lives? Research on prisoners and their writing often makes truth-claims about those men and women, yet prisoners are rarely allowed to participate in that research beyond simply being quoted. They are often allowed no input in methodology, revision, or editing. Such research is not meant to help prisoners understand themselves or their situations better. Rather this research is meant to contribute to a body of knowledge outside of the prison and the prisoners' lives. The benefits of such research rarely reach prisoners. And when prisoners do benefit, those benefits are usually filtered through the same writing classes that enabled that research.

Many studies confirm that teaching prisoners to write through college-based pedagogies helps prisoners learn to use writing for self-expression and communication.

However, some research criticizes this kind of education rather than praises its supposed benefits. For example, Andrea Mayr criticizes the transmission of ideology through literacy studies, including how prisoners are taught to write (*Prison*, 2004). Other studies consider the dilemmas faced by teachers who enter the prison to teach writing, including troubles negotiating the complex network of relationships between officials and prisoners (Lewen, “Academics”).

Research on writing in prison and teaching how to write in prison need to occur together. Much of the writing that occurs in prison, by both prisoners and correctional officers, occurs within educational classes. These classes are important nodes in the prison writing network. However, the ethical dilemmas that emerge when research that focuses on prisoners and their writing is conducted, should be, and can be, addressed. Because such research is tied to classes that draw on rehabilitative and remedial pedagogies, such research will not attend to the range of writing that occurs in prison. That is, the writing that occurs in these classes still only reflects a portion of the writing that occurs in prisons. Thus, conducting research exclusively in educational settings limits any findings to a narrow range of writing. The textual events and relationships of prison circumscribed and illuminated through network theory remain largely overlooked.

Furthermore, conducting research on writing in the context of “traditional” prison writing classes raises ethical questions regarding the relationship between researcher-teachers and their student-subjects. The relationship between researchers and prisoners as subject is always asymmetrical. This asymmetry is evidenced by the fact that rehabilitation and remediation ultimately support the ideology of the prison rather

than the goals of prisoners. This asymmetrical power relationship between prisoners and scholar teachers is described by Rodriguez. He explains that:

the production of prison education and other forms of prison philanthropy invokes and enforces the liquidation or prevention of potentially critical or counterhegemonic forms of prison praxis, including the most banal forms of political writing (102).

Rodriguez argues that prison education is not only compliant with the suppressive role prisons play against critical thought and radical politics, but actively reinforces that suppressive role. Because of this, research based in these classes often reinforces the ideological power of prisons over prisoners by suppressing criticism and potential dissent.

Furthermore, the meaningful and legitimate consent of prisoners becomes a difficult topic in prison. Many prisoners are at least resistant, if not insurrectionist, toward prisons' total control of their lives. It is doubtful that prisoners would give consent to research that reinforces or extends that control. For this reason, researchers should consider the conditions of consent that prisoners give and design research that will not betray the spirit of that consent. Many prisoners are reluctant to help researchers because they feel that the researcher, and by extension the academy, will reinforce the power of the prison regime.

Along with the proposal that writing research and teaching should both be conducted through a lens of network theory, I would also propose that research in particular should incorporate feminist standpoint theory as a methodology for conducting ethical inquiry into the prison writing network. Standpoint theory "presupposes multiplicity and complexity" and recognizes that multiple positions are possible in the formation of work and knowledge (Hawkesworth 177). This methodology

seeks out subjugated and situated knowledge as well as competing perspectives on the subject of inquiry, in this case the subject of writing. Furthermore, standpoint methodology “requires the collection and interrogation of competing claims” (178). This requirement immediately confronts the traditionally narrow scope of traditional prison writing research.

Standpoint methodology also places the relationship between researchers and subjects at the foreground of study. For example, in her discussion of feminist research methods and ethics, from which standpoint methodologies are drawn, Gesa Kirsch points out that inquiry conducted from within the research environment often brings researcher and subjects into a close relationship. The researcher can sometimes become a part of their own study, having been placed as an actor in the studied environment. Kirsch argues that researchers (or teacher-researchers) in these situations need to announce their ideological positions and theoretical dispositions about their object of study in order to foster closer and more honest interactions between themselves and their subjects (13).

Standpoint methodologies also direct researchers to invite marginalized subjects into more active roles within the research project. Subjects are invited to help design and direct research goals as well as the methods of inquiry (89). This would not only allow those subjects to speak for themselves quite literally but would also help guide the project toward more fruitful areas of inquiry. Kirsch explains that “participants themselves are best at articulating their own needs, desires, and experiences” (89). In prison, the writers who participate in the writing network are best situated to describe that network. Prisoners and correctional officers are able to point to writing that is

obscured by the black-boxes, opening up new areas of inquiry. For example “kites” are often left anonymously in the pages of library books and very often are intercepted and destroyed by prison officials. However, if prisoners and correctional officers were enlisted as participant-researchers, those kites could be gathered and studied in closer detail as an otherwise hidden part of the prison writing network. This invitation to participants would also re-legitimize their ways of understanding the subject of inquiry by including their explanations and perspectives as part of the research findings.

A standpoint methodology approach would especially enrich research conducted in prison writing classes by addressing the asymmetrical power relationship between the researcher-teacher and the student-subjects. Prisoners would be invited to work with their teachers to collaboratively explore and describe the prison writing network and its complex set relationships. This research methodology could not only generate deeper descriptions of the prison writing network in action but could also improve prisoners’ own understanding of how their network does its work. Their understanding in turn would contribute to the overall quality of research. Furthermore, this understanding could lead prisoners to act in more rhetorical and critical ways within the network. In other words, prisoners could research where they “stand” in the network, from where they stand in relationship to other actors. While standpoint methodology emphasizes human subjects and their perspectives, network theory emphasizes the relationship between human and non-human as actants, allowing research to connect textual and human participants. These two theoretical perspectives, standpoint theory and network theory, are complementary. They provide a more complete picture of the prison writing network.

Writers in prison are poised to make critical observations about writing in that setting. Their long-term relationships with the network and other actants means they have the most experience and can provide unique observations about writing. By including these writers as participant-researchers, they can help shape inquiry to better explore the prison writing network while simultaneously allowing that research to serve their own purposes and better understand the conditions of their lives.

Conclusions and Anticipations

I close this Chapter and end this dissertation with a call for further research on the prison writing network. Teaching writing and research on writing in prison are both necessary to continue to explore the prison writing network. The prison writing network is interconnected with a site of great social importance. This network hints at a far larger role for writing than previously expected there. We need to renewed research on writing in and around prisons using methods such as ethnographic and textual-archaeologies that are steeped in standpoint methodology. These particular methods could help us trace writing in prison as it occurs, circulates, and acts. Furthermore, these methods avoid the biases of previous methods that focused on the narrow topic of “prisoner writing,” a construction that largely supports the ideologies of the prison and the academy. In short, writing in prison need to be studied for what it can teach us about *writing*. This dissertation is meant to be a glimpse at how such research might occur and what it might describe. But the network is vast, and writing is prolific. Much still remains to be explored and explained in the prison writing network.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Christopher Boyd Hazlett was born in Austin, Texas and grew up among the cornfields of Illinois. He received his Bachelor of Arts from Western Illinois University in English (2004), and a Master of Arts in English (2006). He received (pending) his Ph.D. from the University of Florida in the summer of 2012. Upon graduation, Christopher joined the faculty in the Department of English at the University of Maryland as a Visiting Assistant Professor of English. He has published an essay on the role writing plays in the civic death and rebirth of prisoners in *Turning Points and Transformations: Essays on Language, Literature, and Culture* (edited by Christine Devine and Marie Hendry, Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2011), and has co-edited a collection of writing titled *World Enough and Time* that includes writing by students at the Lawtey Correctional Institution (McNally Jackson Books 2011). His future projects include a case-study of prisoner letters and a city-wide archaeological tracing and analysis of graffiti and graffiti artists as a network of writing.