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Alexander Rahe and Daniel Wuebben

This article has been written about, and with, the Swintec 2410cc, the typewriter model approved for incarcerated writers in the State of Nebraska and many other prison systems across the United States. The co-authors, one of whom is currently serving a six year sentence, relate their personal experiences with typewriters and typists as well as connect functions described in the Swintec User Manual to issues in community literacy. The "Left/Right Margin" function reflects some of the institutional and material constraints prison typewriters face; "Impression Control" invites us to think about the forces and functions governing representations of prison and prison writing; this writing tool and the environment for which it was designed, demand one submit to the process of "Corrections". Finally, this typewritten performance models and attempts to enact critical literacy and social justice from within and beyond the typewriter's cage.

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Institutional and Material Constraints; Or, Left/Right Margin

"After moving the carriage to the position where you want to set the new margin, press either Left or Right Margin key to set the new margin."

The night that I collected the first batch of submissions, I noticed that two had been typewritten. From the desk, I held them up for comparison and casually commented on their distinct type-faces. "I use Courier, which is what a typewritten page should look like," explained the first student from the back of the class. "Yeah, he gives me a hard time," the second student responded with a sheepish grin, "says mine's not professional, but I like it". The second student had used a script printwheel to create a single-spaced page filled with fluid letters designed to mimic the flow of cursive. None of the other students owned a typewriter, and their submissions had been handwritten with plastic ballpoint pens and less-than-perfect penmanship.

Writing tools and technologies can create subtle constraints and hierarchies in any writing classroom. Prisons, jails, and detention centers extenuate such tiers and barriers. Bureaucratic systems and security apparatuses subsume all objects and persons on the inside. The security veil extends to at least the parking lot, where many of us double check our pockets, coats, and bags to avoid any unnecessary confusion or confrontation during the security screening. For example, click-pens are routinely denied entry because, as one of my students later explained, the tiny springs can be used to make tattoos. Flash drives require special permission (and a lengthy inspection) because their contents are not immediately visible.

When I collected those typewritten pages in "Autobiographical Reading and Writing" at the Omaha Correctional Center (OCC), a minimum/medium security state prison within a stone's throw of the Missouri River, I believed in the power of community literacy, and more specifically, of the power of prison writing to enact social justice. My previous college courses had featured texts by prisoners and sometimes composed within prisons: Dr. Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham City Jail", Malcolm X's *Autobiography*, Jimmy Santiago Baca's *Working in the Dark*, Piper Kerman's *Orange is the New Black*. My goal for my first prison writing class, and the first for-credit University course offered in a Nebraska prison, was to build capacity for incarcerated writers, to critically examine previous autobiographies, and to help these students perform literacy, whether that meant penning their most hilarious tales or finding ways to write, and speak, truth to power. I was anxious to cultivate a community of writers. I was not, however, anticipating that I would bear witness to a polite argument about type-face and printwheels. It still strikes me as a conversation better suited to a trendy coffee shop — "Courier is always acceptable, but the new Prestige ASCII printwheel is nails!" In short, when I began to teach prison writing, I was oblivious to the meaning and value of prison typewriters.

After numerous conversations about his typewriter, one of the students mentioned above agreed to co-author this piece. Together, we acknowledge the institutional and material constraints incarcerated writers face, we examine our own relationships to writing tools, and we argue that publishing prison work in its original form can offer added insight into the power of writing performed in a space of imprisonment. This is an affirmative exploration of the prison typewriter, as machine, and as imprisoned typist. It aspires to serve, in Anna Plennon's words, as a writerly "act of creative resistance" and as a "real, representative description of prison work" (41). To do this, we

have elected the same tool: the Swintec 2410cc, the most widely-available typewriter in U.S. penitentiaries.

In the twenty-first century, the Swintec Company of Moonachie, New Jersey has secured contracts to sell their devices to prisons in 43 states. (Rohrlich). While few, if any, competitors still manufacture new electronic typewriters, booming prison sales have helped the Swintec avoid obsolescence. The Swintec marks another ring in the rippling prison industrial complex. Most incarcerated typists purchase their brand new Swintec through commissary for the average cost of \$250, which is approximate list price of a 14-inch laptop with 4Gb of memory. Of course, laptops are banned (though special tablets have been approved in 2018 for inmate use). The educational resource center at OCC does have 24 computers with towers and monitors. Unfortunately, these machines cannot be used by the inmates without direct supervision. When and if I am permitted to enter with a flash drive and supervise, my students can write on the computers and save Word docs (the hard drives on these machines are routinely wiped clean, and students are not allowed to save to the desktop or have their own flash drives). Understandably, most student inmates prefer to handwrite their homework and, I am told, that my Autobiography class was the first to require/facilitate typed submissions (which I then took home on a flash drive and printed and returned to the authors). The Swintec 2410cc seems outdated, even in relation to the decades-old PCs in the educational resource center. Still, this is the most advanced writing technology that can be owned and kept in a housing unit by an individual detained by the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services.

Therefore, the Swintec sets the margins of our typewriter discourse. With each word, the carriage beneath this line literally pushes towards the marings, beeps, and returns. Figuratively, to the right, we push against the assumption that prisons encourage literacy by removing distractions. "What else do they have to do but read and write" such thinking goes. Certainly, many incarcerated men and women overcome significant obstacles to advance their literacy practices and transform their lives while serving time. Recently, Curtis "Wall Street" Carroll gained advanced trading skills to become to the so-called "Oracle of San Quentin" ("Investment Guru Teaches Financial Literacy"). Reginald Dwayne Betts read and wrote prodigiously while serving an eight year sentence and has since founded youth literacy programs, published two acclaimed books of poetry, and graduated from Yale Law School ("A Poet, With Prison Behind Him"). Michelle Jones researched and published academic articles while incarcerated and, upon release, earned acceptance to prestigious doctoral programs ("From Prison to Ph.D."). Prisoners' success stories must be shared; those stories cannot prove the prison system is a success. Prisons are punitive, sometimes inhumanely so. They are not monasteries or writers' retreats. Almost all imprisoned men and women have relatively demanding schedules, face persistent threats of violence, and lack writing tools, reading materials, and the quiet space most of us take for granted. Writers are rarely, if ever, advantaged by their incarceration. For every voice "born" behind bars, many thousands more are permanently silenced.

An accurate account of the constraints faced by incarcerated writers appears in William W. Graham's article, "A Good Place?". Graham debunks the idea that prison writing is so powerful because these institutions restrict mobility and remove distractions, allowing the incarcerated writer to focus on his craft. Certainly, prison forces a closer examination of life choices and many incarcerated men and women use writing as "an act of defiance, a way to stand up and shout that I am human, and individual, and you cannot crush me". For Graham, however, writing is more "part of the ramparts, glacis, and bastions of self-defense I've built in my life to keep me sane and whole" (90). Building that practice

of self-defense requires Graham to overcome material hurdles. He asks readers to consider, "When you write, you do so sitting in a chair, at a desk or table, right? Not here. When I type, I do so sitting on my bunk with my typewriter on a cardboard box on the floor" (88). While Graham admits he is fortunate to have his own typewriter at the federal lock-up in Lovelock, Nevada, the typewriter ribbons are expensive and their delivery infrequent. On the inside, one has to scrounge for basic writing supplies. Incarcerated men and women do not write because of their environment, they write despite it.

If, to the right, we press against the myth that prisons facilitate literacy by removing distractions, to the left, we press against the romantic visions of typewriting as a cure for digital malaise. Indeed, in recent years, some writers have embraced this antiquated technology and its restrictions. The cultural cache attached to these pitter-pattering machines cannot be dismissed. Titles such as The Typewriter Revolution (2015), Typewriter: A Celebration of the Ultimate Writing Machine (2016), and California Typewriter (2017), a feature-length documentary starring Tom Hanks, suggest that a widening ribbon of the American public is returning to these machines for their implied simplicity, authenticity, and material intimacy. According to Richard Polt's "Typewriter Manifesto", to typewrite is to choose the "real over representation, the physical over the digital, the durable over the unsustainable, the self-sufficient over the efficient". Typewriting in the digital age stresses tactility and immediacy. It speaks to the "thingness" of the composition process. As Hanks explains, typewriting is a "pleasant, tactile action" that "turns writing or composing into a very specific, physical process that has a soundtrack to it" (California Typewriter). Most attention turns towards antique machines (and typewriter purists may even reject our claims for the Swintec 2410cc to be included in their ranks). A new \$549 device called the "Freewrite" describes itself as the "world's first smart typewriter". It has a mechanical keyboard, local storage for up to a million pages, and connects, via WiFi, to the cloud. The modern typewriter is desirable for what it lacks, namely, internet access.

We agree that typewriting is physical, durable, auditory, and self-sufficient. However, we remind our comrades that their machines and typewritten manifestos represent a self-imposed limitation. For those of us on the outside, this typewritten performance is a choice. Over time, the typewriter can learn to appreciate the heaviness of the keys, the permanence of mistakes, and the need to learn niche operating techniques involving platen positions, cartridges, ink ribbons, font wheels, and special keys. Compared to what Marshall McLuhan might call our "hot" web-based word processing, this "cool" medium produces stylish and seemingly sincere text. We feel nostalgic about poetry and prose impressed on thick paper that can be signed, mailed, saved, and framed. Of course, as I sit herein my office, with the door locked so I can concentrate and limit the typing mistakes, I am not naive enough to believe, or even wish, I could compose this or any other serious text without supplementary internet access (which provides me with the research that I can then share with my co-author). I also know this piece would not reach its intended audience without PDFs, email, social media, and other features of the World Wide Web.

For my co-author, this performance with the Swintec 2410cc does not represent choice. He is not likely to see this electronic machine as necessarily well-crafted or reliable in comparison to a laptop or PC. The machine producing these pages is not retro or sthick; this experience, in and of itself, is not a form of resistance. Instead, this device is specially housed in a clear plastic shell. The keyboard, the printwheel, and the internal parts are also plastic. The metal motor is smaller than a shot glass and the printhead the size of a fingernail. This machine was designed with safety in mind. The

see-through casing allows guards to easily inspect it for contraband. They might enter the cell where he writes at any minute and demand to examine the machine (they will not, in his experience, take the time to read anything he is writing though). Therefore, this transparent, plastic Swintec writing tool is a symptom, and symbol, of what Michel Foucault calls the "marvelous machine" of the panopticon. Its design and function suggest that, while the typewriter-as-pen might be mightier than the sword, it must first have limited possibilities for actually performing like a sword, missile, club, or shank.

Typewriters and Memory

As a child of the 1980s, I rode the first waves of the personal computer revolution. Apple IIe machines allowed me to traverse The Oregon Trail in elementary school, I learned keyboarding skills on IBM-compatible computers in middle school, and learned how to code HTML and Java on PCs before graduating high school in 2001. But, even before that, I first learned to peck on a typewriter in my grandmother's home office. Computers are commonplace in the world today, from smart watches to tablets, but they were not always the predominant force in productivity. Before men like Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and Steve Wozniak put a personal computer on every desk, brand names like Electromatic, Royal, and Westinghouse were the standard in offices around the country. Although times have changed, and technology has advanced, the usefulness of the typewriter has not diminished — its target audience has merely evolved.

My grandmother worked as a secretary and office manager for a small business out of an office in her home. As a kid, her typewriter fascinated me; it was the first machine I ever used where I could see tangible results of my actions. Pressing a key resulted in a corresponding mark on the sheet of paper. Cause and effect, action and reaction. At first, it was more so the curiosity of playing with her typewriter that intrigued me than the results I could produce by using it. These misguided adventures amused me, but usually concluded in being scolded. The more I played around with it, pounding out gibberish and jamming the keys together, grandma soon realized that the sensible thing to do would be to teach me how to use the typewriter properly.

Lessons started with a simple overview of how it worked and how to operate the typewriter. She explained that it was an "electric-assist" model, which was a more-modern version of the older style manual typewriters that were common in the 1940s and 1950s that she learned to type on. The manual arm used to return the carriage to begin a new line was replaced with an electric motor that advanced the page to the next line and returned the carriage to resume typing automatically. Grandma's typewriter still had an audible bell that rang to signal the end of a line, and more than once I remember her reaching for the return arm out of habit as the carriage returned by itself. The keys were arrayed across the front of the housing, in what she called the "ink well". Each letter, number, and symbol were individual metal blocks that would move when the corresponding key was struck. If more than one key was depressed at the same time, each would try to strike the same spot on the page simultaneously. Grandma explained that this was why it was important to type slowly and methodically until I found a rhythm that would work for me. Once pressed, the key would rise, strike a cloth ribbon with ink on it, and impact the paper to leave the character on the page. If you make a mistake, you could quickly lift the ink off with correction tape before it dried; the character would be gone, but the impact of the strike would leave the imprint of the letter behind. This taught me to press the keys lightly, only heavily enough to contact the ribbon to the paper. Any more pressure than that would have the effect

of embossing the page (which I thought was neat, though, because I could remove the ribbon and type "secret" messages the adults "couldn't see" ...). I practiced my typing on that old typewriter for years until I got my own.

My parents bought me a Brother word processor for Christmas when I was 12 so I could do my homework on my own typewriter. The machine they bought was much more sophisticated than grandma's "electric-assist" model; it was a hybrid typewriter-turned-computer. I was able to type papers into the processor's internal memory using a small screen on the unit's cover and make edits before it was printed. Although the memory was limited to a few thousand characters, the processor was equipped with a 3½ inch disk drive so work could be stored on a floppy disk — one of the first forms of removable media. The system also included a simple spell-check dictionary that would catch errors as I typed, a feature that was extremely useful as my skill developed, so I could correct the mistakes before I would print my work. The finished product was still struck through a ribbon to create a printed page, but the characters were now contained on a circular wheel instead of individual keys within the case. This allowed for consistent strikes of each character onto the page because the hammer impacting each key was mechanically-driven, not corresponding to the physically-driven pressure of the manual typewriter. The compact wheel also meant that it was convenient to swap them in and out, allowing for different fonts and font sizes — something not possible on older models of manual typewriters. I used this processor for years until our family purchased a computer, at which time the Brother was relegated to storage (where I still believe it remains to this day).

Since the day that we brought that PC into our home, I assumed that I would likely never need a typewriter again. After graduating high school, I have probably owned a dozen or more computers, countless smartphones, and a few tablet PC's. I worked in the Information Technology field for much of my 20's, working in desktop support and network management. But, none of that mattered after June 24, 2013; on that day, I entered the custody of the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services. Despite what is shown on TV or in movies, inmates don't have much access to modern technology inside prisons in Nebraska. For much of the personal computing revolution that has occurred outside these prison walls in the past 20-25 years, here, a Swintec typewriter is still considered "high tech".

Until 2014, an inmate's only means of written communication out of a Nebraska prison was a letter delivered via "snail mail", or through the US Postal Service. Access to email has increased since then, but barriers still exist to its use that makes it difficult for all inmates to utilize it. Aside from personal communication, however, the typewriter also serves an important function in providing access to the legal system. In the State of Nebraska, it is permissible for a Pro Se litigant, Latin for "one who represents themselves" in court without a lawyer, to submit motions and briefs to the Court that are handwritten. Unfortunately, nothing prevents a jurist from rejecting an inmate's pleading if he or she can't read it. Many inmates in our prison systems are under-educated, and often do not have a firm understanding of simple writing skills necessary to file or perfect even the most basic of legal filings. Those that can put the necessary documents together frequently have handwriting that is incredibly difficult to decipher, making it likely that their complaints and petitions may be thrown out of court. In general, handwriting a legal document comes with an inherent risk that jeopardizes the inmate's constitutional right to access to the courts.

I accepted a plea bargain in my case, so I did not make any attempts to appeal my conviction; thus, I did not have an immediate need to produce any

legal paperwork. I noticed, however, an opportunity to assist other offenders with their legal issues, so I purchased a Swintec 2410cc in the fall of 2014. I paid approximately \$250, including taxes and shipping, which amounted to nearly 18 months' worth of stipends that I received for my job assignment within the institution (at the time, I was receiving \$1.21/day for my position). The Swintec 2410cc is a model that has no memory and is the only model permitted for inmate purchase within Nebraska prisons. Memory models were banned shortly after 2000 as a way of preventing mass production of prison grievances and the spread of gambling tickets used for sports betting amongst the inmates. Unlike my old Brother, the Swintec types each letter as they key is depressed, much like the "electric assist" model that my grandmother used in the 1980s. Despite all the technological advancements in society, inmates are still prevented from having access to the simplest of "new" technology for fear that they might use it to petition redress from prison officials or wager on a football game.

My typewriter arrived nearly a month later, and came in a clear, "prison-friendly" casing which allows correctional staff to inspect the contents easily to detect any hidden contraband. The box did not include any typing ribbon or correction tape necessary to use the typewriter, however. Due to restrictions placed on the amount of special orders, such as a typewriter or consumables for them, an inmate can place, I had to wait another six weeks before I could purchase ribbon for use in my new typewriter. Once I had the necessary consumables, I started offering my typing services for a small fee. Soon, I had contracted enough work that I needed to purchase more ribbons, but I had already placed two of my four special orders for the year. Thankfully, some of my more resourceful "clients" found other inmates willing to sell their excess ribbons, so I was able to continue working between orders. By the end of the first year that I owned the Swintec, I had completed enough legal work to recoup the costs of my typewriter and all the consumables that I had ordered. Typically, I would accept payment for my work in items from the commissary or in pop tokens, the defacto inmate currency. Word quickly spread across the facility about the quality of my work, and soon I became so busy with requests that I had to refer work to others.

The Swintec 2410cc has been useful for more than just filing post-conviction motions in court and grievances within the department. Besides filing numerous State and Federal lawsuits on my own behalf challenging violations of my constitutional rights and conditions of our confinement, I have used my typewriter for petitions to the prison administration on behalf of all inmates requesting policy changes, better food, and additional recreational opportunities. I have written letters, for myself and others, to administrators of the prison system, Governors Dave Heineman and Pete Ricketts, members of the Nebraska Unicameral, members of the Boards of Parole and Pardons, and countless attorneys, law firms, and advocacy groups over the years. It has also allowed me to write and share various poems and short stories, as well as coursework for classes taken through Metropolitan Community College and the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Since purchasing my Swintec 2410cc in 2014, I have purchased approximately \$500 to \$600 worth of consumables (like ribbons and paper) and produced between 10,000 and 15,000 pages of documents.

Corrections

Relatively few inmates take advantage of the opportunity to use the typewriters in the library; fewer purchase their own personal machine. This may be due to cost, duration of sentence, or a perceived lack of utility. For me, this typewriter is not only useful, it's a reminder of prison writing's chain of corrections.

It is not uncommon to find my typewritten pages with scribbles, notes in the margins, or ~~words crossed off~~, other changes that are made without erasing the words underneath. Typed changes and corrections can be subtler. On the Swintec 2410cc, a button just to the right of the space bar provides me with the option of deleting a character or the whole word. Pressing this button moves the carriage back to the last character typed, raises the ribbon, and restrikes the character again through a correction ribbon that lifts the ink off the page to remove the mistaken strike. Using a combination of keys, the author can automatically remove the entire word as well. This process does not come without a price. The correction ribbon is a consumable product that must be replaced like the ink ribbon, though the thrifty inmate-author has been known to rewind the correction tape and use it at least once more before discarding it completely. Also, the same mechanism that moves the correction tape also advances the ink ribbon, so every mistaken strike costs a character's worth of correction tape and two worth of ink.

In addition to these consumable costs in correcting mistakes on the original, type typewriter is not as forgiving when typing forms in duplicate or triplicate. The correction process might lift the erroneous strike from the top copy, but because it strikes the carbon copy multiple times in the same spot, any correction on the surface leaves a mess of characters underneath. Each strike, and each correction, has value and must be treated as a deliberate action.

The inmate-author, especially the economical one, can work around the costs of correcting typewritten pages. The incarcerated typist develops skills to adapt to his or her situation that few others can experience or understand. This can be time-consuming and tedious. However, having copies that can be understood can mean the difference between, on the one hand, proving something as evidence, or, on the other, submitting an unintelligible claim that proves nothing. This can have far-reaching effects, especially if the inmate attempts to use such a copy in a civil lawsuit or post-conviction relief motion. As a result, the prison typist often gives up after the first mistake and starts the document all over, costing time and consumables (and creating a great deal of frustration).

The quality of the correction tape also affects the final product. The inmate-author on a tight budget will be inclined to purchase generic materials. These Swintec knock-offs can be half the price of the name brand, but the quality is sometimes suspect and far from guaranteed. In addition, generic tapes vary in length and are sometimes inefficient at peeling off the ink left by the mistyped characters. This is also a challenge when using colored paper, as the whited-over correction can be more distracting than the original mistake it was trying to cover up.

Even the most careful and competent typist will make a mistake or two when typing. Neither the fresh tape, the generic tape, or the reused tape entirely clears the error; a reader will often be able to see the outline of the mistyped character even after the author makes the correction. The page, and the inmate, cannot be perfectly corrected, regardless of the transformation.

For the inmate and the incarcerated typewriter, the process of "corrections" is rarely smooth. Of course, mistakes do need to be identified and corrected. Justice should be served for the reader, and for society at large. And yet, in my experience, correctional systems that try to cut corners and save money on rehabilitation can have inefficient results. Errors may be poorly masked and those who have served a sentence may be passed off as "corrected" to the perpetrator, the victim(s), or broader society. The inmate, and the tax-paying public, can be concerned with the total costs that they forget to give thought

to the quality of the corrected text.

As with any story, or sentence, the inmate-author and the correctional system must decide what they are willing to overlook or accept. The sloppiness of the finished product depends on the author, but the careful editors and patient readers also play a role. In other words, understanding circumstances of literacy means we must be willing to recognize errors without quick judgments. When composing, editing, writing, revising, or reading prison writing, the quality of the results might be measured in the work put into the final draft as well as the performance of the system in which the product was created. The best works are a labor of love that requires significant effort and resources both by the inmate-author and the correctional system.

Prisoners struggle to rewrite the story of their lives. The tools to revise their narratives are often painfully limited; a commutation, which shortens the sentence inside the correctional facility, or a pardon, a governmental forgiving of transgressions and restoration of civil rights forfeited upon conviction. Much like the fresh correction tape that corrects the surface flaws of a document, a commutation allows for the inmate to begin a new life outside the confines of the correctional system. A pardon, however, is similar to a complete erasure of the mistake — when the inmate-author makes the mistake but then starts over with a fresh sheet of paper. The pardon process takes time (a minimum of ten years after release in Nebraska, depending on the conviction) and can be costly (a good pardon attorney can cost more than a good defense lawyer). Unfortunately, even this fresh page "erasure" is not perfect. Nebraska does not expunge a conviction from an offender's record once a pardon is granted. The record receives an asterisk (*), which notates that a pardon was received. This is further proof that the inmate's story can never truly be mistake-free after the offense is made and conviction passed down. The best we can hope for is a clean copy on the surface.

Prison writing is fraught with mistakes and errors, many of which are difficult to conceal. Much like the inmates themselves, whose mistakes in life are often impossible to escape even after they've served their time and repaid their debts to society. The Swintec 2410cc typewriter offers an option for correcting the mistakes made in writing, but like the correctional system that necessitates these clear plastic writing machines, they can do a poor job and leave the inmate-author with a compromised submission.

These compromised words, one of which you are currently reading, might be helpful for those who believe the onus of "fixing" any mistakes must be placed squarely on the offender. I am not deliberately making mistakes, but I am consciously leaving some mistakes in place. I own these small imperfections, and in asking the reader to also accept them, I am also suggesting that society's view of corrections may need some correcting as well. Without proper guidance, feedback, oversight, and opportunities for revision, neither the inmate-author nor the correctional systems have ample tools to improve their craft. It can be easy to view prison and maximum sentencing as the solution to crime. The only seemingly acceptable expenses for the correctional system are more guards, more walls, and more restrictions. However, more careful revision, more deliberate composition, and better corrections may be the difference in the lives of the offenders who leave the system equipped with the necessary tools to be successful author-citizens and the ones who leave only to be swept back into the recursive life of crime and violence.

Impression Control

This typewritten performance acknowledges the powerful impressions that literacy activities can have on those who read and write inside; it also argues

that incarcerated writers and prison writing can and should impress the rest of society. Here, some of the diverse and more figurative impressions of prison typewriting are linked to a physical feature called "Impression Control".

Impression Control allows the Swintec typist to adjust the force of each keystroke. When I press one of the plastic keys, the machine responds with a rapid sequence. The nickel-sized, hammer-shaped print head springs towards the printwheel, the printwheel rotates its plastic spokes until the embossed character corresponding to the pressed key is exposed. A split second later, the metal head hits the tweezer-thin spoke into a slice of ink ribbon. The three objects almost simultaneously sandwiched together — head, spoke, ribbon — impress this page. As soon as the mark is made, the rubber belt guiding the carriage chunks one space to the right, the ribbon wheel twists left, and the print head returns to its resting position, a few centimeters below the line's center of focus. If I am unconcerned about typos, I can make approximately 160 impressions per minute.

Depending on variables such as ribbon quality, paper density, or the number of carbon copies to be reproduced, the writer can adjust the Impression Control setting to Low, Medium, or High. In the Swintec User Manual, the section on Impression Control advises, "determine the best [impression] value for each situation experimentally".

Any community literacy project requires tweaks, adjustments, and experimentation. Conducting such trials within a system defined by custody and control can have severe results. If we select a "low" level and impress too softly, the words we have spent months crafting may not appear on the page and our intentions may be lost in the cackle and drone of the perpetual and punitive machine. If the powers that be cannot, or will not, acknowledge the benefits of our classes and programs, the resources that make this collaboration possible may be more readily denied.

We want this piece to impress fellow scholars, correctional staff, and administrators; however, we also recognize that any writing we share during this collaboration and all printed materials that enter or leave the prison will be monitored and may be officially be reviewed by the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services. A "low" impression force may not leave a mark, but a "high" impression force may hatchet the page. If we attempt to make too powerful an impression, our writing may be deemed radical, bombastic, or unsafe to enter or leave the prison. The variables that govern this collaboration, such as rules for volunteer-inmate contact, media releases, lockdowns, court dates, inmate transfers, and the shifts in explicit and implicit rules make it feel as if selecting the "best" impression value is often beyond our control.

As writers, teachers, and activists, we promote writing as a tool with which to reflect and imagine. Writing offers us a means to analyze past choices and build pathways to personal growth. In prison settings, writing often sparks particular forms of reflection and anticipation. For example, Jimmy Santiago Baca says that learning to read and write while imprisoned taught him "to believe in myself and to dream of a better life" (4, 2001). The writing began the dreams and then impressed, bridged, and united the words he composed inside to the world he imagined outside. Journals, letters, essays, and poems also connected Baca to different parts of himself, including his released self. He explains, "Language made bridges of fire between me and everything I saw. Writing bridged my divided life of prisoner and free man" (11, 1992).

We want to help other inmates control their own writing and the narrative arc of their lives, but we also recognize that material constraints leave many

of them without the tools with which to draft, compose, and revise their work. In addition, we are hesitant to suggest that increased autonomy can solve the societal problems of incarceration. As we promote and create writing on the inside, we want to be careful not to suggest the onus falls on the prison (type)writer. The first subjective entry on the State of Nebraska form for a commutation implores the applicant to "Tell the story of your crime". We must offer the inmate the skills and tools to compose such a story; we should also extend that question beyond the first person. What is the story of "our" crimes? What kind of research from friends, family, teachers, judges, policymakers, and police would that story demand? Who would tell such a story? Where would it be circulated and published?

To ask such questions is to acknowledge that, in addition to a means of personal transformation and temporary release, prison literacy must also strive for collaboration and collective change. That change often appears as a release. Another writer who, like Baca, participated in the Florence Prison Writer's Workshop in Arizona said that "When the workshop is succeeding, we are for those two or three hours, it seems, outside" (qtd. in Shelton 133). Similarly, David Coogan's recent book, *Writing Our Way Out: Memiors from Jail*, recounts a writing group that he facilitated at a city jail in Richmond, Virginia. The title's subject pronoun, "our", and the prepositions "way out" and "from jail" suggest the potential for incarcerated writers and the facilitator to share the struggles and joys of this figurative release or escape. Prison literacy, in the form of memoir or personal narrative, allows us to creatively account for our experiences within the system.

We believe that prison literacy must also challenge participants to see beyond individual desires, escapes, and salvations. Classes and workshops expose the realities surrounding OUR prisons, jails, and detention centers. Prison literacy may be most evident in the form of the incarcerated reader with a book in his or her cell or the prison typewriter pounding away at plastic keys, and yet the forms and functions of this literacy have broader, lasting impacts.

Our collectivist approach to prison literacy more closely relates to the "activist imagination" described by Paul Feigenbaum. The writer-as-activist collaboratively imagines a more inclusive, progressive, and just society (Feigenbaum 15). Prison literacy, sparked by the activist imagination, works to realize collective dreams such as racial justice and prison abolition. We may not reform the system with poetry workshops and typewritten essays, but to achieve the fuller, action-oriented potential of prison literacy requires words that can ripple past the locks, bars, and barbed wire and shake the fabric of our carceral state. In other words, singular and sometimes ephemeral writing exercises, insightful readings, and earth-shattering sentences impress prison literacy upon individuals inside, but it must also work to be part of a broader, more egalitarian effort at change.

Promoting change is part of the reason why we intend to publish this piece. Our intention to publish an act of prison literacy means we must also adapt another set of "impression controls". Navigating the proper channels to instruct and publish incarcerated writers, Tobi Jacobi explains, is akin to slipping "through, under, or around razor wire with language" (Jacobi 67, 2008). Jacobi, who has taught in prisons and helped published incarcerated writers in various outlets since 2005, intimately understands the challenges and risks of the razor wire. Her metaphor also raises questions about the advocacy and agency of those who remained jailed and cannot even metaphorically "slip through the razor wire". Imprisoned authors, even when granted opportunities

to share or publish, must frequently relinquish control over their work. In their article, "What Words Might Do", Jacobi and Wendy Hinshaw ask that we question the material circumstances which give rise to representations of prisons and prison writers: "Who publishes the words of incarcerated people and where do such publications circulate? What are the impacts of such representations?" (71). When the words of the incarcerated are written or recorded with an intention to publish, they might be typed, edited, reformatted, or redacted, sometimes without the author's approval or recognition. Publishing often requires relinquishing control, and yet, the lack of impression control seems even more severe for inmates.

For example, in a recent blog post, Augie M. Torres questions why a Midwest Journal of Latino Literature accepted his short story for publication and then made significant cuts to his author biography. In his original biography, he began "Augie M. Torres was born in Davenport, Iowa and is currently incarcerated at Danville Prison in Danville, Illinois." The journal omitted the fact of his incarceration in the published bio, only offering that Torres "currently teaches English as a Second Language (ESL) to incarcerated men at the Danville Prison in Illinois". Torres explains that he is proud of his role as a teacher, and many incarcerated writers who publish (such as my co-author) also teach, tutor, or mentor fellow inmates. Nevertheless, Torres also wanted readers to know that he too is incarcerated, because "claiming my position as an incarcerated person is imperative to me as an advocate for ending the era of Mass Incarceration" (Torres 2014). Incarcerated men and women may find ways to put pen or pencil or typewriter ink to paper, but their words, contexts, and intentions can be edited, erased, or sterilized as they cross the prison threshold or are transferred to media more suitable for publication and distribution.

The impression we make with these typewritten pages is meant to enhance the agency which my co-author has over our collaborative composition process and its eventual publication. The material impressions made by each keystroke signify a particular rhetorical situation. In this way, our narrative of prison literacy attempts to account, as Patrick Berry advises, for "the situated ways in which incarcerated writers compose within and across carceral spaces, for it is through such accounts that we can see efforts to disrupt the totalizing rhetoric of the prison-industrial complex" (Berry 22). If this piece is accepted for publication, my co-author has been advised by administrators not to use his full name. In addition, if the "original" typewritten submission is scanned and published online, I will need to screenshot, print, and mail a copy to him as proof of our accomplishment. We have spoken about these consequences and constraints. Whether or not they are a justified safety precaution is a topic for another time, but these limitations should remind those working with incarcerated writers to question the assets, agencies, and material impacts of our work. The powerful impression that a published text makes might not be as powerful for the incarcerated author.

I, as a literacy facilitator and corresponding author, feel that this is a suitable impression force, but imagining the "ideal" impression with which to represent my co-author's experience or that of any individual heavily impressed by crime, violence, and prison seems Sisyphean. After almost ten months of typing on this Swintec for a few hours each week, I am still unable to typewrite a fully formed and nuanced impression that enhances his agency and speaks our truth to power of the U.S. prison industrial complex. The public cannot, nor would I expect them to, fully understand the gravity of the prison experience without firsthand knowledge either; thus, through our impression, we hope to impart a sense of that experience upon the reader. Attempts to reckon with the staggering statistics and injustices braided through our justice system

often only scratch the surface. The ennui of our sweeping prison infrastructure seems nearly infinite. Indeed, for tens of millions of human beings both currently and formerly incarcerated, the series of rapid impressions made by prison — from the permanent mark on one's criminal record to the physical scars of incarceration — never seem to end.

Release

On most QWERTY keyboards today, a key marked "ESC" (for Escape) is typically found at the top left corner. This key has a variety of functions, depending on the program being used, but generally creates a stop or backs out of something the author is doing; it creates an escape. On the Swintec 2410cc typewriter, there is no such key because there is nothing to escape from. No program is running on the typewriter and no processes need to be stopped. For the inmates within a correctional system that use a typewriter, they have no real hope for escape either.

When talking about an escape in the penological sense, images of convicts in stripped jumpsuits hijacking a laundry truck or climbing over a fence come to mind. The concept of an inmate "escaping" is repugnant to the community at large, but it's a necessary way to survive inside prison. For offenders, finding a way to "escape" the realities of life inside a prison is as important as eating or breathing. But, due to the negative connotation that the word "escape" involves, its very use is considered taboo by most; especially to correctional staff. The word itself — escape — has the same connection as yelling "FIRE!" in a crowded theater or "BOMB!" on an airplane. As such, inmates replace the word with release; a word with many meanings, each as unique as to the context in which it's used.

The Swintec 2410cc has a "MAR REL" key in the place of the typical "ESC" key. "MAR REL", or Margin Release, creates freedom for the carriage to move outside the defined boundaries of the margins set. Using this key allows the author to type to the edge of the line, if so desired, as a way to cram as much onto a single page or a way of rebelling against the order and accepted norms of the formal, written page. This release from the constraint of rules or good order allows for an individual's own artistic flair or unique tastes to take the reins and control the flow. Allowing for that freedom in writing also allows the author to create their art on their own terms, as a way to break away from the life dictated to them every minute of every day while they are incarcerated.

Release can also be a way for the inmate-author to close their eyes and free themselves from the walls, fences, and wires that surround them each day and find themselves transported anywhere else. While the prison system is designed to confine the physical bodies of offenders, nothing can hold their minds. The ability to imagine yourself on a sunny beach with a cold drink, on the porch at home watching your children play, or in bed with a loved one again is a way to manage the mental anguish that correctional facilities create. That release from the day-to-day life of tedious monotony inside prison is necessary for offenders to stay (somewhat) sane. Prisons seem to exist to trap society's scourge away from the rest of the community and provide John Q. Taxpayer with a (false) sense of security. Inside these walls, people no different than John Q. live as well; the main difference between the two is that those of us on the inside were caught and punished for our mistakes and worst decisions. Creating that artificial release allows us to remember that we, too, are human, and are indeed worth something as well.

Release is also the ultimate goal and result for many incarcerated offenders

in jails and prisons across the country. One average, only one in every ten inmates jailed today will remain incarcerated until their natural death or be put to death by the state for their crime(s). That means that most of the people locked away will eventually return to the communities that they left after serving their time. Every one of those inmates plans for, dreams of, and anticipates their own release from the correctional facility. Everyday, discussions are overheard about what a soon-to-be-released offender wants to have for their first meal or who they want to go see first (or how quickly they can find, uh, "intimate company", if you catch my meaning ...). Creating fantasy about your release is something that every inmate does from time to time, and it can be fun to share those ideas with those around you as a way to kill time. I'd be lying if I said that I have not thought about my own first few days of freedom next year. My release date coincides with the opening games of the NCAA Men's basketball tournament in March, 2019; I'm looking forward to spending that entire first weekend doing nothing but lounging on the couch with immediate family, watching the games, and eating homecooked meals again. The following Monday, I'll worry about everything else: seeing other family, reconnecting with friends, and starting to look for employment.

Inmates can also express their releases through their writing, as I have done myself more than once. I have written several stories and poems, some that I have shared and others that I have not, as well as written about my plans for the future. Some of my writing is done with pen and paper and occasionally makes its way into a folder for later consideration or into a more formal format through the typed page. I'd like to think that all of my writing is high-quality material, but I am just not that great of an author (yet). But, that does not stop me from putting my thoughts on the page. Every day since my incarceration began in mid-2013, I have kept a daily journal as a way of documenting my experiences here, processing the things that I have seen, and as a way of venting my frustrations or aggravations to clear my mind. It is a technique I learned in therapy prior to going into custody that I never really thought much about until I arrived here. I have numbered each entry with the date and how many days I have been incarcerated; today's entry will be Day 1998. Now that I am under three months away from my discharge date, I have started adding the days remaining to my count; 89 remain. This process has allowed me to find a release everyday in some form or another, even if that means only talking about the things that I have experienced around me and how that has made me feel. Until now, I was never good at expressing my feelings — one of the things that led me to my arrest in the first place (and two failed marriages) — but now I am comfortable putting those thoughts into words and lifting that burden off my soul.

Release is an important thing to the incarcerated, whether metaphorically or at the end of a term of incarceration. Inmates can enjoy that release in a variety of ways, including through their writings. Those who put their thoughts into words on the page enjoy a long tradition of sharing their prison writing, even if it is only amongst themselves. These writings can be as formal or informal as the author desires, but the inmate-author dictates whether or not the writing is inside the margins or not, conforming to acceptable norms or not. It is the one place inside a prison where absolute freedom exists.

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At the suggestion of the anonymous peer reviewers (who we also thank and appreciate), we offer a brief comment about how this piece came to fruition. Towards the end of our first semester of class together, we began exchanging typewritten meditations about these machines and our craft. We decided to attempt to co-author a text. One of us did research and delivered appropriate articles and academic essays to the other. The more advanced typist shared his copy of the Swintec 2410cc user manual with the beginner and this document helped crystalize the idea for the outline. We each selected buttons and functions about which we wrote our respective sections: Margin, Memory, Correction, Impression, and Release. During our second semester together, we exchanged and retyped drafts. The non-incarcerated author took this draft to the Conference on College Composition and Communication and approached the editors of CLJ. They graciously agreed to accept a typewritten submission and to then send it for peer review.

We did not explicitly identify who authored or typed the individual sections as we wanted to challenge the distinctions between student and instructor, incarcerated writer and free scholar, inmate and volunteer. However, any idea that these roles can blur or reverse does not change the fact that one of us typed in his office on a university campus, which he was and is free to leave at his will, while the other typed under the constant control and surveillance of the prison system. Rules regarding our communication reinforce the separation of the authors. We intend to follow these rules, which means that after this final section is typed (and retyped) and sent via snail mail to the CLJ editors, we will need to cease any contact or correspondence until the first is released or the second relinquishes his ability to teach or volunteer inside the prison. We hope that this publication shows the potential for and challenges that incarcerated writers face when attempting to publish their work and also hope NDCS will reconsider their policies about volunteer and inmate correspondence.

Finally, we would like to note that we discussed the potential risks and authorial slight of putting our names on this manuscript or leaving it relatively anonymous. The final decision was given to the author on the inside.

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Author Bios

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