

INTRODUCTION

I don't know if you can get your point across except by bringing the public in and sticking them in one of those little cages for a week or two.

JEREMY ROLAND*, CONTROL UNIT PRISONER

Waiting on my side of a visiting booth in a maximum security unit, I am looking through a clear, thick plastic window into a small, bare room identical to the one in which I am sitting. But unlike the ordinary wooden door I just closed behind me, the door into the room on the other side is solid steel with a small hinged slot, or cuffport, at waist height. As it opens, two blue-uniformed officers hand in a dark-haired young man in a white jumpsuit, hands cuffed behind his back. The door closes behind him with a heavy clank. In one smooth motion the prisoner takes a step inside and backs his hands through the cuffport so that one of the officers can free them from the cuffs.

After Jeremy Roland settles onto the metal stool on his side of the window and I place my tape recorder microphone up against the small speaker in the wall on my side, he tells me that he knows this situation would seem odd to an outsider.¹ "Seeing someone come in here with handcuffs and backing up to the door probably seems very strange to you, but I've been doing it for a few years now. It's like putting on your shoes and walking out of your house." But his grandmother will be coming soon for what he knows will be the last time, and he is sorry that he will have to meet her in one of these booths. He doesn't want her to see him here under maximum custody restrictions. "I still get embarrassed in front of visitors

*All names given for prisoners in this book are pseudonyms.

and being handcuffed. Not so much embarrassed as I am ashamed . . . I'm gonna have a real hard time with it." I notice that the window between us is covered with smudges right at eye level where previous visitors have tried to press their hands together through the plastic pane.

Jeremy has a life sentence. He came to prison at twenty after his third "strike"; his worst offense was an assault during a robbery in which no one was killed. "Everything that was most important to me then is least important to me now," he says. "And everything that was least important is most important to me now. [My third strike] woke me up. I wish it had happened ten years ago. I wish so much. But it's too late. They've thrown away the key." He talks about the other prisoners who are here with him on this unit where he is confined to a solitary cell for twenty-three hours a day. Some seem to be deranged, "sick individuals" who "make everyone miserable, day in and day out" by pounding on their sinks and doors. It seems to him that no sooner does one leave than another takes his place. Others are murderers who have done "brutal things"—"I know some horrible people [who] commit horrible crimes . . . You've got some pretty bad prisoners in here, just awful."

Once he gets past the "little trouble" that brought him to this unit, Jeremy likely will do his time in the "general population," where the vast majority of prisoners live. But like many who live or work in prisons, he frames his description of his environment with two figures who, like book-ends, mark the limits of comprehension: one "sick" and the other "bad."

Jeremy is typical of many prisoners and staff in his description of the disturbing—but far from uniform—effects of intensive confinement. My introduction to a prisoner Jeremy would have called "sick" occurred one day during the first year of our project when I visited a psychiatric unit for seriously mentally ill inmates. A small group of staff took me to the end of a long cell-lined hallway. Thomas Vincent had lived there for several years, and his delusions, odd behavior, and attacks on staff had diminished in response to the care he received. But his sentence expired the next day, and two days earlier his condition had deteriorated dramatically. Now, he was "locked down" in his small room behind his heavy door with its small window. He had destroyed most of his property, including his clothes, and had wrapped his naked body in threads unraveled from a sheet. Before I quickly glanced away, I saw his frightened eyes and the gleam of dozens of white strings wound around his tense body. He looked as though he wanted to jump out of his skin.

One of the unit's counselors was rather awkwardly cradling a pair of shoes, which he held up in front of the window so that Vincent could see them. Setting them carefully on the floor in front of the cell, he explained to me that he wanted to reassure the prisoner that the things that had been removed from his cell were still available. After we had walked back down the tier, we gathered in a little knot near the unit's control booth. The staff explained that they could not, of course, keep Vincent where he was, and they had no obligation other than to let him go from the gate of their prison into the surrounding semi-rural landscape. They had scheduled a commitment hearing with a state hospital and planned to argue that his psychosis and history of assault made him a danger to both himself and others. What, I asked, if that doesn't work? Then they would drive him to a nearby city and drop him off outside the emergency room of a public hospital.²

A prison mental health worker described the facility that Vincent seems reluctant to leave as a "black box within a black box" into which the public and even other prisons want men like him to disappear.³ Vincent may well have arrived there from another maximum security setting, psychotic and banging on his cell like the inmates Jeremy described. Now he had nowhere to go, no reason to step into those shoes outside his door.

During that same first year I went for the first time into the kind of maximum security unit in which I interviewed Roland. The unit had a circular design, with a control booth in the center and rows of cells around the periphery. Standing next to the control booth with the two prison workers who were escorting me, at first I barely noticed the man exercising in a small indoor yard in front of the tiers. The prisoner, Jamal Nelson, was facing the wall and swinging his arms out in gradually widening circles, an exercise that made sense given the lack of any exercise equipment in the little space. But gradually we became aware that he was calmly and rhythmically swinging one arm closer and closer to the wall, a bloodstain spreading as his hand hit the concrete. "Let's go," said one of my companions sharply, "before we give him any more attention." As we left, I saw that two officers had moved quickly into the yard to stop him.

The "box" of the prison presents a smooth surface to the outside world, which is of course how it works as a place of disappearance. But inside, it has distinct internal separations. The two prisoners I have just described were in the different, though equally controlled, environments designated

for the system's "problem children." Vincent had a diagnosis of chronic mental illness; the staff of the treatment unit felt he needed attention in the form of medication, reassurance, and, they hoped, some sort of continuing treatment. Nelson was considered disturbed, though more ambiguously; those keeping him felt that he was playing for "attention" and that attention was harmful to him. They believed that he needed to be maintained—maybe permanently—in a condition offering the barest of human contact.

Maximum security prisons have in common extreme forms of control that go well beyond that effected by ordinary prison discipline. Confined to these units are the prisoners called—in the shorthand of psychiatry—the "mad" and the "bad." At the heart of this book is the paradox represented in my sketches of Vincent and Nelson: the tighter control becomes, the more problematic are the effects it precipitates. Often situations like these are approached in terms of whether and how individuals choose their own behavior. To what extent are these men in control of themselves? Are these strange behaviors signs of underlying disturbances—"madness" in one of its many forms—in those subjected to intensive confinement? Or are they willful, character-based attempts to exert a minimal, if counter-productive, resistance? A second way to frame these questions, however, is to shift to the level of the institutional mechanisms of control. What assumptions about dangerousness, self-control, and individual choice are contained in, and signaled by, measures of extreme confinement? What conundrums are encountered both by those who are the object of these measures and by those who enforce them? These questions point us less toward the inmate as a disturbed individual and more toward his position in and his responses to the social world formed around him by the conditions in which he is held. It is primarily this second kind of question that I explore in this book.

Reflecting on the path that sent him to prison, Roland says that he has "made some mistakes in [his] life, some bad choices" for which he deserves punishment, though he protests that the punishment itself is excessive. He mourns the rational actor he could have been and wants to be now. "So here I sit," he says sadly. Vincent clearly cannot make rational choices and has been given a kind of partial exemption, but he is in a larger context that has abandoned him. Nelson's strange act is ambiguous; is it a calculated bid for attention? He has lived in a control unit for years without

a resolution to this question. Within the larger issue of control, then, we find that the behavior of these prisoners is understood in terms of their capacity to reason, an understanding that in turn determines where they live and the attitudes they encounter in prison staff. Both the “horrible” prisoners described by Roland and the “attention-seeking” Nelson, as well as Roland himself, are being treated as rational actors. They are believed capable of choosing not to be where they are. Vincent, on the other hand, is treated as irrational and therefore unable to control his behavior.

The issue of whether and how prisoners make rational decisions is embedded in a larger question: what of the institution itself? The kind of control exercised in these maximum security settings is technologically sophisticated and planned down to the smallest detail. The myriad elements of housing design, placement, and daily routine shaping these prisoners’ situations rest on the assumption that rational practices underlie the operation of “the system.” But what, really, is this rationality of the system? Perhaps—as suggested by the history of modern forms of punishment—it lies in an institutional regime of order designed to contain and correct the disordered products of society. Perhaps, as many prison workers and some prisoners believe, it arises “naturally” from the connection between the project of containment and our innate capacity to reason. Punishment, in this view, simply aligns human nature with laws that reflect that nature back to us. But perhaps the institution carries a secret: that it is, under these surface appearances, profoundly irrational. Roland’s sentence, with its wastefulness of life and incredible cost, Vincent’s impending ejection, delusional and assaultive, to “the streets,” the interpretation offered for Nelson’s self-destruction—all suggest that the “system” itself may be mad. These prisoners are entangled in institutional contradictions within which they become—and suffer for becoming—the extremes and exceptions that mark the limits of the rational.

How these limits are situated—that is, what happens to prisoners deemed more or less capable of reason—depends on an opposition fundamental to prisons. On the one hand, punishment in the form of a harsh environment is presumed to teach a lesson; on the other, treatment offers a partial alternative to that environment. I explore here how these alternatives are worked out—or struggled through—in practice. I do not treat these categories for sorting prisoners as given; in fact, the reader should suspend judgment as to whether and in what sense individuals fit into

them. Instead I treat the process of sorting as one element in the shifting institutional terrain within which prisoners and staff alike must somehow make sense of intensive confinement.

Several things are at stake in trying to connect everyday events in prisons with certain fundamental assumptions about how people do, do not, will not, or cannot choose their behavior. The first is that these assumptions have been central in driving the recent growth of prisons and underpinning the proliferation of maximum security facilities within prisons. The human situations represented in these brief stories and throughout this book happen every day all over the United States. They involve an extraordinarily large number of people—prisoners, prison workers, and others—in wasteful and damaging forms of institutional life. We have evolved a public discourse in which paying attention to these situations is taken as a sign of indifference to the suffering of those who have been harmed by others and of lack of common sense in the face of obvious social dangers. But attention to the effects of prisons on individuals and of large-scale imprisonment on the country does not require us to turn away from the effects of crime or to minimize the fact that some people need to be prevented from harming others.⁴ In fact, much in the current situation increases the likelihood of future harm. Conversely, while some prison workers are harsh or worse, presuming that all are harsh not only misrepresents the many who are not, but also keeps us from a more nuanced understanding of the work they are being asked to do. It will become clear in this book that many (though certainly not all) in corrections realize and are puzzled or frustrated by the contradictions they experience. Exploring the internal logic of the prison can make it clearer what these contradictions are and open possibilities for questioning our approach to them.

The second thing at stake in understanding prisons is that, perhaps more than most institutions, they raise the question of whether there is any “give” or hope in the “system.” In posing the issue of rationality I am not proposing some sort of structural approach that works from within the terms already provided—for example, to argue that more study would enable a more accurate system of inmate classification. Rather, I take these premises that are important within the prison and explore their persistent and perversely troublesome effects. Psychiatry and custody, for example, are

mutually dependent and at the same time speak irreconcilable languages. At their points of intersection people are necessarily forced to articulate and reflect on what they do, and it is at these moments that possibilities for change emerge. Even a very local effort such as the one I describe in the last chapter—however tentative and necessarily enmeshed in the terms it resists—can be seen as an indicator that seemingly monolithic systems have openings.

The third thing at stake has to do with the fact that current theoretical debates in anthropology and many other disciplines make heavy use of the historical prison to draw connections between power—particularly the power of the state—and the conditions in which the modern sense of self or personhood is formed. The usefulness of these debates for understanding the contemporary prison has been little explored, nor has the social world inside the prison been approached for what it might have to say to them.⁵ This book reflects my desire to stay alert to how conversation on these matters can cut both ways. Recognizing the implications of certain historical echoes, such as the mutual shaping of architecture and modern state power, helps to illuminate the encrusted layers of practice within institutions. It suggests, also, that it is not just the perversity of human nature that gives these institutions their unintended consequences. At the same time, those who live inside the actual practices of confinement—staff and prisoners—offer an embedded commentary that can illuminate theoretical difficulties being excavated elsewhere.

Finally, the contemporary prison has developed a new technology—in the form of the control prison—for the creation of a potentially absolute social exclusion. Historically, and in many prison systems in the United States, this exclusion is correlated with and profoundly linked to race. The current proliferation and expansion of the technology suggests that it is being enlisted to manage other projects of separation and isolation as well. When these projects of exclusion are framed in entirely individualistic and non-rehabilitative terms, they confront us with disturbing questions about what it means to be a human—a social—being. I believe this is the issue most deeply at stake in the contemporary prison. I approach it here, not at the level of national policy where it has been well described, but at the level of local practice where it is enacted in daily assertions of authority and resistance.

PRISON NATION

Prison is a big “black hole” we pour resources into.

PRISON MENTAL HEALTH WORKER

Even those who haunt our dominant institutions and their systems of value are haunted too by things they sometimes have names for and sometimes do not.

AVERY GORDON, *Ghostly Matters*, pp. 4–5

Prisons create by their very nature sets of opposing and aligned positions, at the least consisting of prisoners, correctional workers, and the “public.” To these one must add the many auxiliary industries and workers arrayed around prison systems, the legal and human rights organizations that help prisoners, and the media. In addition, scholarly interest in prisons goes back deep into the nineteenth century and has generated an enormous literature across many disciplines and perspectives. All these positions, of course, have genealogies that are in turn subject to much exploration and debate. I present here a brief and simplified overview of this territory and of how it is related to my purpose. Before doing that, however, I need to mention that the writer on prisons is faced with certain unavoidable points of complicity with her subject.

One of these is that crime, criminals, and “prison life” are—and have been at least since the nineteenth century—a source of public fascination and debate. Looming cellblocks, stone-faced guards, dangerous and deranged felons: these familiar tropes tell us in advance what to expect of prison. Allen Feldman writes of what he calls “cultural anesthesia”: the fact that we are bombarded with images representing all kinds of violence but are also able, by means of these same images, to evade the disturbing physicality and immediacy of violence itself.⁶ Many aspects of the contemporary representation of crime and punishment carry the danger of this kind of anesthesia. One consequence is that prison becomes an “abstract site” in the public imagination precisely through the fetishizing of its concrete details.⁷ An element in this dynamic, of course, is the captivating relationship between watching and being watched that pervades prisons. This relationship inevitably molds description (witness mine of the three prisoners I just described) and thus perpetuates itself even as one attempts to evade it. Although I do not pretend to resolve this dilemma, I choose to

emphasize the social contexts in which what people said had meaning and to refrain from using a case study format to describe prisoners.

One officer who read an earlier version of this book told me that he had at first felt concern about how I would describe officers, wondering, as he put it, “Is she on our side?” This is a field in which several vocabularies represent positions that are in a state of chronic tension with one another. Often, two or three highly charged words refer to the same thing, and words from one or another “side” are offensive to the others. Thus the people who watch over prisoners are “officers” to themselves, “guards” in the media and to prison critics, and “guards,” “police,” or “cops” to prisoners. Prisoners are “prisoners,” “inmates,” or “convicts” to themselves, “inmates” or—the currently favored term—“offenders” to correctional workers.⁸ Similar conflictual terms and positions exist among perspectives on prison as a whole: “corrections” and the “prison industrial complex” refer to, but certainly do not live in, the same world. I attempt to represent rather than resolve these difficulties, choosing words reflective of the various contexts I describe and juxtaposing multiple perspectives. The effect may be disconcerting to those accustomed to staying within one of these vocabularies, but my aim is to evoke a sense of movement from the space of one discourse to another.

Prisons as Industry

The expansion of the prison system that began in the early 1980s has resulted in the highest rate of incarceration in the world. Today in the United States over two million people are in prison. Half of these prisoners are African Americans and three-fourths are people of color.⁹ The incarceration of women, three-fourths women of color, expanded dramatically during the period of prison growth.¹⁰ The prison complex is immensely costly, draining money from other arenas of public life; in 2000 state and local incarceration costs came to almost \$40 billion.¹¹

Critics of the prison industrial complex point out that prisons do many things that depend upon but are only indirectly connected to those they confine. In many parts of the country prisons have become a substitute for traditional industries, offering middle-class, union-protected wages to rural people facing globalization and diminishing employment opportunities.¹² Here—in often factory-like conditions—former factory, mill, and agricultural workers are given over to the containment of unemployed ur-

ban youths and of some of their more demoralized neighbors. Prisons create new markets for law enforcement technology, provide cheap labor for corporations, add to the census of depopulated rural counties, disenfranchise poor and minority people, and lower official unemployment statistics.¹³ Recent works that refer to a “prison nation” and a national lockdown point to the fact that the prison complex is grounded in these wider economic and political developments.¹⁴ By “disappearing” large numbers of poor, mostly minority people as well as many who are seriously mentally ill, prisons exercise a kind of social magic that produces “multiple invisibilities.”¹⁵ From this perspective what happens to individual prisoners once they fall from public view is an almost incidental—though devastating—effect of incarceration as an industry.¹⁶

The decade of the 1990s saw the greatest prison population increase in U.S. history. However, a recent slowing of prison expansion suggests that fiscal realities and changing public and political concerns are beginning to shift the pattern. Since 2000 a number of states have reduced their prison populations and placed construction plans on hold; there is evidence that state governments, correctional officials, and many citizens are questioning the large-scale imprisonment of nonviolent offenders over the past twenty years.¹⁷ This is, perhaps, an indication that the moment is right for efforts to unpack the consequences of prison growth. At the same time, however, the fading of the boom in the absence of any significant reduction in the overall prison population may simply serve to show the strength of its systemic social and economic underpinnings. Criminal justice policies that disproportionately affect minorities, the use of prison construction to manage rural unemployment, and the multiple industries geared to corrections may be extremely resistant to change. And the strong attribution of individual “choice” to prisoners—so central to the current politics of incarceration—remains thoroughly embedded in a larger discourse of economic and social autonomy that shows no signs of losing its grip on the public imagination.

Corrections

“Corrections”—the governmental system that operates prisons—is a bureaucracy centered on the management of large numbers of people. It is

a world of policies, documents, meetings, acronyms, and all the other governmental practices that make up such management. As in other organizations, one can spend a good deal of time in administrative meetings without getting much flavor of what it is, exactly, that is being managed. This “paper” side of the prison system has grown in size and impact as the result of an increasingly professional and managerial focus within corrections.¹⁸ Centralized management overlays a second organizational hierarchy, the older paramilitary structure—called “custody”—composed of officers and the sergeants, lieutenants, and captains who make up their “chain of command” in each prison.¹⁹ The prisons themselves are administered by superintendents (wardens) and managers who must both support and control the uniformed staff. In addition, a multitude of other workers also enter the prisons each day. Among these are the psychologists and other mental health workers who staff mental health units and work as outpatient staff in other parts of the prisons.

At the seams of this system two, three, or more of these lines of authority intersect, each of them operating on assumptions that are in part opaque to the others.²⁰ In this book the main intersection I describe is between custodial (security) and mental health staff. Two related but sometimes conflicting discourses meet at this juncture, one centered on projects of discipline founded in notions of rationality and the other on projects of restoration aimed toward normal subjectivity.²¹ The degree of harmony or friction among those who occupy these positions varies greatly over time and from one prison to another. My interest here, however, is how the issues themselves are embedded in a larger vernacular logic. This logic manifests itself in everyday practice as a struggle over which individuals should be forced to take responsibility for their actions and reflects the contradictions of a Euro-American individualism that is widely shared and deeply implicated in the historical origins of both prisons and psychiatry.

Correctional management at the local level is far from static. Administrators and officials come and go, expectations of staff change (for example, a formerly all-male officer corps now includes women), vocabularies change, and management tools (such as total quality management and computerized tracking systems) are imported. Evidence for this kind of change appears in this book in a number of places: the presence of fe-

male staff is commonplace, some of my examples come from relatively new training classes for officers, and people from different “eras” speak openly about differences between past and present practices and expectations. These changes always take place, however, in the context of security requirements and the time-tested authority structure that enforces them.

Line staff, the mainstay of the prison’s round-the-clock operation, spoke with me of their ways of understanding prisoners, their responses to the governmental practices they are taught, and the emotional toll of what they do. Like many who have studied prisons, I found most correctional workers to be decent people doing difficult work. This is not to minimize the potential for brutality; there is ample evidence of abusive behavior by prison workers. Ted Conover, a journalist who spent a year working as a guard at Sing Sing, notes that on this point the officers he worked with adopted a “siege mentality . . . a closing of ranks” that prevented them from acknowledging “the obvious, that among the many good officers there are a few bad ones.”²² While removing abusive officers is clearly important, it does not address the larger systemic issues that impinge on all workers and prisoners and, as I show, contribute to the circularity of some of their responses to one another. Prisons have complementary but in some ways quite similar effects on inmates, officers, and prison workers in general, a point that has some potential for undermining stereotypical depictions.

The fact that I worked in Washington State prisons influences this account in several ways that I am aware of and probably in some ways that I am not. Clearly the fact of our work in the system and the help we received from correctional officials, administrators, and line staff suggest an openness that may not be present elsewhere.²³ Further, because of the relatively small size of Washington State, its largely white prison population, and its progressive history, some of what I describe here may not be typical of other states. Much critical literature on prisons examines the massive incarceration of African Americans, control prisons of up to several thousand beds, and the systematic use of permanent preventive detention; none of these issues characterizes Washington State. Finally, changes in Washington’s prisons during the period of our work and our involvement in specific projects of change likely influenced the reflective tone of some of my material.

A former prisoner writes, “Most Americans remain ignorant . . . that they live in a country that holds hostage behind bars another populous country of their fellow citizens.”²⁴ In this other country there is tremendous variation among prisoners and among the environments in which they live. One reason I began with my conversation with Jeremy Roland is that although he was a maximum custody inmate at the time, he represents the many inmates who pass through that status quickly and whose lives in prison do not revolve around the kind of difficulties that I describe in this book. The term “general population” is used in prisons to refer to the ordinary conditions under which most prisoners live and to which Roland would return.

General population inmates are not personally restrained and move about the prison (at specific times) to jobs and other activities. They eat together in large dining halls, share two- to four-man cells in crowded living units, and exercise in large communal yards. A prisoner living in general population writes of Stateville in Illinois:

If you expect the usual tale of constant violence, brutal guards, gang rapes, daily escape efforts, turmoil . . . you will be deeply disappointed. Prison life . . . is not a daily round of threats, fights, plots, and “shanks” (prison made knives)—though you have to be constantly careful to avoid situations or behavior that might lead to violence . . . For me, and many like me in prison, violence is not the major problem; the major problem is monotony . . . boredom, time-slowness boredom, interrupted by occasional bursts of fear and anger, is the governing reality of life in prison.²⁵

For the purpose of understanding the contexts I describe here, the most important feature of general population is that it requires prisoners to manage themselves in groups within a complex, overcrowded system. Assignment to special maximum security units occurs in a larger context of pressures for conformity, jam-packed quarters, intergroup tensions, and various kinds of victimization. Large living units can be dangerous for prisoners with psychiatric problems or other vulnerabilities; even fairly minor aberrant behavior may cause an inmate to be rejected or injured by his peers.²⁶ Once confined to a special unit, some inmates regard general population

as a sort of Promised Land where they can have access to their property, sit in the sun, yard with other inmates (in prison, “yard” is a verb as well as a noun). Others, however, find the intense social life on regular living units more deadly than a lonely special unit cell.²⁷ Both prisoners and staff negotiate an environment in which the difficult, boring, or dangerous conditions of the prison as a whole are in ongoing tension with—and the only alternative to—the isolation and stasis of intensive confinement.

THINKING THROUGH PRISONS

I became aware, over and over again, of how tenaciously
the past searches for its expression in the present.

ANTHONY GIDDENS (QUOTING A THERAPIST),
IN BECK, GIDDENS, AND LASH, *Reflexive Modernity*, p. 72

Instead of dividing the world into good and bad
exercises of power, Foucault prefers the question . . .
“What happens?”

JOHN RANSOM, *Foucault's Discipline*, p. 42

In movies and in accounts by prisoners and visitors, being “inside” for the first time is a stock scene, the sound of clanging steel gates (always closing behind one) the classic rendering of confinement’s threshold. I was somewhat prepared for this, the moment when one imagines never coming out again. But when I stood inside the control unit during Nelson’s yard, I was distracted by something else: the historical specificity of the unit’s design. I was standing at the center of a circular prison almost identical to the now-famous “Inspection House” designed by the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham in the 1790s. The fact that we watched from the center as a prisoner responded—negatively—to our gaze was a perverse twist on Bentham’s belief that with his new panoptical design the prisoner would internalize the inspector’s gaze and thereby instill a positive discipline in himself.²⁸

Throughout the writing of this book I have grappled with the question of what to do about history. The architecture, practices, and conflicts I describe here all reach back to specific historical moments: the birth of the modern prison in Bentham’s utilitarian philosophy of punishment; the intermeshing of psychiatric and penal theories about the individual in the

nineteenth century; the prison slavery of Reconstruction; the layers and layers of reform that promised to bring order to the penal systems of Europe and America. Hundreds of works document the development of the modern prison and the histories of specific prisons. After a long tussle with this material I have realized, with the help of Avery Gordon's wonderful *Ghostly Matters*, that what I want to convey is less the comprehensive historical detail—impossible in any case—than a sense of echo. What assailed me in that first control unit visit was the sort of echo that Gordon calls a haunting—a moment when history offers itself to us as a presence rather than a collection of facts. Contemporary prisons are indeed haunted in this sense, holding as they do a history of disappearances. And they are pervaded by past efforts and failures, often taking up where some long-forgotten plan left off. I have incorporated history into this book in small bits that point to its effects and in notes pointing to additional sources. I want these occasional digressions to show the temporal depth and resonance of certain practices and to suggest a contact with the past “in which [we] touch the . . . shadows of ourselves and our society.”²⁹

For me, as for many others, the prison is haunted not only by its actual history, however that is understood, but also by the interpretation of it provided by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*. Taking as his central image Bentham's dream of an all-pervasive surveillance, Foucault describes the nineteenth-century prison as a force for the creation of modern forms of subjectivity. I do not see my project as an “application” of Foucault to prisons—an absurd exercise in any case—but rather as an inevitable immersion in the issues of power, knowledge, and self-governance with which he was concerned. I have chosen not to belabor the connections, but the reader familiar with Foucault's work will see that in each chapter I am working with a set of problems for which he suggests some ways of asking questions. The attempt to differentiate madness and reason constituted, for Foucault, the historical genesis of the modern project of incarceration. It is an attempt that still haunts the contemporary prison.

Each chapter of this book considers how—in several permutations within the maximum security prison—social exclusion is entangled with questions about what makes for a rational, self-regulating human being. Part 1 centers on control units and explores the individualism and emphasis on

choice that underpin their operation. In chapter 1 I describe the physical space of these units and the practices of containment that manage the prisoners who live in them. Drawing on interview material and other sources to touch first on how prisoners describe the effects of isolation, I then turn to two pervasive forms of reaction to this environment. Despite and because of intensive control, prisoners in these units use their body wastes as weapons and engage in episodes of violence. I explore the extreme forms of social distancing, contamination, and shaming that thus emerge at the cell door and consider how an emphasis on control over the body works to secrete its opposite. The conversations I enter into in this chapter are a point of entry to the ways in which contemporary control units fall away from the “rehabilitative ideal” toward a warehousing approach that—despite its physical resemblance to earlier prison experiments—does not rest on any gloss of self-transformation.

In chapter 2, I turn to how notions of individual choice and rational management intersect to form the background and underpinning to control. I describe how training in the use of restraints suggests problematic connections between enforcement and the law and examine ways in which prisoners and staff articulate their expectations of autonomy under conditions in which it is both valued and constrained. Ending this chapter with an exploration of how electrical technologies of control collapse choice into obedience, I lay the groundwork for understanding the contrast between responses to those prisoners who appear to have a capacity for reason and those who do not.

Part 2 is about the relationship between treatment for mentally ill prisoners and the custodial orientation of prison operation. Chapter 3 centers on the issue of irrational behavior and the psychiatric treatment designed to contain it. I approach this in two ways. First, I ask how “the mentally ill” precipitate out of the general prison population through screening and diagnostic practices that create a partial and temporary exemption from discipline for those who cannot take responsibility for their actions. Second, I explore how mental health unit staff understand and manage their charges by using metaphors of parenting and the logic of behaviorism. These approaches to the mentally ill are connected, as I show, to techniques of encirclement that attend to inmates’ language as well as their behavior.

Chapter 4 is about how the relationship between custody and treatment

is negotiated by uniformed and mental health staff. Classification hearings and the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* are elements in this negotiation, which involves alignments and conflicts between custodial power and psychiatric knowledge. I describe how the division of psychiatric disorders into the major mental illnesses and the character disorders is taken up by, and reflected in, a division of labor between psychiatric and custodial staff. Here, in contrast to the previous chapter, I emphasize the permeable and contested boundary between these two aspects of the prison and the conundrums that form around the interpretation of behavior.

In Part 3 I turn to the question of long-term confinement and describe an attempt, in one control unit, to challenge the assumptions underlying it. In chapter 5 I return to the control unit to consider prisoners who come to represent ongoing danger within and outside the system. I describe how prison workers are taught to anticipate manipulation and how prisoners, in turn, struggle against the suspicion of lying. Here the diagnostic manual interjects a theory of character that supports a utilitarian view of language and reinforces a sense of “fit” between long-term prisoners and the environment in which they are contained. This chapter ends by pointing to the relationship between characterological interpretations of prisoners’ language, public representations of the danger represented by criminals, and the warehouse prison.

Finally, chapter 6 is about a control unit involved in a process of change. I describe how staff instituted new practices such as regular and direct contact between administrators and prisoners. These attempts to shift toward a more humane practice interrupt the contradictions of control discussed in the first chapter and show staff trying to address the most fundamental issue raised by the maximum security prison: its capacity to produce extremes of isolation and exclusion from the human.

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