

ARTE EN PRISIÓN

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11. CURRENT TRENDS IN SCENIC PRACTICES AS TOOLS FOR RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: AN EXPERIENCE FROM MARSEILLE'S PRISON

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"The line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps as indistinct, as possible.... something will always happen at this juncture".

(Schechner, 1973, p. 61)

INTRODUCTION

During the years 2017 and 2018, I used to volunteer for the French Association Genepi¹, initially founded by Michel Foucault. The general purpose of this historic Association is to raise awareness on prison issues and on the rights of incarcerated persons. Among its actions, Genepi has signed a convention with the Prisons' Administration in national level that offers its volunteers the possibility to propose and to facilitate socio-cultural activities (workshops) inside French prisons in the whole country. These workshops are not professional ones, but rather based on social values such as the "horizontal" of human relations and the circulation of knowledge. My purpose, as a researcher working on RJ was to use this opportunity inside prison in order to come closer to the reality of women behind the walls. In fact, despite my legal background, I was always passionate about Theater and had some previous theatrical experiences as amateur. Thus, I initially proposed a theatrical activity based on Greek tragedies, for fifteen female adult prisoners at the Prison of Marseille (Baumettes). My interventions inside the prison took place during February-May 2018.

Greek tragedies, as stories, are characterized by "timelessness" and "universality", and therefore are susceptible to "host" individual conflict cases, individual human pain and suffering. The key issue of tragedies is "drama", which literally means "action" in ancient Greek. The sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) was one of the first scholars who adapted the term "dramaturgy" to sociology, establishing, thereby, a connection between micro-sociology (face-to-face social interactions) and Theater. However, social interactions, important for our self-determination, for our identity building, are extremely limited inside "total institutions" such as prisons (Goffman 1961). Prisoners are a doubly invis-

¹ Official website of the Association: <https://www.genepi.fr>

ble population; invisible to both the population outside the walls and inside the walls; in fact, the prisoners are (and feel) cut off from their own identity, from their experiences, from the person they used to be outside of the prison. That might explain why applied drama with prisoners is likely to provide a safe space where borders and lines between fictional narratives and reality are blurred and this might illuminate lived experiences (Nicholson 2005: 66).

At the same period, I was working with an Athenian drama school, the “Theater of Changes” on two theatrical plays, “*Re-storying a Greek tragedy: Electra meets Clytemnestra*” and “*Re-storying a terrorist tragedy: The encounter*”, both fruits of a collaboration with an Athenian drama school, voluntarily produced for a workshop on the theatricality of human drama and RJ, during the 10th EFRJ International Conference (Tirana 2018)². The general theme of this conference was “Expanding the restorative imagination”, thus our basic idea for this fictional restorative encounters turned into movies was to “change the rules”; we adopted a more sophisticated approach to tragedy, going beyond the classic script and we used “unexpected stages” for both films. That is how I firstly came up with the idea to organize a similar experience inside prison: to use the issue data of a tragedy or a dramatic story in a more improvised way, in order to “play” a restorative-style encounter with prisoners and to unravel why characters do the things they do.

This idea, as well as the difficult environment of the prison itself, both led me to be interested in current trends in scenic practices, in order to create a “stage” inside such a particular and isolated place as prison and achieve more active participation of the prisoners. We prefer here the broader term “scenic practices” rather than the term “theater”, because as scenic practices we can consider every technique for the creation of a “stage”, not necessarily inside a Theater hall, but also in other, “unexpected stages” of everyday life. Current scenic practices in theater allude to a new *ekphrasis* and *praxis*, a revolutionary metamorphose of the relation between real life and artistic expression. They reveal a general “demand” for a rupture with classic protocols, for transformation, for active participation, and therefore, they could be seen as an invitation to “change lenses” – to use Zehr’s expression – regarding the way we perceive the relation(s) between the artist, the spectator, the space, the language and the society. In fact, new trends in Theater as artistic activities bring new poetic-spatial dynamics to address social problems, social suffering and harm. New spaces, times and relations have to be set up for that purpose.

The present contribution envisages to present how the philosophy and the ideas behind the current trends in scenic practices inspired me and helped me to induce interaction and development of human relations among female pris-

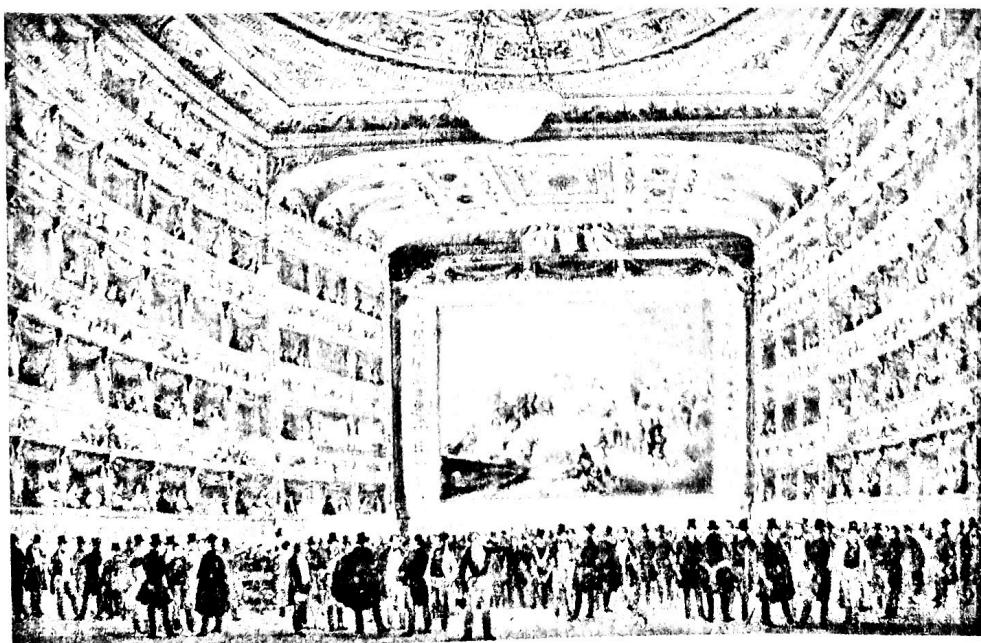
² You can find both videos here: <https://vimeo.com/user59651192>

oners. In the first part of this contribution, I will provide references that may open a discussion and theoretical perspectives regarding the possible connection between new trends in Theater and the RJ movement, as they have common social ideas and values. In the second part, by presenting how those ideas and practices were used inside the prison of Marseille, this contribution aims to propose possible ways of using scenic practices inside prison, either to communicate and raise awareness of RJ values or prepare/implement restorative encounters.

CURRENT SCENIC PRACTICES AS “ENCAPSULATIONS” OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

If RJ movement can be considered as a new trend in Justice matters, current scenic practices could be seen as a new trend in Theater. They are both social transformative movements that propose a “turning point” in their field. To put it in Boaventura de Sousa Santos’ words, they both propose a “paradigmatic transition”. By that term, the Portuguese sociologist of Law points out the “transition between forms of sociability in the widest sense, including economics, social, political and cultural dimensions” (1995: 93). The “paradigmatic transition” corresponds to the interruption from what exists before, an interruption that questions the dominant paradigm because it is in crisis and proposes new responses to current (social) needs. In order to better understand the socio-cultural and philosophical links between RJ and current trends in scenic practices, a brief presentation of recent evolution in Theater is necessary.

From the “Italian-style Theatre” (Théâtre à l’italienne)....



The “Italian-style Theater”, or “proscenium stage” - as the French term has been translated in English - was the dominant architectural style for theaters in Europe from the Renaissance until the end of the 19th century. In opposition to the Greek theaters that were situated in open spaces, in nature and were accessible to every citizen as a form of entertainment - education, the “Italian style” theater was a closed-spaced theater. Big spacious buildings, similar to the classic theaters, with a “proscenium”³ that frames the stage and divides the audience from the actors and, hence, it creates and establishes “two worlds”. This structure imposes a frame into which the audience as passive spectators, as witnesses, observe from a unified angle the theatrical play and everything what happens on stage.

In fact, this structure has not only to do with architecture, but with a whole order of things, a whole philosophy and can be considered as a social construct. This model of theater was addressed to a well-defined audience, a “micro-community” mostly from the high social class (bourgeoisie). Through its architecture and its organization of the space, the “Italian-style Theater” highlighted the representation, the “sacredness” of the text and of the theatrical space; the theatrical activity can only happen on the stage that is dedicated for this purpose and strictly follows a script. The strict organization of the bodies and of thought, separates the stage where the actors perform, from the (passive) audience (Felizardo Mendes, 2018).

... To new trends in the field of Theater

Almost since the early 20th century, the “Italian-style Theater”, as a conception and structure, became exposed to a growing disaffection, because it was incompatible with the social changes of the period and the desire to establish a true communion between the audience and the stage. Representational art is “based on the assumption that ‘art’ and ‘life’ are not only separated but of different orders of reality” (Schechner, 2002: 116). Thus, it was abandoned in favor of forms that allow an “interpenetration” of the two worlds. New trends appeared in Art in general and in the field of Theater in particular, revealing an “aesthetic turning point”. The Avant-garde movement, the Experimental theater, the Theater of the oppressed, the art of improvisation, etc. inspire and nourish the new scenic practices that offer new theatrical experiences. Their common objective is to promote a different conception and use of the word “theater”, by instituting its plasticity and its adaptability to new environments and contexts as well as its capacity to abolish the boundaries between art and life. In other words, to propose a cultural and social revolution, to oppose

³ The Greek word proscenium (προσκήνιον) means “in front of the stage”.

bourgeois values and ethos, to criticize the system of the “representation” while trying to introduce a different and more revolutionary use of language and body, and more importantly, to establish a new, more (inter-) active relation with the audience-citizens.

The convergence of theater and anthropology



Since the 1960s several scholars from different fields observed that there is a strong connection between Theater and Anthropology, this last conceived in a broader sense as the science of human being and of its societies. Among them we can name here Erving Goffman, the anthropologists Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz, the theorists of theater and performing art researchers Richard Schechner, Dwight Conquergood, Hans-Thies Lehmann, etc. In the end of the 1970's a “turning point” is also observed in anthropological studies and the humanities; the scientific interest is less focused on static facts and the norms, but on the processes, on human behavior and action (described as *habitus*, a term used by Mauss, Bourdieu etc.). The main idea is that the source of human culture is theatrical, that is to say performative; in fact, there is no difference between theater and the rituals of some societies and, therefore, Theater in its institutional form is not necessary, because people already experience the performativity and the theatricality in their own lives. Victor Turner, in his book *From Ritual to Theatre* (1982), studied and explored the transformative, revolutionary qualities of performance that can produce social change. As he notes, “I came to see performances of ritual as distinct phases in the social progress whereby groups became adjusted to internal changes” (1982: 21).

Moreover, according to the same scholar, several forms of entertainments, theater and rituals included, offer a way to ensure that social problems and issues, —“social dramas” as he describes them—, are not left unaddressed within

the society. He highlighted that if a “social drama” is left unaddressed, theater and theatricality could be a “mode of redress”, since “theater is, indeed, a hypertrophy, an exaggeration, of jural and ritual processes; it is not a simple replication of the “natural’ total procession pattern of the social drama” (1982: 12). “Social dramas” are seen from the point of view of both the individual experience inside the society and the collective one, that is to say the development of common beliefs that characterize a group. In addition and in relation to “social dramas”, Turner developed the concept of “communitas”, to describe the intense spirit of solidarity and of togetherness that people experience during the experience and the expression of the “social dramas”. “Communitas” in Turner’s work can be associated to both the community (new ways to be together) and the communication (new ways to express and address issues).

“Performance Studies”

The re-discovery of the ritual theater as well as the emergence of the performance as artistic expression produce a reactivation of the semantic field of Theater. Performances do not happen where an action is “reproduced”, but where it “takes place”. Wherever a person, an object or a situation is exposed in front of the eyes of other people, we can talk about performances. In fact, since the 1970’s, the concept of performance is radically reformulated and the artistic expression becomes a source of information on the values, the vision of the world, the ideology of a society rather than just an aesthetic event. In theatrical studies, a special academic discipline was created, the “Performance Studies”, where anthropological and other interdisciplinary perspectives were involved in order to better approach cultural rituals and social transformation⁴. “Performance Studies” as academic field adopts a relativist vision of the world by analyzing a broad range of behaviors, popular entertainments, events, social realities (including highly charged conflicts that mark political and economic life). By viewing and treating the above mentioned phenomena as “performances” a different and broaden way of understanding is offered. Therefore, a performance is recognized as an opportunity to shape identities, to disrupt the perception of time and space, to fit the body and to share stories.

Blurry Boundaries: the concept of the “liminal”

Victor Turner also developed the concept of “liminal” (from the latin word *limen*, that means “threshold”), to describe the ritualized performatory activity.

⁴ Here you can watch Richard Schechner talking about Performance Studies: <https://hemispheric-institute.org/en/hidvl/hidvl-int-wips/item/1338-wips-rschechner.html>

This term is a key-concept in current scenic practices and was first used by the anthropologist Arnold van Gennep. The notion of “liminal” in human behavior has a transitional, transformative dimension, underlying the importance of in-between periods, of a “being on a threshold”. Ileana Diéguez, a scholar in Theater studies and humanities from Mexico, borrowed Turner’s concept of “liminal” to analyze and describe modern theatrical activities as processes inscribed in everyday life, that reflect an ethical metamorphose, a “*de-automation* and the transformation of our perception of the others and the world around us” (Felizardo Mendes, 2018: 290). Beyond their transformative dimension and their potential in action, liminal activities involve several disciplines (Theater, Anthropology, Sociology, Justice, etc.) and, therefore, they invite for an interdisciplinary dialogue, which challenges the classic boundaries of each discipline involved.

A new perception of the subjectivity and its “presence”

As already evoked, current trends in scenic practices necessitate and presuppose a radical change of dynamics and, mainly, of the perception of the subjectivity. Hence, more deliberative forms of theatricality, such as playing-games, popular entertainments, identity construction games, ritualized processes, improvisations, etc. replace the representations. A deliberative, improvised activity does not mean absolute freedom and disorder, because a certain context is always given as a frame (guiding principles). The difference is that the performer is flexible, his/her expression is intensified and he/she can be creative inside the given frame, or can even create a new one. Performers do not serve roles, but they create *personas*. In addition, it is the spectator’s position that is radically questioned as the focus is on the “quality” of his/her presence during the performance; it is not sufficient that he/she *is* physically present, but also that he/she *has* presence, that he/she is included through his/her participation (Féral and Perrot 2012: 14). The audience members instead of being simple spectators, they become “spect-actors”, a term created by Augusto Boal in his Forum Theater (*infra*).

Creation of new “stages”

“In RJ, rituals are used to transform the space into an environment like no other place in participants’ lives, setting the stage for an elevated level of intimacy and understanding rarely experienced”.

(Umbreit, M. and Armour, M. P. 2011: 76)

Current trends in scenic practices also imply a revolutionary conception of the space and spatial dynamics. There is a need to create “stages” in unexpected

places by rejecting what exists around. The concept of space in scenic practices is usually associated with the potential of the imagination and the perspective of the spectator as well as the ability of the performer to de-construct and construct realities. Peter Brook's book *The Empty Space* (1968) is important regarding the need for stage creation. As Brook claims "I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space, whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theater to be engaged" (1968: 7). By the only fact that one or more persons are watching other persons performing or giving a meaning to their actions, a "stage" is created and, thus, takes the place of an "empty space". Brook criticizes the commercial theater because actors are not free on stage, their abilities, their souls and excitement are limited by what the audience expects to see. He supports a theater of the living, a "theater of the Invisible-Made-Visible" (1968: 47) that reveals aspects which escape our senses, a theater concentrated on the concerns or problems of the daily life and give them shape and form. New spatial dynamics seeks to give on situations a deeper meaning, where abstract ideas can be expressed.

The "political capacity" of theater: Boal's dramaturgy

RJ "as a social reform movement... is concerned with the harm people suffer not just from individual acts of criminality, but also harm caused by in-sensitivities and inequalities in the criminal justice system and other institutions".

(Umbreit, M. and Armour, M. P. 2011: 43)

The connection between theater and anthropology, the direct intervention that current scenic practices envisage to have in real life, give to modern theatricality a political dimension, a "political capacity". In the 1970's one of the most important personalities that revealed the political capacity of theater through his work was the Brazilian political activist and theater practitioner Augusto Boal, creator of the "Theater of the oppressed" (hereafter TOO). Boal proposed a new way to experience and change reality through improvisational and participative theater. His work offers an opportunity of dialogue and interaction between audience and performer so that they can collectively analyze, propose solutions and transform the context and the reality in which they are living. Boal's theater is a theater of the "oppressed" because its deep purpose is to induce oppressed feelings of people and to invite them to change the situation and to awaken their conscience of society. Boal believed that the theater *per se* is not revolutionary, but offers a chance to rehearse and prepare for revolution.

There are several branches-techniques of the TOO, but the most known one is the "Forum Theater". The "Forum Theater" could be seen as the artistic expression/version of a restorative encounter. It is a community-based dramatic model for dialogue that allows the performers and/or audience members

to stop at any point an on-going performance in which there is some kind of oppression inspired by real life and to suggest different actions and solutions to it. Hence, it offers the possibility to explore several alternatives proposed by different people. It is rather a dialectic experience than a didactic one. The actors can be either professional or non professionals drawn from “oppressed” communities. A neutral party, a facilitator (in Boal literature it is referred as “Joker”) is required to enable communication between the performers and the audience. The “Joker’s” responsibility though is only to ensure the process without get involved or intervene in the context of the performance. He has to make sure that the fictional situation of oppression – social problem will be overcome by participants’ contribution in as realistic way as possible.

The audience involved in Boal’s dramaturgy has a dual role during the performance as both spectator and actor (“spect-actor”) and this is important so that the audience’s “incapacitation” is avoided. Moreover, it reveals a willingness to “humanize” the spectators, namely to restore and promote their capacity for action, participation and expression in all its fullness. “Spect-actors” can volunteer to replace the protagonist and by acting out their own performance, to operate an intervention to “break the oppression” occurring in front of them, to change the story, to propose solutions. However, the “change” is not easy, because the actors remain on stage and offer a strong resistance by performing against “spect-actors” intervention; as they do not follow a script, nobody can predict their reaction to “spect-actor’s” intervention that comes as a protest to their own action. The important point is that this experience may enable and encourage “spect-actors” to develop actions for changes also in society, to break the “oppressive” situations also in their own lives and communities.

CURRENT SCENIC PRACTICES INSIDE PRISONS: A PROMISING TOOL FOR RJ?

As argued in the first part of this paper, theoretical common ground between current trends in scenic practices and current trends in criminal justice (RJ), both conceived as social movements seeking for active participation while addressing social problems, could be possible. In this second part, the discussion will be focused on how scenic practices and the new ideas emerged in Theater might be fruitful and open new ways on how we could create “stages” for restorative encounters, for opening a “dialogue” between people involved in a crime, or, for simply raise awareness on key-concepts of RJ philosophy such as “harm”, “identity re-building”, “empathy”, “human interaction”, etc. More specifically, we will focus on how this could be possible in difficult environments, such as prisons, by providing concrete examples of how basic ideas of those theatrical practices were used from a RJ point of view inside the prison of Marseille.

Restorative encounters in Prisons: a challenge for the RJ community

RJ implementation inside prisons has provoked a lot of discussions among RJ advocates in international level. Imprisonment and its inherent punitive culture is so antithetical to RJ values such as inclusiveness, rebuilding of human relations, healing, etc. However, Edgar and Newell argue that “while restorative justice and prisons continue to be seen as opposite points on a spectrum, the potential of restorative justice to work with serious offending will be severely restricted. The victims of serious crimes are let down when prisons are not used as places of restoration for offenders, victims and their communities. Prisons are full of people in desperate need of restoration – those most damaged and damaging in our society” (2006: 24).

The particularity of the prison environment and of the prison population

Prisons as “micro-societies” are characterized by a different reality both regarding the spatiality and the subjectivity. The coexistence of a delinquent, rebellious to social norms population in an inherently confined and restricted space is an obvious source of tensions, of emotional and psychological violence. Prison’s rules, constraints and culture associated with the restriction of vital space exacerbate frustrations and support aggression. As Jean-Paul Céré points out, the prison environment “produces its own violence” (2016:126); beyond its traditional evils, prison is also marked by side effects of violence, not only among prisoners but also between the prisoners and the prison guards. As a result, and in order to avoid tensions, prisoners progressively limit their interactions with the others, avoid the expression of their feelings and thoughts. They try to become “invisible” inside prison and, as a result, they end up a “doubly” invisible population: invisible from the society outside the walls and invisible from the society inside the walls. After some time inside prison, people feel alienated not only from the others, but also from themselves.

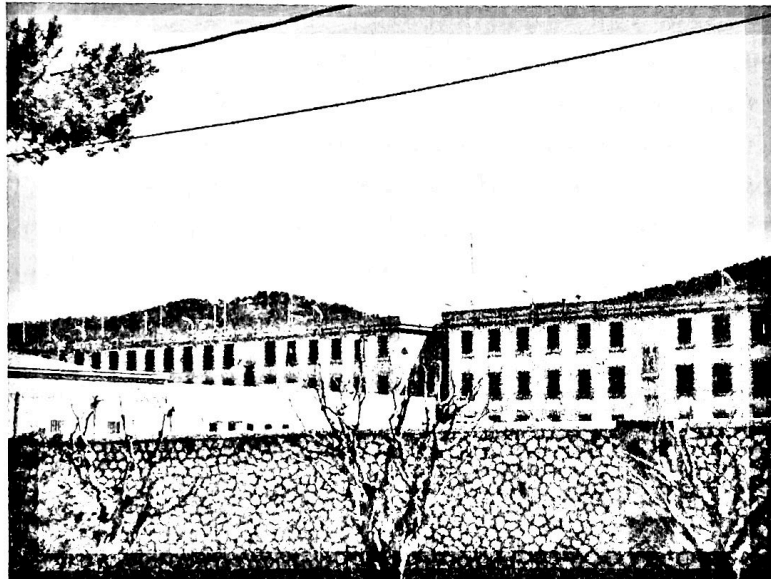
Current needs for RJ encounters with prisoners and inside prisons

The main challenges for RJ encounters inside prison concern both the phase of the preparation and the phase of the implementation. In addition, the particularity of the prison population and the double alienation that prisoners experience as referred above, necessitate a double work during the preparation phase: before getting prepared on how to communicate and interact with the others, prisoners need an intense and careful work regarding their identity (re) building and expression. It is important to work on the feeling of belonging, on inclusivity that might help the person inside prison to better understand what empathy is and its importance for living with, communicating and (re)

connecting to the others and to society. On the other hand, another challenge inside prison is the space; it is difficult to “transform” the prison into a place of dialogue, of communication, to make people inside the walls be open to listen and talk, without having in mind the restriction and all the negative effects of the environment around them. Regarding those challenges, could current scenic practices serve as an important tool? How?

Restorative values through Theater in Marseille’s female prisons

A quick look inside Marseille’s prisons....



When I started my visits in the “Baumettes” female prisons, I realized that there is a particular policy of isolation inside this French prison, because of the high rates of violence. Thus, human interactions are very limited. For instance, there is not a common place for lunches or dinners, but all the meals are delivered directly inside the cells. In addition, even during the “free” time at the yard of the prison, the women are divided in small groups according to the rate of the aggressiveness they manifest. Than means that the prisoners almost never meet all together at the same time at the yard, to avoid fights, etc. As a result of the lack of interactions, I observed that in the group of the women who participated in my workshops, they barely knew each other, despite the fact that most of them were living on the same floor of the prison. I also noticed that some of them were even afraid of the others because of previous tensions or rumors.

One of the preconditions for my visits inside the prison was that I had no right to ask information on the offense that the participants in my group had committed. As for the profile of the female participants in my workshops, their age varied from eighteen years old to sixty years old, most of them of Arab

origin but also some French and they were of different education level. One of them was analphabetic, but others told me that they were reading a lot inside the prison. When they were asked why they chose this activity, I got remarkably diverse answers; some of them told me that they had no particular interest on it, but they felt “obliged” to do so, just to avoid problems with the penitentiary direction, showing that they are “good girls”. Others told me that they have always liked theater and ancient Greek literature. Others just by curiosity.

However, since the very first moment that we started talking about ancient Greek theater and tragedies, I felt that almost all of them liked the interaction I was trying to create during the workshops. For instance, since our first meeting, we were always putting ourselves on a circle and everybody had the chance to get the floor to talk and to participate as much as possible. After few visits, the discussions and interactions on diverse subjects (initially inspired by tragedies) were the main activity of our workshop. But still, some of the women were somehow distant because -as they admitted later- they were seeing me as somebody coming from the side of the penitentiary direction, so “from the other side”. That is why I decided to behave in a way that contradicts the feeling they had; to close the door of the room behind me so that the guards could not watch us and listen to what we were talking about, to leave the alarm that the direction was giving to me in case of emergency at the corner of the class, and in general to show them that I was not afraid of them and of their reality, that I trust them, etc. After a month, almost everybody was more relax and less distant during the workshops. That was the moment that they started to be curious about me and addressed me the question of what I am doing in my own life and why I was there. I replied that I have studied law and I am currently doing a PhD on RJ. As expected, they wanted to know what RJ actually is. And that was the moment for me to start presenting the values and practices of RJ by using our activity, the Theater!

The theatrical experiments

During my weekly visits in “Baumettes” prison for four months, me and the participants of the workshops had several theatrical experiences and games, always focused on the prisoners’ interaction and expression. In the frame of this presentation, only three of them have been chosen and will be presented, as they are the ones the most related to RJ values.

Mediation between “Electra” and “Cletemnestra”

For RJ scholars, the connection between mediation and Greek tragedies is already known through the famous work of Jacqueline Morineau in her book

L'esprit de la médiation (2010). According to Morineau, mediation is like a theater play on the stage, where the “drama of suffering” and the conflict occur. Greek tragedies offer stories of conflicts, stories in which the person is confronted with his own emotions and its own acts. Similarly to mediation, a tragedy follows a process, ritualized in three steps: a) the “theoria”; the moment of expression, of listening and of exchange, b) the “crisis”; the phase of the confrontation, of the recognition, of the suffering and c) the “catharsis”; the moment of the awareness that allows the protagonists to surpass themselves and to search for solutions. Hence, both the tragedy and the mediation are processes of transformation through rituals.

Influenced by Morineau's remarks, the first experiment we implemented inside the prison was inspired by the issue data of the Greek tragedy *Electra* of Sophocles. The main theme of this tragedy is Electra's revenge for the death of her father. The central female characters in the play are “Electra”, the daughter of Agamemnon and “Clytemnestra”, the wife and murderer of Agamemnon. Thus, this tragedy issue offers a great opportunity to address the feminine point of view on issues such as criminality, suffering, family connections, etc. We kept the issue data of the tragedy as conductive information, but I invited them to go beyond the script, to improvise. In addition, by using procedural structures elaborated in Boal's dramaturgy from the TOO my purpose was to activate the “audience”, to invite participants to become “spect-actors” and replace the “protagonists”.

Thus, the incarcerated women were divided in two groups, one group called and representing “Electra” and the other called and representing “Clytemnestra”. To accomplish the first step according to Morineau's work, the “theoria”, each group was invited to take some time to discuss among its members the issues data of the tragedy and in particular on what they think about the personality that their group was representing, to think and elaborate ideas regarding the motifs of the two characters of the tragedy, to imagine their feelings, their suffering, etc.

After the group discussion, it was the moment for the phase of the “crisis”, that is to say the confrontation. For this purpose, the groups were invited to choose a representative, one for each group, that could be replaced during the performance at any time by another member of the group, if necessary. In fact, the two chosen representatives had to come in front of their group and perform “on stage” the character that the group was representing. To provide a frame for the encounter and the confrontation of the two characters, I invited the groups to imagine that Clytemnestra was punished and she is still in prison after what she did to Agamemnon and that Electra comes to visit her for the first time, ten years after the incidents.

The performance had to be given without script, without a text to follow. They needed to imagine, to invent the dialogue between the two women, mother and daughter, offender and victim, according to the information exchange and the discussions they previously had among the members of their group. Nobody could predict the result or even the content of this confrontation, because each group was not aware of the discussions of the other group. I took the role of the mediator, by explaining that I was there just to facilitate the process, to guide the discussion and to address questions to the two representatives, if necessary, to help them continue their confrontation-dialogue.

In addition, as in Boal's dramaturgy, the members of each group that were not performing were allowed to intervene if they wished to, either to complete or to support the representative of their group, to provide arguments during the dialogue with the representative of the other group and to express their feelings. In the beginning, as expected, the confrontation was not "natural", because the participants felt that they should follow a certain "method" to perform. To overcome this, I started asking spontaneous questions like "how do you feel right now that you see her after all those years?" It took some minutes for the representatives to get used to this kind of improvised dialogue and to stop addressing their answers to me, but to the representative of the other group. I remarked that the members of each group that were not performing "on stage", felt more comfortable to intervene and to support their representative.

Once the performance of this confrontation ended we all became one group again by sitting in a big circle. We launched a discussion on how they experienced this activity, and especially on the main difficulties they faced. We also discussed on what they could have done differently during the performance, how the interaction could possibly have followed a different path. We collectively analyzed and discussed on both characters performed, "Electra" and "Clytemnestra" to have a more global idea of the conflict between them, of the suffering of each character etc. It was the phase of "catharsis". As expected, the two performers admitted that it was easier for them to develop ideas and to discuss inside the "comfort zone" of our circle or of their group rather than to perform on stage. We all thanked them for their courage to represent their group.

The results of this first experiment of "mediation" was mostly positive. The main obstacles I remarked had to do with the women's difficulty of expression and self exposition, the lack of trust to the others and their low capacity to manifest empathy for the personage they were performing on stage. But the positive points were that they developed a certain feeling of belonging, as they had to share their ideas with the other members of the group as well as to "support" and "encourage" their representative. They also expressed that what they liked the most from this experience was the fact that they had not the

obligation to follow a script. The improvisation we tried gave them a feeling of freedom and flexibility of expression.

The Lady's Bag

After the positive results but also the obstacles of the first experiment, such as the difficulty to understand and share the feelings of another personage, it was obvious that the focus had to be more on identity issues as well as on group cohesion, belonging, etc. Therefore, the next theatrical experiment was an image-making exercise, an identity construction game to make the women inside the prison to (re)connect to themselves and to (re)introduce themselves to the others. For this purpose, among others, I particularly got inspired by Goffman's "self-presentation theory", presented in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), where the author analyzes the social interactions and their importance for the construction of individual identity or persona through an exchange of information with other persons. According to Goffman "while in the presence of others, the individual typically infuses his activity with signs which dramatically highlight and portray confirmatory facts that might otherwise remain unapparent or obscure. For if the individual's activity is to become significant to others, he must mobilize his activity so that it will express during the interaction what he wishes to convey" (Goffman, 1959: 30).

To better understand this process of self presentation-determination, or "dramatic realization", Goffman (1959: 22-24) developed the concept of the "front", describing it as the "that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance. In order to establish a "social front", a social role, an individual needs three elements: a) the "setting" that "involves furniture, décor, physical layout, and other background items which supply the scenery and stage props for the space of human action played out before, within, or upon it", b) the "appearance" that describe "those stimuli which function at the time to tell us of the performer's social statuses" and c) the "manner", namely "those stimuli which function at the time to warn us of the interaction role the performer will expect to play in the opening situation". Goffman calls "personal front" the last two elements, so the "appearance" and the "manner". Furthermore, the concept of the "team" is used by the same author to describe and illustrate the group dynamics, the work of a group of individuals who "co-operate" and "co-act" in performance.

To fulfill the "personal front", I had to provide the women with stimuli from the "outside society". Obviously, there were restrictions regarding the objects I could carry with me during my visits inside the prison, thus I decided to take a bag and to put inside simple objects that could "pass" the control of the

penitentiary direction, such as few metro tickets, a notebook, a scarf, my ear-phones, a small ribbon, some shells, a beer cap, a receipt from a coffee place, a carte postale from Marseille, etc. I named this bag “the Lady’s bag”. In fact, the women were invited to imagine that this bag belongs to a lady, unknown to us, but as we found her bag, we had to imagine how this lady is as a person so that if we meet her one day by accident, to recognize her and give her back the bag.

I emptied all the objects of the bag on the floor and I divided the participants in three groups. Each group was invited to observe the objects of the bag, to discuss and to imagine the personality of this “unknown lady”, to create a portrait of her, in other words to invent a *persona*. The idea was that through both the individual and the group reflection and interpretation of the stimuli provided (the content of the bag), this image creation game would lead to the creation of three different *personas* with mixed characteristics from the personality of all the participants. The discussions and exchanges in all the groups during the “fabrication” of the *persona* were an important opportunity for the women to introduce themselves and to better know each other. Once the group discussion that gave birth to an imaginary *persona* ended, each group had to choose again a representative to perform this *persona* in front of all the groups. Each representative had almost three to five minutes to improvise a monologue or an unilateral dialogue, in order to introduce the *persona* created by her group to the others.

The improvisation was free both regarding its content and its context, but inside the room of the prison, the first element that Goffman describes, the “setting” was a big challenge, because the environment limited and restricted the imagination of the persons. Not only we were inside a prison, but also we were closed inside the four walls of a room. In order to overcome this obstacle and to “transform” the prison environment into a “different place”, we needed to let the imagination of the women free to create the environment they wished to. Brook’s theory of “empty spaces” was vital for this. I took some time to explain Brook’s theory to the women and to invite them to “create the stage” that suits the most to the context of the performance they wished to give. They were allowed to use the room, the chairs and the tables as they wanted.

The three *personas* created by the prisoners were remarkably different. The representative of the first group performed an introvert, shy young lady that was inside the metro and was talking to herself expressing that she was stressed, because she missed the previous metro and she was late at work. The second representative performed a happy and carefree lady that was talking to her best friend on the phone while walking on the beach and she hanged up because she saw a handsome man smiling at her. The third representative was a casual, extrovert lady that loved the music. She was working in a beautiful coffee shop and talked to her clients but she did not like a lot her boss.

During the three performances, all of the participants were very focused on the story performed in front of them and some of them expressed their feelings through their face expressions (smiling, expressions of surprise, etc.). They gave me the impression that it was like they were seeing for the first time the three performers. After the last performance, most of us had the feeling that the short fictional stories we previously watched made us travel and “escape” from the prison for a while and, hence, we collectively decided to go further and continue this image-creation activity. We imagined a context that allows all the three performers to come back on stage and perform in interaction this time.

The fictional story was that the coffee place in which the third performer was working was on the beach that the second one was walking alone. So, after her work at the coffee place, the third lady went to the beach to smoke a cigarette where she met the second one. They started talking and sharing their thoughts when the first one, that earlier had been fired from her work, decided to go and walk to the beach to think and decide of what to do in her life now that she is unemployed. She was sad and needed a lighter to smoke her last cigarette and that is how she met with the two others. The second and the third ladies remarked that she was sad, so they proposed her to sit with them, to forget her problems. They were all sitting on the beach (literally on the floor of the prison room) and somehow, through the interactions and the improvised dialogues, the three ladies became friends and decided to go later that night in a pub to celebrate their meeting and the beginning of a friendship. That was the end of the interactive performance.

The results of this experiment were more positive than expected. As the women witnessed during the collective discussion we had later on this experience, this activity resurrected memories from their life before the prison, as they felt connected to their previous habits and lifestyle. This experiment gave them the opportunity to choose another context to introduce themselves and not the one of the prison. The interesting part was that through the dialogues invented during the last interactive performance, the three *personas* somehow completed each other and created a feeling of group cohesion and a friendly ambiance inside the room of the prison. That day all the prisoners, even the ones that were more distant during our previous workshops, expressed enthusiasm and some of them were even smiling and talking more with the others. I also noticed that this activity gave to some women the opportunity to build relationships, as they could (better) know each other. Some of them discovered that they have common interests and hobbies and they admitted that they should talk more and find some time to exchange during the promenades at the prison yard.

A fictional restorative circle

After the second experiment, it was obvious that everybody was feeling more comfortable during the workshops, the whole group had more energy and cohesion and the participants were more open to try new improvisations. I then got inspired by Turner's "social drama" theory and the performances as opportunity for problem expression and solving. This time I proposed to the participants another interactive performance; to create a "stage" for a RJ dialogue. After having explained to the participants what RJ stands for and how the harm is approached during restorative encounters, I particularly focused on the rituals of a restorative circle. I proposed them to perform all together a restorative circle to better understand how it works. They all agreed.

We collectively invented a fictional misdemeanor that took place in Marseille. It was a robbery occurred in a rich Marseillaise neighborhood. The victims were two old sisters that were living together after the death of their husbands and the offenders were three younger friends, unemployed and living in a poor neighborhood of Marseille. The robbery happened during a summer night, while the old women were sleeping, but the victims thought they were not at home, because it was summer holiday. So when the offenders entered the house and discovered that the old women were sleeping inside and one of them woke up and noticed their presence inside the house, they panicked and hurt lightly the old woman that started to scream because she was afraid of the three strangers. In our fictional story there were also neighbors, other women that were shocked by what happened, some of them were mothers and felt afraid for their children's and their families' safety. Therefore, in the circle we could have three categories of participants: the victims, the offenders and the neighbors (civil society members).

I addressed the question of who wants to perform what. As expected, in the beginning the women were hesitating to choose which group to join. So I asked more precisely who wants to perform the offenders and one of them made a joke by answering "here inside this is the only thing that you can find!". All the participants, myself included, found this auto-sarcastic joke funny and laughed. I felt more comfortable to proceed. The choice of the offenders was easy. We after chose four civil society members whose role was a more "neutral" to perform, so I easily found volunteers. The victims' role were finally attributed to two mature women that showed a big interest for our workshops since the beginning, so they accepted to volunteer for this. It is important to note here that the rest of the prisoners expressed their admiration to them.

Once again divided in groups (the offenders, the victims and the civil society members) the women had some time to discuss, to imagine and understand the situation, the harm, the feelings, etc. and to prepare themselves for the encounter with the members of the other groups. In total, only nine out of fifteen women

were about to perform on stage. The other six did not wish to perform, but were free to join the group discussion they found more interesting for them. Only two of them joined the victims' group discussion. This time, during the group discussions, I decided to intervene in all the groups and help them to reflect on the situation, to give them "food for thought" and to explain what are the aspects and challenges that each role may contain. Once all the groups felt ready, we all sat on a circle.

I launched the discussion by addressing questions to the performers of all the categories. After a while, they were also asking questions to each other. Some of the participants became emotional. The easy part was that all the participants were aware of the situation inside prison, so everybody showed empathy on how the life of the offenders could look like. But I got impressed by the performance of the fictional victims who, while performing, they expressed real empathy and defended the position of a victim almost in a realistic way. In addition, the fact that the victims' side was performed by real prisoners help and deliberated the woman that were performing the offenders to better understand the victims' position and to also express empathy to the pain performed by the fictional victims. The civil society members' performance was also remarkable as they showed that they were able to understand and express the fear and the shock that an illegal act implies. After this last performance and when our workshop ended, six out of fifteen participants wanted to know more about RJ. In addition, three out of them asked me how they could meet their own victims in real life...

CONCLUSION

My experience in Marseille's prison was by far one of the most strong, rich and unexpected experiences I have ever had. It gave me the opportunity to meet and to interact with human beings behind the wall, to help them reveal their personality and to share with them unforgettable, strong moments. At the same time, it motivated me to have fruitful discussions with researchers on Theater studies from my University. I learned more about a different field from mine, the field of Theater and I shared information regarding RJ. I discovered that there is a common ground and a lot of connections between the philosophical values that govern the current scenic practices and those of the RJ movement. This connection made me better understand the roots and the social value of RJ as well as its importance for Justice.

In addition, ideas, concepts and techniques from current trends in Theater, fruits of the junction between theater and anthropology, inspired and nourished my creativity inside prison. Some of the theatrical experiments we implemented during my interventions in prison led and helped the participants in my

workshops to experience a real feeling of community, of togetherness, to better express themselves and to better know each other. Current trends in scenic practices and their whole philosophy offer the opportunity to have flexibility, creativity and adaptability when dealing with problems or difficult situations. Hence, they could be considered as potential and promising means to raise awareness and promote RJ values both outside and inside prisons. Moreover, they could be seen as a useful tool in the hands of RJ practitioners for both the preparation and the implementation of restorative encounters, especially when prisoners or former prisoners are involved and/or the encounters have to happen inside prisons.

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