Journal of Applied Hermeneutics
ISSN: 1927-4416
March 11, 2023

DOI: 10.11575/jah.v2023i2023.77072

# Doing Time: Exploring Hermeneutic Temporality in Prison Theater

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## Abstract

According to Gadamer, engaging with a work of art arrests our time and attention, suspends our will, and compels our participation in its unfolding. Time in prison is also arrested time, when our will is suspended, and we are compelled to submit to another's authority. Time inside is often described as an endless present, without meaningful relation to the past or future. The experience of tarrying with art, on the other hand, offers a moment of absolute presentness. This paper explores how these two temporalities differ and overlap in the context of prison theater, namely Shakespeare Behind Bars. Participating in and celebrating the temporality of the work of art allows us to experience the fullness of time and an intensification of being that are absent from a prison temporality characterized as an interminable present. Involvement with art can return us to ourselves and a continuity with our world that imprisonment severs.

## Keywords

Hans-Georg Gadamer, hermeneutics, temporality, prison arts, theater

The phenomenon of prison theater presents a curious context for thinking about temporality. Consider, on the one hand, Gadamer's account of the temporality of the work of art: briefly, the work arrests our attention and compels participation in its unfolding. While tarrying with the work of art, we are entirely absorbed in its playing out, which achieves a full and absolute presentness

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in the moment. This is the temporal experience of those involved in theater—both actors and spectators—who surrender their time to participate in, celebrate, and be transported into the world of the play. On the other hand, consider the temporal experience of being in prison—once again arrested, transported, suspended in time, compelled to surrender one's own goals to the authority of another. The temporal experience of imprisonment can feel like an interminable present, without any meaningful relation to either the past or the future. Art and prison might both casually be called experiences of timelessness, when time seems to come to a halt, and we are held up in some duration of time that just feels like an enduring present. What might participation in theater—the unfolding of an absolute presentness—accomplish for those who are suspended in time in prison, experiencing an interminable present?

In this essay, I will examine the phenomenon of prison theater through the lens of hermeneutic temporality. I'll describe some of my experiences visiting the prison theater program Shakespeare Behind Bars and present an account of prison temporality as it has been described by many inside. Then I'll explore Gadamer's understanding of the hermeneutic temporality of the work of art and contrast these two experiences of being suspended in time, the absolute presentness of participation in art and the endless present that is incarceration. I aim to show that while it may seem paradoxical, surrendering oneself to the autonomous playing out of the work of art can restore a liveliness and vibrancy to the temporal experience of being in prison. For all of us, experiencing the fullness of time through involvement with art can return us to ourselves and inspire a new sense of belonging to the world. But this transformative experience is especially vital for those who may be suffering an interminable present behind bars. Tarrying with art and celebrating its festive temporality can reinvigorate one's experience of time and mend the continuity with our world and community that imprisonment severs.

## Experiencing Time Inside

I want to start by walking you into prison with me. It's Luther Luckett Correctional Complex, in LaGrange, Kentucky, and we've come to see one of the public performances put on by Shakespeare Behind Bars (SBB), a troupe of actors inside this medium security men's prison.[1]

The first thing we do when we walk in the front door is – wait. We'll go through security in just a minute, once the right personnel are here to sign us in and check our clearances. We make it through one set of double doors, and then, once again – we wait. We're in a small lobby of sorts with nowhere to sit. We'll pack into this room until it's full to capacity, the air stuffy and hot, when finally, the electric doors at the end of the room clunk open and we're herded around a corner and down a wide concrete hallway to another cramped room. This one is scattered with school cafeteria tables and their little attached stools. It's the visiting room. Again, we wait. We wait longer than we expect to. Everything runs late here, it seems. When it's time, we're shuffled through another electric gate (these heavy, sliding doors) into what feels like an airlock, where we're sandwiched between two sets of locked gates so that we can move through to the prison yard without there ever being an actual opening between the prison yard and that front building in the complex. Once released onto the prison yard, we walk – carefully! between the painted yellow lines – down another concrete expanse to the prison chapel, where the SBB performances take place.

Once we're inside, it's much like any other theater experience. A common remark from public audience members is "I forgot I was in a prison!" This is a testament to the actors and also to the nature of theater, able to transport an audience to another time and place. What Gadamer says about art is true – its "absolute presentness to all times and places" means this performance "is able to build bridges that reach beyond the enclosure and space in which it originated" (1992/2007, p.199). But the journey inside, to the space of the theater, is an experience of enclosure, cementation, awash with the sense that one's time is no longer one's own.

After a performance, my experience of time was usually of it being cut short. Once I had established a relationship with the performers, the time after the show to give congratulations and chat was never long enough, and I would be shooed out before I'd finished my goodbyes.

When I taught inside prisons in Texas, my experience of time was unpredictable. I prepared for a three-hour class, but I never knew if I'd be allowed to see my students for that full duration, either because we couldn't start on time or because I'd be made to leave early. On the other hand, on several occasions, I was kept long after the scheduled end of class because the whole prison had been locked down, and no one could move. Sometimes there would be weeks at a time I couldn't come in to see my students at all because of lockdowns. I spent just three nights a week inside, but even so, it disrupted my ability to expect any kind of predictable timeline at any scale – minutes, hours, days, weeks, months. Prison time, in my experience, is indefinite and arbitrary.

## Thematizing Prison Temporality

For my students and others inside, it is worse, of course. In prison, a person's daily routine might involve waking up at 3:00 or 4:00 a.m. just to catch a shower and some breakfast before work. Inside, movement is so constrained that these simple necessities can take hours to accomplish. A common aphorism in prison is, "Hurry up and wait," and this well encapsulates the frustrating paradox of prison temporality, a kind of constant fruitless hustle. Lisa Guenther, in *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and Its Afterlives* (2013), describes imprisoned people's relationship to time as unstable, disorienting, and disempowering. She writes that the hyper-regulation and regimentation of time in prison "tends to undermine prisoners' sense of meaningful temporal distinctions" (p. 195), such that moments and days become indistinguishable. Time both stops and slips away unmarked. The constant waiting – for gates to open, for another visit from loved ones, for one's release date – "both devalues the present and extends it indefinitely" (p. 196). Time inside is like an endless, meaningless present. Guenther quotes a man named Sam Gutierrez, who was imprisoned at Stateville Correctional Center in Illinois at the time, saying his time inside is characterized by "idleness and boredom," every day showing "a dull sameness," in which "nothing matters" (p. 197). Nicole Fleetwood, in her book on prison art, *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration* (2020), describes prison temporality as a kind of timelessness and slow death. Depictions of dysfunctional clocks in prison art reveal the brokenness of prison time, where those imprisoned often feel they await a future of nothingness. Indeed, an imprisoned person's relationship to their past and their future is fraught. The endless present they experience inside is a disruption of the temporal structure of human life, in which one's past haunts the present, and the future is so uncertain as to feel like an impossibility.

For a hermeneutic thinker of temporality like Gadamer, or Heidegger before him, the present is open to the horizons of past and future such that both are always already in play. The present is a gathering together of tradition, history, and also of possibility. But for a person who's imprisoned, for whom time itself is a punishment, those horizons might feel more like dropping off the edge of the world. Small infractions can add up to extend a person's sentence in the U.S. – ordinary things like taking a short cut, bringing food from the mess hall back to your residence, or owning the wrong kind of pen. Even one's eventual release may not hold the promise of real possibility.

Let me tell you just one example of a release story: one SBB member who was released after my first year there told me about how dangerous his release was for him and his family, and how difficult it was for him to survive while following all of the terms of his parole. It is policy for the victim and their family to be notified when an offender is released, but since the crime this man had been imprisoned for was related to an old feud between families, that meant his victim was also an enemy to him and his family. He was released to a family home, the address to which the rival family had been given, and where they knew he would be because his parole required it. He wasn't allowed to possess any weapons, and with the rival family knowing exactly where to find him, he felt he was putting his own family in danger by following the legally mandated terms of his release. He was also required to hold a steady job, and was able to find one, but as there are only so many employers willing to hire a person with a felony record, and according to his parole he was not allowed to associate with any other felons at the time, he found that any off-the-job time he spent with his coworkers (including riding together to pick up food on their break) was time he was violating his parole. One simple reason recidivism rates are so high is that it's so easy to violate the strident requirements of parole. Together with the possibility of returning to the situations that led to incarceration in the first place, an imprisoned person's release can engender as much fear and violence as their past. Even the possibility of parole can be experienced as a threat to an imprisoned person's future.

So, as droll and meaningless as the endless present can feel in prison, the past and the future can also feel like traps. Tray Jones, a student of philosopher Drew Leder and a contributor to his book *The Soul Knows No Bars: Inmates Reflect on Life, Death, and Hope* (2000), who was imprisoned in Maryland at the time, says, "I'm trying to dedicate myself to getting rid of time. Because when I think about the future, that traps me, and my past traps me" (p. 92). For Jones, the past has already trapped him in his current position, and looking forward, he sees two options: hope for the future (but that's a trap!) or trying to enjoy the present. Expecting anything from the future is a risk for those subject to the arbitrariness of incarceration in the U.S.; as Jones says – it's the ones who expect something good in the future who "go crazy" when their hope is frustrated (p. 88). It is between the persistent, nagging, undigested past and the uncertain, dangerous, deathlike future that the person in prison must attempt to find meaning in an interminable and unstable present.

At the same time, since time itself is the punishment for people in prison, time moves on the scale of months and years. One of the imprisoned artists Fleetwood interviewed, Raymond Towler, said, "You start keeping time with a calendar instead of a watch" (p. 42). The flow and, we might say, *size* of time is distorted in prison, and the person caught up within that distorted temporality is disoriented, both tumbling and standing completely still. In this state, arrested in time and lost in its outsized expanse, people who are imprisoned must develop strategies for "doing" their time, whether that means making something of it, structuring it, or trying to control it. Another of

Leder's students in prison, by the name of Q, calls time "a dragon [he has] to slay" (p. 86), a dragon Leder imagines as three-headed, consisting of the "disappearing future," the "empty, endless present," and the "screwed-up past," "all attacking" at once (p. 94). Another common aphorism in prison is, "You have to do the time, or the time will do you." Time is something that has to be actively done or managed in some way or it's not survivable.

Guenther talks about how in solitary confinement, it's important to keep a daily schedule for yourself in order to stave off the meaninglessness that comes from living in an endless present. She writes, the "segmentation of time into manageable parts that one can expect or forget" helps to restore one's relationship to the past and the future (p. 215). Even when the past and future feel like traps, one can re-create a meaningful temporal structure in the day-to-day. I think of this as managing the size of one's time, returning to watch-time from calendar-time.

Relationships with others can also restructure prison time. Fleetwood writes about how the relationality or sharedness of time is destroyed when a person goes to prison. While the feeling of being suspended in time might impact both the person in prison and those who must continue without them, time moves differently for the person inside and for the loved ones who remain outside, and this severance in relational time contributes to the disjointedness of prison time. Reconstituting relational time through shared activities and new relationships can help the imprisoned person to do their time. Niall Keane's (2021) treatment of time, loss, and grief is instructive here: when there is a break between one's own lived experience of time and world-time, we can soothe the wound and heal the breach through caring engagement with others. (This is what he describes as the gift of time, where others can hold space and share memories to grant us an open future.) Keane draws on Levinas to say that while we may not be able to gain control over our time, to reconcile our life-time with world-time, we can grow to belong together in a shared time. Instead of trying to control our time, we can create a shared, relational experience of time and find a sense of belonging to the world again. Building new relationships inside is another useful strategy for doing time.

Daily schedules, meaningful relationships, and shared activities are some ways a person can manage their time inside; involvement with art is another. Staving off the relentless present of prison temporality is also possible through engagement with intellectual and creative projects like SBB. Fleetwood obviously has this in mind when she talks about shared or relational time in her book on prison art. At a prison arts conference Fleetwood hosted in 2014, prison theater practitioner Ashley Lucas also advocated for art as a means of resisting emptiness and stagnation, key aspects of prison temporality.[2] Logistically, SBB gives additional structure to a day inside with the schedule of rehearsals from September to May. The recurrent event structure of the yearly performances also lends meaningful structure to an SBB actor's time inside. One forgets last year's lines; one anticipates this year's performances. It's also an activity that fills time and mental space. The men in the program learn their lines in the long stretches of time spent waiting that intersperse their daily lives, and they practice scenes together in a broom closet between formal rehearsals. The meaningful time they spend working towards a shared goal also builds relationships among the SBB members that many call a family. Having others they can rely on inside brings their experience of time into harmony with something larger, something shared which they can belong to, even if it can't bring them into sync with how time moves outside.

## Doing Time Hermeneutically

These strategies for doing time are crucial survival strategies for people inside; nevertheless, one might wonder if they are stopgap measures designed to fill empty time, where what is needed is the transformation of one's experience of time. Gadamer defines empty time, or passing time, as the string of successive moments that we ordinarily experience as time. Empty time is abstracted from any real content for the sake of measurement and calculation, turning time into a resource to be used or disposed of. This inauthentic experience of time[3] is also future-oriented, used for making plans, and characterized by anticipation, as either "time for" or "time until" (1970, pp. 343-344). When a calculated amount of time is used as a penalty, I think it's safe to say that's empty time. The "hurry up and wait" of prison temporality is akin to what Gadamer calls "bustle and boredom" (1986, p. 132), a fixation on the activities (whether too many or too few) that one has planned to fill up that measure of time.

The complement to empty time for Gadamer is fulfilled time, a more authentic conception of time experienced as "liveliness as such" (1970, p. 345), a coincidence of past and future where being-there takes place, a kind of being in the moment. It is vital to note, we can't experience fulfilled time just by filling up empty time. We must transform empty time into something more original and authentic. Gadamer argues that participation in (or involvement with) a work of art transforms our experience of time, and we find support for his view in work that's been done on prison temporality, too. Guenther also claims that art holds the potential to restructure and restore meaning to the time people spend behind bars. She writes, "The temporality of engaging in a project or other challenge in which the mind reaches toward a solution or toward the completion of a task offers a temporary escape from the oppressiveness of an unchanging present, a way of forgetting oneself and focusing on something that matters" (p. 216). Gadamer would likely agree, that forgetting ourselves and focusing on or being involved with a subject matter that matters to us is how we can transform our understanding of time. And in fact, these are two main ways the SBB men talk about how their involvement with theater transforms their sense of time: as transporting and in terms of forgetting oneself.

I've mentioned already how the audience experience of SBB is one of being transported, as if during the time of the performance we're no longer inside the prison. It operates the same way for the actors themselves. One told me, "Shakespeare gets you out of this, kind of out of the fence." Just as the temporality of the play transports us to another time and place (like to ancient Greece or 15th century England), so one's participation in a work of art transports one to a different experience of temporality. In this, the transportation we experience in involvement with art is nothing less than a transformation. In *Truth and Method* (1960/2004), Gadamer calls the experience of art – encompassing both actors and spectators – "not simply transposition into another world" (p. 111); rather, participants in the unfolding of the work of art are "lifted out of the ongoing course of the ordinary world" (p. 124). He says, "what no longer exists is the world in which we live as our own. … [The world of the play] is, so to speak, its own measure and measures itself by nothing outside it" (1960/2004, p. 111). In artistic play, the world of empty, measured time melts into fulfilled and lively temporality that defies any external standard of duration or calculation.

SBB has two minds about this kind of transporting experience, though, depending on the audience. For an audience of their peers inside, they aim for transportation and forgetfulness of place. One actor said what he wants for his peers in the audience is for them to be able to say, "I had fun. For two hours, I didn't think about the razor wire." On the other hand, SBB designs the experience to keep public audiences aware of their location, for instance with costumes that never fully cover or replace their state-issued khaki pants and scrub tops. The razor wire is actually always visible just outside. But we'll forget anyway; we will feel the transformation. Gadamer's analysis of the disappearance or unobtrusiveness of the actors does seem to prevail: "Neither the being that the creating artist is for himself – call it his biography – nor that of whoever is performing the work, nor that of the spectator watching the play, has any legitimacy of its own in the face of the being of the artwork itself" (1960/2004, p. 124).[4] The play itself takes primacy and we are wholly absorbed, forgetting ourselves and our situation.

The men in SBB also identify a kind of self-forgetfulness in their experience of time doing theater. Beyond forgetting that they're locked up (or hoping that their audiences of their peers will forget they are), the men speak about losing themselves in the moment. SBB members typically conceptualize their performances in terms of listening and responding to each other – an acting technique that keeps the performance fresh and meaningful, not flat, but also a strategy for anchoring themselves in a shared experience of meaning-making that can reorient them temporally as well. Being in the moment is one of their goals and challenges as actors. They aim for total absorption in the play, the character, the dialogue, to surrender their own concerns to participate fully in bringing the play to life. Gadamer also associates this self-forgetfulness with being present in the moment. "Being present has the character of being outside oneself" (1960/2004, p. 122), he says, and "this kind of being present is a self-forgetfulness" (1960/2004, p. 122). Daniel Tate (2012) describes this kind of being in the moment through Heidegger and Gadamer in this way: "To be in the moment is to give one's full attention to what is encountered there, of genuinely attending to it such that it comes to presence. … Thus being present involves a self-forgetfulness that consists in surrendering oneself to what one is watching" (p. 103), or we might add: performing. This full participation in the playing out of a work of art is required by actors and spectators alike in order for the work to come to full presence. We must all forget ourselves for a while to attend and participate in the bringing to presence of a work of art.

Yet this transportation/transformation of the world and self-forgetfulness is no kind of "escape" or avoidance for participants behind bars. In the fulfilled temporality of being with art, we come to belong more fully to our own context, and we become more ourselves. Gadamer says in *Truth and Method*, the "absolute presentness" of art effects both self-forgetfulness and reconciliation with self: "What rends him [the participant in the work of art] from himself at the same time gives him back the whole of his being" (p. 125). Through the transformation and self-forgetfulness of involvement with play, the participant "comes to belong to [his own world] more fully by recognizing himself more profoundly in it" (1960/2004, p. 129). The benefit of participation in theater for folks in prison is not a facile strategy for passing time or a mental escape from life inside but a transformed experience of time and a deeper understanding of self. Indeed, Keane (2022) describes the experience of the work of art as "bring[ing] what is durational and transitory to a standstill… [with] the promise of a lasting intensification [and, he adds later, transfiguration] of being" (p. 342). Philosophical hermeneutics and Shakespeare Behind Bars teach us the

difference between the interminable present one might suffer behind bars and a full and absolute presentness that transforms and fulfills our very being.

## Participating in Absolute Presentness

The temporal experience of the work of art (a suspension of ordinary time in a full and total presence) and the prison temporality that is likewise a suspension but in an unending present differ in terms of participation; the relationship they grant between the past, the present, and the future; and the fullness or emptiness of the time involved. What makes the difference is our engagement with the work of art, which Gadamer explains in terms of tarrying and celebration/festival.

When we're engaged with a work of art, it's not just that time stops and the present moment stretches. Nor is it the case that art is "timeless" and entirely removed from the temporal structures of experience. Those are both conceptions of time that are grounded in measurable, empty time, and so they would bring us no closer to a transformed experience of time inside prison. Rather, the temporality of the work of art is an interruption to ordinary passing time that transports us to a different sense of time altogether,[5] and it happens when we take the time to tarry with a work of art. "Tarrying" is the name Gadamer gives to our proper comportment toward and engagement with a work of art. We tarry when we participate in the unfolding of the work, its playing out, and that participation entails absorption, surrender, and self-forgetfulness just as the participants in SBB have described. Tarrying with art is a deep involvement with the artwork that brings it into absolute presence, brings forth the full being of the work, and makes its historical existence and its future possibilities present all at once.

Along with tarrying, Gadamer also uses the image of the festival to describe the temporality of our being with art. A festival is a recurring event that brings a community together in a spirit of celebration, and Gadamer says that the work of art, especially the performing arts like theater, also shares this temporal character. Part of the transformative magic of theater is that it's a *communal* experience of self-forgetfulness, absorption in play, and intensification of being. When a whole community participates in the celebration of a festival, it provides a temporary reprieve from the ordinary and empty passage of time, and we commune with all who celebrate or have celebrated that same festival. In this, the work of art comes fully to presence with its whole past and future in hand, a unity Gadamer calls art's contemporaneity (rather than "timelessness"). When people who are imprisoned participate in this coming to presence with a community, it can transform their experience of time inside.

The participation of actors and spectators alike is key in festivals and in the work of art. As Gadamer says in *Truth and Method* (1960/2004), "Being present does not simply mean being there along with something else that is there at the same time. To be present means to participate" (p. 121). Now there is very little about prison life that engenders being-with and genuine, attentive participation. Imprisoned people cannot easily participate politically or personally in the world outside, and very little about their situation inside is up to them or depends even on their consent, let alone their participation. Prison temporality is largely characterized by *waiting*, but not tarrying. Tarrying is not a lingering contemplation or an expectant waiting but, as Sheila Ross (2006) describes it, a "fullness and intensity of attention and engrossment" (p. 109), an active involvement with. Participating in an artwork's playing out means submitting to its temporality, its sovereignty,

much the way actors who work on their timing work to attune themselves to the rhythms and pace of the play itself. Perhaps paradoxically, actors behind bars can transform their experience of time not by striving to regain control of it but by giving up all control and submitting to the autonomy of the artwork and the communal temporality of the festive.

Along with active, engaged participation, another key difference between the absolute presentness of art and the endless present of prison time is the relationship the present moment has with the past and the future. A festival is necessarily repeated, never stagnant in time, with the diversity of its recurrences built into its very essence (Gadamer, 1960/2004, p. 121). This kind of temporal experience is full and fulfilled because of the temporal unity of past and future it enacts. As I've said, the participant in the festival communes with all who have celebrated before and all who will celebrate that same festival. The actor and playgoer are present in a moment that's reminiscent of every prior performance of that same play and pregnant with every future performance. Instead of a present moment that is endless and empty, like prison time, art delivers a present that is full and fulfilling because it gathers together the past and the future in one coherent moment.

Gadamer says fulfilled time like this has the character of a transition: "… transition appears as the true being of time in the sense that everything is in it at the same time such that past and future are together" (1970, p. 350). In the experience of transition, the past departs, and the future begins – and that's the very experience that seems to be denied people who are imprisoned. In prison, a person is perpetually reminded of and defined by their past. Instead of departing, the past persists, causing constant rumination and continually determining both the present and the limited possibilities one faces in the future. The U.S. legal system makes a person's past continually present not as a point of departure but as a constant presence that will never pass. When the past refuses to depart, one cannot transition into a future that begins either. This stuckness of prison temporality is like the way Gadamer talks about psychological neuroses and how we cannot become open for the future until we relinquish the past (1970, p. 352). But when we tarry with an artwork, celebrate its festivity, and interrupt passing time to experience instead the fulfillment of time, this is a paradigm shift that can alter one's relationship to the past and the future.

Ultimately, the absolute presentness of art is distinct from the endless present in prison because of the fullness, the fulfilled-ness, that being and time achieve in our tarrying with and celebrating art. The endless present experienced in prison is empty; it passes without significance or pause. But when we tarry with a work of art, bringing it into its full presence through our participation, there is something fully present in the present. Gadamer explains in "The Artwork in Word and Image" (1992/2007) how the work of art brings forth its truth, its full being, something he just calls "it" (as "it emerges!" p. 211). Likewise, the work of art also *is there* in a way we can't quite put into words. It *is* something *there* for us to attend to, play along with, and bring forth, and even while we can't put a finger on what it is that's there, it fulfills. Gadamer describes this fulfillment of being and time with words like Aristotle's *energeia*, aliveness itself, something vital, living, fully present and aware, the "highest form of activity and reality" (1992/2007, p. 213, 215). Descriptions of time in prison from those inside call the endless present an empty nothingness, and the absolute presentness we experience in tarrying with and celebrating the work of art is full of liveliness, vitality, a vibrant something being there. Submitting to the temporality of the work of art can restore to those in prison something of the experience of life itself, which is exactly what is absent from a prison temporality characterized as an interminable, futureless present, a living death.

## Conclusion

If prison time is experienced as an interminable present, more a suspension than a transition, then tarrying with and celebrating the work of art can restore a living and fulfilling experience of time to people inside, at least for a while. The arrest of empty time and the fulfillment we experience when we tarry with art may be temporary, but participating in prison arts programs like SBB can be transformative for those doing time in prison. I urge that this hermeneutic experience must be made available to people our legal system locks into a ruminative and futureless relationship with their past actions. While the absorption and self-forgetfulness of tarrying may appear to reinscribe the precarity that results from being subject to the authority of the state and being erased as an autonomous participant in world-time, in fact our involvement with art and its celebratory community can return us to ourselves and create a new sense of belonging, an effect that is especially powerful for people in prison. This surrender, to the playing out of the work and its full coming to presence, is not a loss but an intensification and transformation of our experience of being and time.

## Acknowlegements

My deepest gratitude goes to the men in the SBB circle who shared their experiences and stories with me. I also wish to thank those in Kentucky who made my visits to Luther Luckett Correctional Complex possible, including Matt Wallace, Carol Stewart, and Jerry Alter. This research was supervised in part by Dr. Nandra Perry and Dr. Kristi Sweet at Texas A&M University and supported in part by funding from Texas A&M University's Department of Philosophy, Department of English, Women's and Gender Studies Program, Melbern G. Glasscock Center for Humanities Research, and the Fasken Graduate Student Teaching Award. I also thank the participants at the Canadian Hermeneutic Institute in 2022 and my colleague in prison education, Dr. Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom at Lewis University, for their thoughtful feedback on earlier drafts of this paper.

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[1] I visited the SBB program at Luther Luckett for about two weeks (including rehearsals, the public performances, and one performance for others inside) in May of 2014 and for the public performances in May of 2015. This research was approved by the IRB at Texas A&M University, where I was a graduate student at the time. Observations of the program were collected with informed consent from all participants.

[2] She expands this view and reports on years of international research in prison theater in her 2021 book *PrisonTheatre and the Global Crisis of Incarceration*, where she argues for the value of prison theater as a strategy for community building, professionalization, social change, and hope.

[3] While I use the term "inauthentic" for empty time, I also recognize and accept Keane's (2022) argument that simplifying the relationship between fulfilled time and empty time to one of authenticity/inauthenticity is inadequate, perhaps inaccurate (p. 346). Gadamer's sense of this difference may not be a simple dichotomy as I represent it here.

[4] Gadamer says the performer "disappears" (1960/2004, p. 114) and remarks on their "unobtrusiveness" (1986, p. 52).

[5] In this, I am reminded of Melissa Freeman's (2021) exploration of the ways art can perturb our ordinary understandings of the world in generative ways.