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The Horror-Storyed Prison

A Narrative Study of Prison as an Abject and Uncanny Institution

Tea Fredriksson



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Abstract

In terms of time as well as in terms of depth, prison is a storied institution. Many-layered tales have been told about it since its inception. A prominent theme of these stories is how they configure belonging and otherness through horror-iconography. This study pursues how prison is made sense of in stories that present it as both fact and fiction. To study this, it explores how prison is narrativized in 10 commercially published prison autobiographies. The analysis explores how the narrativization of prison space speaks to social fears and anxieties about deviance and punishment, and how these narratives fit into social, subject-formative processes where prison is an abject as well as uncanny institution.

The study employs haunting and the monstrous-feminine as critical devices. The implementation of the monstrous-feminine motif enables a reading of the prison's particular form of punishment as one that threatens to devour, incorporate, and assimilate subjects into the other; rather than exclude and remove (undesirable) subjects from society. It also elucidates how, as an abject other, it cannot spawn clean and proper, rehabilitated bodies. Moreover, viewing prison as haunting unveils several processes that unfamiliarize the familiar in both conceptual and spatiotemporal ways. It shows how prison unsettles definitions and meanings of things like past, present, and future; punisher and punishee; and even life and death. Additionally, focusing on haunting as social, spatial, and temporal ambiguity enables an analysis of how prison functions as a repository of repressed violence. This is particularly evident when texts reveal how prison is haunted at the same time as it also haunts places and people both in and around it. Uncanny doubles exemplify this, where eerily similar bodies and places destabilize notions of safety and danger.

Through its analysis of prison novels, the present study unveils how prison is narrativized as a viscous timespace that devours, disorients, and dissolves. It threatens to incorporate both subjects and other spaces into its lingering abjectivity, and haunt them if they ever leave. The study analyses how prison inscribes social fears on flesh, as well as what ghosts this flesh-making conjures. The resulting view is one of a sticky, subject-dissolving prison that seeps into and disrupts the fabric of ordinary life, while also threatening to keep growing and devouring with indiscriminate insatiability.

Keywords: *Abject, Uncanny, Haunting, Monstrous-feminine, Prison Studies, Narrative Criminology.*

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I don't come from an academic background, but I do come from a supportive one. To make a long story short, I didn't really go to school the way you're supposed to. I switched schools a lot, stayed home a lot, and had a pretty low tolerance level for both colds and cruelties. All of this led to what has become one of my dad's favourite stories from my early school years: When teachers would ask my parents why I was absent, their counter would be to ask if I was falling behind in anything. No? Then what's the problem? School never had an answer outside of "she should be here because she should be here". I didn't know it at the time, but in hindsight I think that's what sparked my interest in the whys and wherefores behind notions of deviance and related systems of power. Among other things, my parents led by example in teaching me curiosity, integrity, creativity, and just the right amount of rebellion. As it turns out, these are useful qualities in academia. Who would've thought that enabling my reluctance to go to school would cause to me stay in school for as long as it would possibly let me? Mom, dad, this book is for you.

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CHAPTER 1

PRISON IMAGINARIES

Most people have never been imprisoned. Yet, we all have some idea of what prison is like. What do you think about when you think about prison? What do you picture? How does it look, sound, smell, or feel? Now, consider how much of the image you have conjured up is based on your encounters with prison in popular culture. Unlike many other places we are personally unfamiliar with, we still think we know a lot about what prison is like due to its popularity in pop culture and the media (see e.g. Carrabine 2008; Carrabine 2012b; Cecil 2015; Cheliotis 2012). But what stories are told and heard about prison? And how?

Prison influences, and is influenced by, our cultural, collective imagination, especially through its myriad depictions in art and literature (Carrabine 2012b; Garland 2012). The criminological interest in how crime and punishment is represented in popular culture has increased in the past decade (e.g. Carrabine 2008; Fiddler 2007; Fredriksson 2020; Steinmetz 2018; Young 2009). Studies have shown that popular culture is an intrinsic part of public perceptions of prison, to an extent where myths, tropes, and horror stories have come to be viewed as truths about prison (e.g. Cecil 2015; Cheliotis 2012; Fiddler 2011b; Fleisher & Krienert 2009). Prison, especially to those who have never been inside it themselves, has thus become a merger of fact and fiction. Such fictionalizations, moreover, are closely related to the Gothic. They convey fears and threats, and rely on horror iconography to do so (Garland 2012; Fiddler 2011b). The present study explores this grey area of factual fictions about prison through a close-reading of commercially published prison autobiographies. To analyse how prison is narrativized there,¹ this study uses a psychoanalytical

¹ To be narrativized, rather than narrated, relates to how space is created and ‘comes alive’ on the page. As such, it is more than a mere description of the space, although descriptions are part of narrativization.

approach drawing on the Kristevan abject—processes of boundary maintenance and transgression vis-à-vis otherness, and the Freudian uncanny—the unsettling of boundaries and unfamiliarization of the familiar.

PRISON AND (POPULAR) CULTURE

When it comes to prison's presence in culture, it has a particular history of relying on deliberate, and frightening, misinformation. A clear example of this can be found in its early architecture. The *architecture terrible* of 19th century prisons was designed to mirror the castles and dungeons of the then-popular Gothic novels and penny dreadfuls (Garland 2012; Fiddler 2011b). These buildings were artistically designed with the aim of conveying a fearful image of incarceration—to tell a specific, frightening story about what it meant to be imprisoned. To do this, the designs implemented horrific details such as chains, sharp spikes, and statues of tortured convicts (Garland 2012:259). The explicit aim of this design was to add fuel to the fires of public superstition, thereby inspiring new horror stories and making prison frightening to the public (Fiddler 2011b; Smith, C. 2009). In this way, the prison façade became a communicative, pop-cultural display modelled after a Gothic aesthetic: dark, gloomy, and threatening. By means of familiar horror iconography, people would know (or, rather, think they knew) what to expect from imprisonment. This form of projection has been explored as a form of phantasmagoria (Fiddler 2011a), where underlying collective fears and anxieties were projected onto an external surface. Over time, through prison's increasing presence as an imagined reality in art and culture, this “message of Gothic prison-ness” no longer needs “to be projected onto a façade. It exists as a place myth, stripped of an apparatus” (Fiddler 2007:204). Today, this is evident in how contemporary culture is filled with dark and dreary prison imagery (e.g. the true crime wave of the 21st century). Prison thus has a communicative function that is intricately bound up with pop culture and the collective imaginary. This broad, societal communication is a form of storytelling, be it through façades or narrative fiction.

As narrative criminologists have pointed out, “[t]he sharing of stories is an important part of the human condition” (Sandberg & Ugelvik 2016). Through stories in film and literature, “it is the dramatic depictions of the prison that convey the same messages as the Gothic façade [of the 19th century]” used to do (Fiddler 2007:193). The present study has a

cultural- and narrative-oriented criminological approach, and explores the stories prison tells: stories about belonging and otherness; deviance and normalcy; horror and haunting. It also explores how these stories unveil prison as an abject (i.e. concerned with boundary transgression and maintenance) and uncanny (i.e. uncertain, destabilizing, and ambiguous) socio-cultural institution bound up in processes of societal subject formation. The question of collective or societal subject formation centres on how society becomes what it is (through processes of exclusion, hierarchy, and haunting), and, for the purposes of this study, what role prison plays in this becoming.

Cultural criminology merges with narrative criminology through a shared, established interest in the stories we tell and how their socially constructed meanings underpin issues of crime and control, as well as the spaces they occur in (e.g. Ferrell 2013; Garland 2012; Hayward 2012). Because of their interest in storytelling and meaning-making, cultural-criminological enquiries often merge criminological, sociological, and humanistic research methods. As Sothkott states, “Cultural Criminology is primarily concerned, not with novelty for its own sake, but with re-shifting the focus of criminological enquiry in a more overtly humanistic direction”, in order to better explain “how popular vindictiveness and disgust for criminal transgression can sometimes encourage responses (both formal and informal) that are themselves unlawful” (Sothkott 2016:443; see also Valier 2008). In other words, it takes an interest in how the idea of *fighting* monsters is what *creates* monsters. The nascent and related field of ghost criminology has devoted its attention to how questions of (dis)appearance, (in)visibility and haunting figure into these questions of deviance and punishment (Fiddler, Kindynis & Linnemann, forthcoming), and how this is expressed in myriad cultural forms (e.g. Carrabine 2014; Fiddler 2011; Fredriksson & Gålnander 2020; Steinmetz 2018). Here, scholars have highlighted the importance of looking at how anxieties relating to belonging and otherness underpin (narrative) sense-making, and how these anxieties are distilled and dissolved through cultural discourses and imaginings (e.g. Fiddler 2007; Fiddler 2011; Sothkott 2016; Higgins & Swartz 2018; Steinmetz 2018). Explored within this field, prison’s abjection and uncanniness pertain to more than prison itself. They are also tied to questions about what, and how, societies that use prison fear, and prison’s role as monster or saviour in the stories about

deviance and normativity that society tells itself, about itself (cf. Garland 2012).

Manifestations of the same, gothicized prison story that was expressed by 19th century buildings are present in modern true crime stories, prison novels, and prison films (Cecil 2015; Duncan 1996; Fiddler 2007; Garland 2012). Instead of inscribing the story of imprisonment on prison façades, today's socio-cultural understanding of prison relies on written and filmic storytelling to paint the picture of what, why, and how prison *is* (Carrabine 2012b; Cecil 2015; Fiddler 2011b; Garland 2012). Effectively, the aforementioned 19th century prison exteriors made prison look like something abject and monstrous to proper, civilized society. Prison was thus visibly ejected from society as abject, while *simultaneously* being displayed for public view. It functioned as an embodiment of the meaning of imprisonment, aimed at eliciting—and designed based on familiarity with—gothic imaginaries and horrors (Garland 2012). Because of their play on the public's familiarity with horror, these prisons' façades also made for uncanny doubles. They doubled the dungeons and castles of horror stories in order to conjure up similar thoughts about what went on inside prison walls.² As such, this communicative display embodied a specific, gothicized meaning of punishment to the public eye. These buildings thus offer a clear example of how the abject and uncanny have been present in prison's storytelling, and how this storytelling merges the real with the imagined. This study focuses on a similar merger of fact and fiction: autobiographical novels. These too, as this study will show, retain prison's connections to a Gothic mode of storytelling. This Gothic mode is a collection of conventions, tropes, and iconographies that together form a Gothic aesthetic in the articulation of prisonness (cf. Fiddler 2007). As this study will demonstrate, this Gothic mode remains a foundational aspect of how Western societies continue to picture and understand 'real' prisons today—but through books, rather than buildings. The dramatization that goes into prison documentaries and autobiographical prison novels thus performs much of the same work as the 19th century prison façade: projecting collective anxieties in communicative, (mis)informative ways, using familiar horror tropes to make the image of

² Importantly, these notions were inspired by deliberately erroneous aesthetics. These designs were supposed to elicit a fearful response for deterrence purposes. In other words, the imprisonment practices behind these walls were not modelled on the same gothic sensibilities as the look of the buildings.

prison ‘realities’ come alive in the public imagination (Fiddler 2011a). As such, the underlying narrative that structures prison as an imagined reality remains built on a gothic foundation.

Furthering prison’s ties to gothicness and its many tropes and conventions, prison has also been depicted as a living tomb where imprisoned people persevere as ghosts, zombies or monsters, existing in a liminal state of living death (Smith, C. 2009). Prison is thus both a space of safety, keeping the monsters at bay—and a site of horrors, envisioned as a dark tomb for live burials. This theme of tombs and live burials where social undesirables exist in liminal states of living death renders prison uncanny; as the “buried, repressed, repository of social fears” (Fiddler 2007:198). Does prison make monsters, or contain them? Or was prison the monster, all along? What *is* a monster, anyway? And to whom?

Much like the aforementioned 19th century prison façades, autobiographical prison novels tend to present prison as a simultaneously monstrous, abject and haunting, uncanny space. This perpetual motion between abjection and uncanniness is the central tension that this study explores. In short, the present study investigates how prison’s storytelling function expresses generic as well as subject-formative societal anxieties about belonging and otherness, normalcy and deviance, as both abject and uncanny.

AIMS

The present study conducts a narrative analysis of 10 Western, commercially published prison autobiographies. It regards such novels as fictionalized (cf. Cecil 2015), as well as gothicized, and explores how prison is narrativized as a frightening, threatening, or unsettling space within these stories. As such, this study aims to explore how the fears and anxieties that prison conjures, distils, and directs are presented in this kind of literary text. However, the study positions these literary texts within the wider framework of what prison is, as a cultural, discursive imaginary. How do prison autobiographies create a sense of prisonness? To analyse this, the present study focuses on questions of how prison comes across as an abject and uncanny institution through storytelling.

While abjection deals with expelling that which the (collective or individual) self needs to exist in opposition to in order to maintain its sense of identity, the uncanny deals with the unsettling return of the repressed, or unfamiliarization of the familiar (Freud 1919; Kristeva 1982). This study

takes an interest in how prison is caught up in a perpetual exchange between the two. In short, this perpetual exchange is between how prison (and those it represents) is the abject, social death in relation to which the rest of society retains a sense of propriety, while this this sense is also constantly called into question by prison's uncanny unsettling of familiar categorisations (e.g. between good and evil; life and death; punishment and crime). As such, *how* prison expresses both generic and subjective social fears as abject and uncanny is one aspect of how prison performs a socio-symbolic, storytelling function.

Additionally, this study explores how this storytelling function relies on Gothic conventions and modes of literature. While this, too, actualizes questions of how abjection and uncanniness operate in autobiographical novels, the focus on gothicness pays less attention to subjective positions and more attention to how the gothic mode and its conventions operate in these autobiographies to create an image of what prison is and does (especially as a space that conflates life and death, or past and present). By focusing on both societal subject formation (e.g. through the abjection of deviance) and gothicized modes of storytelling, this study analyses how prison is narrativized in ways that express and handle societal fears, as well as how (stories of) prison is part of collective, societal subject formation processes.

Since the Gothic, much like Western legislation, has a history of prioritizing white-supremacist, heteronormative, patriarchal voices (see Halberstam 1995; Khair 2015; Wisker 2009), utilizing gothicness in prison studies, or criminology in general (e.g. Picart & Greek 2007), is inherently problematic for precisely the same reason it works—they both deal with the abjection of non-normative bodies, albeit in different ways. As such, a criminology that focuses on punishment's gothicness risks obscuring, rather than unveiling, the power dynamics that underpin both of these othering spheres (Halberstam 1995). This study's focus on subject formation processes is helpful here. While this study concerns itself with the abject and the uncanny in prison autobiographies, it does so with the awareness that commercially popularized notions of what is frightening (and why) derive from specific ideological perspectives (i.e. white-supremacist, heteronormative patriarchy). To capture this, the present study draws on critical studies of gothicness, intersectionality, and psychoanalysis in order to follow previous psychoanalytical sociology in “[making] the fictional, the theoretical, and the factual speak to one another” (Gordon 2008:26).

Research Questions

In order to explore prison as a storytelling, socio-cultural institution that expresses fears in both generic and subjective ways, this study is centred on the interlaced questions of:

- (i) how social fears and anxieties come to light and are dealt with through prison stories, and
- (ii) how prison's abject and uncanny properties are part of social, collective subject formation processes.

Taken together, the study deals with (i) how prison is depicted as frightening in generic as well as specific ways, and (ii) how specific, self-threatening things (e.g. queerness or deviance) are both repressed *and* returned through prison. These questions, moreover, are dealt with in different ways throughout the study's analysis in the empirical chapters. Chapters 4 and 5 are primarily concerned with questions of subject formation (as abjection), while chapter 7 is concerned with more generic social fears of past, present, and future, as well as life and death (as both abject and uncanny). Chapter 6 balances between the generic and the specific, exploring how haunting comes across in prison stories through questions of (non)normativity, (non)life, and (un)death.

By answering these questions, the study will contribute to prison studies' conceptualizations of what prison is and does in Western society (Carrabine 2012b; Moran 2012), especially in terms of what social anxieties are expressed through prison as a space that configures normalcy, belonging, deviance, and otherness. Moreover, this study's methodological approach will also contribute new narrative-criminological ways of using fictionalized stories to deepen the understanding of social facts (cf. Gordon 2008). Answering these questions also helps address the slippage between the real and the reel (cf. Fiddler 2007:195); between prison and prison stories. For the purposes of this study, commercial prison autobiographies are one aspect of, and way of insights into, what prison is as a whole—not because the genre provides truth claims, but because how society imagines prison through storytelling is an important part of the social work prison performs.

DISPOSITION

Chapter 2 consists of a review of the literature and theoretical framework relevant to this study. It discusses how narrative criminology can benefit from a psychoanalytical approach to literary texts, why the Gothic matters to prison studies, ways that prison scholarship has affinities with literary scholarship, and how abjection and uncanniness are especially suited to studies of punishment.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodological considerations that went into formulating the study. For example, the study's interdisciplinary approach as well as the relevance of gothic genre conventions for studies of prison narratives are discussed in-depth. This chapter also contains information about all the selected titles, and a discussion of the importance of separating authorial intent from narratorial voice.

The analysis is divided into four chapters. The first of these chapters, Chapter 4, deals with how prison is abject and boundary-defying. This chapter finds that prison is depicted in line with monstrous-feminine horror iconography, threatening to assimilate and devour those who enter it. This complicates the idea of prison as a masculine form of punishment (cf. Wacquant 2010), and to the idea of prison as a threat of exclusion (Sykes 1958; Crewe 2020). Moreover, this chapter finds that since prison is made sense of through monstrous-feminine horror iconography, this complicates the notion of prison as a rehabilitative, uterine space (Duncan 1996). All in all, this chapter finds that prison fits the definition of monstrous-feminine space, and that this has implications for how prison functions as part of societal subject formation processes.

Chapter 5 goes on to deal with how narrators eject other people as abject within prison, in order to maintain a sense of self and resist the assimilation explored in chapter 4. This chapter pays particular attention to monster-making and narratorial violence in processes of characterization, as well as to how queerness operates in this setting. The chapter finds that homophobic, racist, and/or misogynistic narration tend to merge in such processes of othering. Who (r)jects whom, and how? Importantly, such processes of abjection are carried out by punishers and punishees alike across the novels. Here, the novels are rife with narratorial attempts to situate a clean, proper, and righteous self by depicting other people, rather than the prison system itself, as less than human(e).

Chapter 6 explores prison's uncanniness further by delving into depictions of prison as a both haunted and haunting space. Here, prison is

investigated as a socially, physically, and temporally ambiguous space. This chapter finds that the past and the future unsettle the present, and that familiarity with domesticity becomes unsettled through familiarity with prison. This chapter traces how prison haunts, on both social and (inter)personal levels, within these narratives. Moreover, this chapter finds that death and escape function as a set of temporal twins, as they both entail leaving prison in terms of time and space. Here, people are both dying to leave and leaving by dying.

Finally, Chapter 7 explores prison with a particular emphasis on spatiotemporality by outlining a prison chronotope. The chronotope, in short, is a concept that captures the interconnectedness of time and space in literature. Here, the analysis focuses on how time is narrativized as spatial, at the same time as space is narrativized as temporal. The chapter finds that prison's spatiotemporality is labyrinthine, repetitive, sticky, viscous, and moves at a glacial pace—if it moves at all. Moreover, the chapter finds this to be true across and between both historical and individual layers of storytelling, and regardless of whether the perspective is that of a punisher or a punishee.

While each chapter has its own conclusions, the last chapter of this study, Chapter 8, is a concluding overview that weaves the findings of the empirical chapters together, in order to articulate the overarching story about prison that emerges throughout this study.

CHAPTER 2

THEORIZING THE FIELD

This study, while sociological, draws on psychoanalytical theories. Therefore, this chapter begins by tracing psychoanalytical thinking such as it pertains to a social, macro perspective. It will also relate these theoretical perspectives to relevant previous research, as well as to the field of narrative criminology. Like previous psychoanalytical studies of how prison is imagined and (re)presented in culture, this study takes “for granted such basic psychoanalytic tenets as the existence of the unconscious” and “the meaningfulness of all mental manifestations”, as well as their relations to the “significance of early life” (Duncan 1996:3). To pursue this, this study relies on Freudian and Kristevan thought (cf. Duncan 1996; Fiddler 2007; Gordon 2008). Broadly speaking, both of these schools of thought centre on questions of (un)desirability and (dis)allowance, and how they pertain to the unconscious. What is allowed, desired, or allowed to be desired? How do we treat that which is feared or forbidden? How does it treat us?

In Freudian psychoanalysis, the unconscious is much like the basement of a house. It is present, yet absent. Beneath it all, but always still *there* if you would care to look. The unconscious, moreover, is directed in two ways at once. Things might be repressed, and end up here. But things could also be projected from here, and take on different shapes once superimposed onto something out in the world (Royle 2003).³ Either way, these processes aim to safeguard the self. Repressing undesirable or forbidden traits or ideas, or projecting them onto someone else, serve to keep the self safe and protect notions of individuality and wholeness. Importantly, these concepts are applicable to individual as well as

³ While there is much to be said about the process of sublimation as another way of changing the undesirable into something more palatable, this study does not make use of this concept and thus will not discuss it here.

collective selves or identity formations. While this study does touch on the individual layer, it is primarily concerned with societal subject formation. Regardless of individual or collective selfhood, that which has been repressed or projected outwards can return, especially when we consider how its presence in the unconscious was never really lost. The metaphorical basement might flood, bringing things back up and forcing us to deal with them. These returns, or insights, can destabilize conceptions of both the self and the world. They force the self to face something, about itself or the world, that had hitherto been denied (Royle 2003; Trigg 2014). The undesirable intrudes, complicating notions of safe or desirable selfhood. The mechanisms of repressing and projecting things thus allow consciousness to avoid such uncomfortable confrontations; but only for a while. Whenever the basement floods or its door is opened, the ensuing confrontations can cause both crisis and catharsis. This study focuses on the former.

Kristeva's writing makes explicit mention of Freudian thought, while also drawing on Mary Douglas' concepts of purity and danger (Kristeva 1982:65). Douglas asserts that things like dirt and pollution are defined by "a particular system of classification in which [they] do not fit" (Douglas 2002:xvii). In other words, there is no objectively dirty or dangerous object. Nothing is *always* undesirable or forbidden—pollution is a point of view. For Kristeva, the system that decides what is undesirable, dirty, or dangerous is the patriarchal symbolic order. Essentially, this symbolic order is everything that makes up society; from language to laws. Moreover, anything that disturbs this "identity, system, order" becomes abjected: cast out, forbidden, in order to nullify the threat to said order (Kristeva 1982:4). Where the Freudian unconscious is a basement of lurking (un)knowns, the Kristevan abject is what we flush down the drain or throw in the trash. Elaborating on Freudian thought, Kristeva notes that there are processes at work in both collective and individual identity formation and their respective, unconscious drives that are "not sustained by desire" for what we want or who we want to be, but are rather "based on exclusion" (1982:6) and the elimination of what we do *not* want. Put simply, rather than working towards something desirable, constructing a self through exclusion is a process of ongoing separation from whatever is deemed undesirable (Kristeva 1982:8).

Since the symbolic order is explicitly patriarchal in Kristeva's writing, many of the things that become separated out—abjected—in such

societies are those associated with femininity and the pre-symbolic, maternal (1982:70). Socially, this separation also includes a “strong concern for separating the sexes” in hierarchical ways that support patriarchal control (Kristeva 1982:70). This also includes the exclusion of non-conforming gender projects, since hierarchical separation hinges on clear-cut, well-maintained classifications (and oppressions). This hierarchical aspect shows how, while revulsion and the drive to separate oneself from the undesirable “is a universal phenomenon”, it still “assumes specific shapes and different codings according to the various symbolic systems” at work in any given society (Kristeva 1982:68). In other words, the wish to separate and distance oneself from undesirable things might be a constant, but what societies define as undesirable, deviant, and abject is not.

Further drawing on Douglas, Kristeva emphasises how the potency of any kind of threat to rules and order is always proportional to “the prohibition that founds it”, because different social orders forbid and decry different things (Kristeva 1982:69). The more acute the wish to separate oneself from something is, the more punishable and abject that something becomes. Where Freudian thought would centre on the *repression* of threats to the self into (and their eventual return from) the unconscious, or *projection* of an unwanted trait onto something else (where it can take on new forms), Kristevan thought focuses more on the attempted *separation* between the self and the undesirable (and its threats to the self that it, too, might become dirty, polluted, and thrown away). Boundary maintenance becomes central to both of these schools, however. Boundaries maintain separation, both between self and other and between consciousness and repressed or projected unconscious threats. However, while the repressed or projected is always to some extent *still there*, perpetually emanating from the subject, Kristeva’s principle of exclusion hinges on (physical, social, emotional, or conceptual) separation and hierarchical distancing between the subject and the abjected. Where repressing and projecting something can make that something change, abjecting something is about getting away from it (or rather, getting it away from the self). As such, a psychoanalytical perspective can elucidate societies’ needs to (re)conceptualize things (and themselves) in order to repress or project its own violence (e.g. turning oppressive legislation or state violence into acts of defence), as well as their needs to separate their sense of self from things they perceive as forbidden, undesirable, or

dangerous (e.g. criminality, whatever that may be). These processes can be observed in legislation, social hierarchies, and in the ways societies talk about and make sense of themselves in terms of belonging, otherness, and punitiveness through pop-cultural narratives. While this study focuses on the latter, such pop-cultural narratives are still part of a wider, socio-political discourse. This chapter will discuss how pop-cultural narratives, such as prison autobiographies, fit into this broader frame, and how prison stories speak to the broader question of prisonness.

SURFACES AND DEPTHS

While narrative criminology has an interest in storytelling as a sense-making process, the field is largely focused on the surface levels of narration, and on individual narratives: how stories are structured; how their telling relies on certain tropes and conventions; and how storytelling activities help people make sense of things. Various concepts and metaphors have been invoked to study how narratives help structure comprehension, sense-making, and understanding. Psychoanalytical scholars have pointed out how such conceptualization and metaphors themselves are “never the work of one or more persons”, but rather a “kind of creative energy” that circulates, converges, and “crystallizes over various decades and national traditions” (Masschelein 2011:7). In other words, for a metaphor or concept to be helpful in sense-making, it needs to be commonly agreed on. This captures the societal layer of psychoanalytical study: even when it is applied to individual cases, it still considers collectively agreed upon concepts and their values (e.g. as (un)desirable). Narrative social studies often tend to dwell on the level of text, rather than delve into how and why certain concepts are what they are. Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, largely deals with what lies *beneath*. It is concerned with where, and how, conceptual binary oppositions like “visible/invisible, real/imaginary, dead/alive, past/present” are “both fluid and maddening” (Gordon 2008:42). A psychoanalytical approach in narrative criminology thus allows us to explore what stories eject, project, and repress through the concepts and metaphors they use, as well as how they express themselves on a textual level. As such, this merger explores the tensions between the surfaces and depths of storytelling.

Studying the unconscious aspects of storytelling leads sociological enquiries into a “field where things are *there and yet hidden*” (Gordon 2008:46, emphasis in original). While psychoanalysis has its roots in

diagnosing individual experiences, this is decidedly a social science as well (or, one could argue, primarily).⁴ The usefulness of psychoanalysis for studies of culture was emphasized by Foucault, who “identified a certain common field for psychoanalysis and social anthropology” (Gordon 2008:46), in articulating “the possibility of a discourse that could move from one to the other, [...] the double articulation of the history of individuals upon the unconscious of culture, and of the history of those cultures upon the unconscious of individuals” (Foucault 1973:379, quoted in Gordon 2008:46). The “social unconscious” that impacts both people and the societies they live in (Gordon 1997:197), in other words, is out there. In art and culture, we can see it on display (cf. Garland 2012; Kramer 2007).

The repressed tends to return from the unconscious in one guise or another. For example, the Western world might repress the implications of its enslaving behaviours of the past, only to have them return in the form of imprisonment practice (cf. Wacquant 2002). Psychoanalytical, sociological studies have summarized such forms of repression and return as *haunting*, which “is a constituent element of modern social life. It is neither premodern superstition nor individual psychosis; it is a generalizable social phenomenon of great import” (Gordon 2008:7). This sociological approach to psychoanalysis in general, and haunting in particular, is useful for studies of storytelling as societal identity-formation. It foregrounds how the stories we tell are bound up in collective, socio-cultural identity projects.⁵

Gordon notes how, sociologically, haunting can be understood as the place where “meaning—comprehension—and force intersect” (2008:194). The question of force, and resistance to it, points to the centrality of power hierarchies in the merger of sociological and psychoanalytical spheres. In order to pursue this, this study uses a feminist psychoanalytical perspective to focus on how socio-cultural anxieties come to light in storytelling. This enables a deep dive into how stories enable and express the repression, projection, separation from, and return of unwanted qualities, and how these mechanisms are impacted by power hierarchies. This merger of feminism, a literary approach to narrative

⁴ Freud’s reliance on literary works in formulating the uncanny speaks to this argument (1919).

⁵ Compare, for example, Hollywood filmmaking to Bollywood- or Nordic filmmaking; both the stories and the methods of storytelling speak to specific cultural contexts.

criminology, and psychoanalysis adds to confronting how criminology, like sociology more broadly, “needs a way of grappling with what it represses, haunting, and psychoanalysis needs a way of grappling with what it represses, society” (Gordon 2008:60). Moreover, this merger also answers calls for narrative criminology to “become better connected” to “related fields” in order to develop (Maruna & Liem 2020:140).

Feminist developments of psychoanalysis have focused on power hierarchies and how they have impacted the formulation of concepts such as abjection and uncanniness, as well as the overall field of psychoanalysis. While maintaining the focus on what lies beneath, feminist developments have added a focus on ideology and power, thereby also questioning what lies beneath the very formulation of psychoanalytical concepts. What is repressed, and from whose point of view, in Western society? How can it return, and what happens to whom when it does? Finding concepts (e.g. abjection) to be reliant on patriarchal notions of gender; race; or ability, feminist developments have reconfigured psychoanalytical thinking and moved it away from its heteronormative origins (e.g. Creed 1993; Kramer 2007). These developments evidence how “concepts are inherently dynamic and ever-changing” (Masschelein 2011:8), although feminist- and gender studies earliest adoptions of “often misogynistic” psychoanalytical ideas were met with some criticism (Elliot 1991:1). However, the merger of feminism and psychoanalysis has brought about an increased focus on how power shapes what societies repress, project, separate out, and become haunted by. With regards to hierarchical expressions of power in “any historically embedded society” (Gordon 2008:3), Gordon writes:

Power can be invisible, it can be fantastic, it can be dull and routine. It can be obvious, it can reach you by the baton of the police, it can speak the language of your thoughts and desires. It can feel like remote control, it can exhilarate like liberation, it can travel through time, and it can drown you in the present. It is dense and superficial, it can cause bodily injury, and it can harm you without seeming ever to touch you.

Gordon 2008:3

Power, then, governs an “ensemble of social relations that create inequalities” (Gordon 2008:4). It seeps through language, law, and literature, making all aspects of social life interconnected in their creation and maintenance of inequalities. The link Gordon makes between power and time has been made by others as well, especially when it comes to the question of who has power over time—their own as well as that of others

(Gluckmann 1998:243). That is, of course, a question that fits studies of imprisonment as an expression of power over (object) others. Gordon goes on to note that to study social life and its power hierarchies, especially in ways that can contribute to change, “we must learn how to identify hauntings and reckon with ghosts” (2008:23). This is where a psychoanalytical approach can provide insights into imprisonment that other frameworks cannot, as “the only human science that has taken haunting seriously as an object of analysis” (Gordon 2008:27). Having taken haunting as a social presence seriously, psychoanalysis is possessed of an attentiveness to “what is elusive, fantastic, contingent, and often barely there” (Gordon 2008:26). The following sections will dive into the question of how this has been, and will here continue to be, applied in prison research. First, the psychoanalytical framework will be narrowed down to focus specifically on abjection and uncanniness, since they are the central theoretical concepts used in this study.

THE ABJECT

In short, abjection has to do with horror, disgust, separation, boundary maintenance, and boundary transgression. The abject frightens because it disrespects borders and thus threatens individual, collective, social, or national identity. The abject is an undesirable thing, that “disturbs identity, system, order”, and “does not respect borders, positions, rules” (Kristeva, 1982:4). In her foundational work on abjection, Kristeva describes abjection, which is the process of ejecting the abject to separate from it, as a response to threats of defilement and disorder. The abject is ejected in a process of boundary maintenance meant to protect identity (Kristeva 1982:69). As such, it is not surprising that this concept has been adopted by studies of prisons and punishment (e.g. Valier 2002).

The abject, in short, causes fear and disgust by highlighting the fragility of (individual or collective) borders. Abject horror in culture, therefore, often relies on gory images of physical violence, since they foreground the fragility of both bodies and proper behaviours. This reliance on fearful imagery is not restricted to the fictional sphere, but is echoed in the “insistent recourse to gory images within gothic penalty” as well (Valier 2002:333). Responding to such horrors, abjection—keeping threatening things away—acts as a safeguard. Consider, for instance, the act of looking away from frightening imagery, or processes of legislating in ways that allow society to lock up its undesirables, away from public

view. By ejecting that which frightens or disgusts as abject (that is, as being opposed to the self), identity (and propriety) is maintained (Kristeva 1982:2). Dead bodies; spoiled food; and bodily fluids are all abject, as they highlight the subject's own materiality, mortality, and the frailty of its borders. As this study will show, this kind of horror iconography is common in prison depictions (see also Cecil 2015; Fleisher & Krienert 2009; Smith, P. 2008).

Importantly, abjection is not conceptually restricted to individual borders, but rather the borders of an individual body can be substituted with those of society as a whole, since abjection is coextensive “on the individual as well as the collective level” (Kristeva 1982:68). Noting this, Valier suggests that abjection’s “powers of horror are an important feature of contemporary punitive populism, and index the place of emotion and fantasy in both institutional practices and political life” (2002:320). Moreover, Valier situates the abject as criminologically relevant by noting that “Kristeva wrote that premeditated crime, cunning murder and hypocritical revenge are especially abject”, since they emphasize a “display of the law’s fragility” (2002:333). More importantly for the purposes of this study, “both crime and vengeance [e.g. in the form of imprisonment] index the fragility of law” (Valier 2002:333). In this light, prison *is* the abject **other**, as well as houses it. Studies vary in their textual presentations of abject otherness. Some denote this particular Other with a capital O, to separate it from other uses of the word. This study is primarily interested in otherness as abjection, as a marker of distance and difference. Because of this, this particular form of **other** will henceforth be marked by using a different font from the rest of the text. This textualizes it as an abject **other** by emphasizing its enforced, visible, and oftentimes artificial difference from its surroundings.

Discussing the importance of visibility for abjection, Kramer suggests that abjection does more than expel the abject *from* the subject. It also delivers the abject *to* the subject for observation (2007:121). This is especially important for considerations of abjection in culture. By both distancing and displaying the abject, such as through images of violence, both the abject **other** and the self's supposed superiority is made visible. We can choose to look at the mess in front of us from a position of safety, thereby seeing our own individual wholeness as a contrast to the abject's lack thereof. To view the abject on display is to cement difference and superiority through the act of observation (Kramer 2007:121). This

protects the borders of identity by providing the (collective or individual) subject with a visible, visibly abject, counterpart it can compare itself to. When transferred to the prison, the idea of imagining and depicting it as abject implies that society provides itself with an “image of abjection” that normative, conformist society can regard itself as superior to from the safety of the spectator’s seat (cf. Kramer 2007). Thereby, prison not only serves to horrify, but also to provide an unfortunate **other** that the rest of society can regard itself as better than. This is further exemplified by how society’s professional middle class “distinguishes itself as good” by “undertaking to reform” the underprivileged, abjected **other** through imprisonment (Hörnqvist 2013:98), while simultaneously perpetuating the need for this (i.e. cementing abjection) by articulating most of the prison-narrative distributed in the media (2013:90).

Literary depictions of prison similarly further its abject status by displaying it for public view in the role of the **other**. In order to eject prison as abject, society has marked it as an undesirable destination for its proper, conforming members. This has been accomplished through the architecture and placement of prison buildings, as well as through myths regarding its functions (Garland 2012). For instance, the architecture terrible of 19th century prisons served to mark prison as a site of abject horror to the public. Inspired by the castles and dungeons of gothicity, they were covered “with spikes, draped chains, and statues of convicts” (Garland 2012:259). Another expression of the prison as abject can be found in its more distant placements; building prisons on the outskirts of towns or in inaccessible locations physically ejects them from the rest of society. Placing them in inaccessible, yet visible locations also underscores them as abject in the way Kramer outlined: we can see them in the distance, and thereby see our own supposed superiority *for not being there* (cf. Kramer 2007).⁶ Presenting prison as a monstrous **other** to the ‘safe’, ‘proper’ buildings around it, prison is thus visibly ejected from society as abject. For society to define and differentiate itself from prison in this way, be it through façades or fiction, has been framed as a prerequisite for the threat of imprisonment to have a chance of working as a deterrent (Smith, C.

⁶ One clear example of this is Alcatraz, situated on an inaccessible yet clearly visible island in San Francisco. The abject is thus kept on the other side of the water, but always in view.

2009:55). Keeping prison abject is thus part of its intended purpose and design.

Any display of prison (in pop-culture or in cities) as a real-life horror-story allows normative society to maintain a sense of propriety by looking at it, since it (and the population it houses) thus becomes an abject, inferior **other** by comparison (cf. Kramer 2007). Prison thus serves as a reminder of the *boundary between* selfhood and otherness to the rest of society. Another, perhaps surprisingly related, discussion of how the abject **other** and the boundaries between it and the self can be displayed for public view can be found in Bronfen's writing, where she outlines how tombstones function as a social fetish. She maintains that the West's "cult of tombs is a fetishisation of death, for the tomb is *both* a representative sign of the beloved family members that the living have lost *and* a preservation of the deceased by virtue of the worship of an object reminding of them" (Bronfen 1992:87, emphasis added). Here, the abject (dead bodies) is both covered up and emphasized. Societies' lack of these people, and their turning into dead, abject **others**, is *both* denied (we can still visit them) *and* emphasized (tombs highlight their death). As a result, their absence is highly present. The religious overtones and rituals associated with tombstones also means that their duality, emphasizing yet denying death, is meant to fuel worship *of the object itself*, and the ideas it inspires about life both before and after death. It is meant to inspire virtuous living in its onlookers, to keep them on the right path. Moreover, the duality of tombstones' also means that they symbolize both control (of how we memorialize our dead) and the utter lack of control (everybody dies).

The role of prison in Western culture bears similarities to this. Like the tombstone, it expresses dual, opposite things: (social) life and death, absence and presence, control and the lack thereof. Here, too, the abject—imprisoned, rather than dead, people, envisioned as dangerous deviants separated out from the rest of society—is both covered up and emphasized. Prison symbolizes *both* the control and containment of deviance *and* the lack of control that necessitates it. It embodies both the problem and the attempted solution. Like Bronfen's tombs, it thus exhibits the same duality surrounding (lacks of) control. Also like the tombstone, prison inspires rituals and worship, but of social, rather than religious, laws and ideals (cf. Garland 2012). They thus share the symbolic function of attempting to inspire conformism to a certain set of rules. Moreover, prison-displays also exhibit the same absence/presence duality as

tombstones do, by simultaneously hiding the realities of imprisoned people away (i.e. socially burying them), yet also showcasing them as frightening or saddening examples of abject otherness for the purpose of entertainment or cautionary tales (i.e. providing a symbolic object that the public can interact with in lieu of the real thing). Furthering the link between tomb stones and prisons as fetishistic objects that both display and cover up the same lack—disappearances of people from ordinary society—studies have shown that prison itself is often likened to a tomb where civil death mirrors physical death (e.g. Fiddler 2007; Garland 2012; Smith, C. 2009). This study will return to how prison narratives present these dualities in the forms of life and death, (un)control, and noticeably present absences later on, in terms of both abjection and haunting.

For the purposes of exploring how prison is abject, the gendering at work in processes of abjection is also important (Kristeva 1982). In particular, the patriarchal notion of femininities as frightening is one aspect of how the abject can function as a framework for exploring prison's socio-cultural functions. In patriarchal societies, femininity is viewed as abject: dirty, defiling, and in need of repression (Kristeva 1982:70). But why, and how? In part, this is due to the generative powers associated with maternity, and to castration anxieties that depend on a presupposed, prior sameness—before femininity was forcibly made inferior. As such, this could happen to masculinity, too. However, these views have been critiqued, elaborated on, and reframed. Expanding on the idea of femininity and maternity as abject to patriarchy, Barbara Creed critically elaborates on Kristevan and Freudian thought on these matters in her discussion of abject femininity (re)conceptualized as the monstrous-feminine (1993:8).

The Monstrous-Feminine

In developing a monstrous-feminine framework for cultural studies, Creed critiques the traditional view of femininity as abject. She argues convincingly that psychoanalysis' established notions of "woman as monstrous in relation to her reproductive functions work to reinforce the phallogocentric notion that female sexuality is abject" (1993:151). In other words, these notions perpetuate the idea that heteronormative masculinity is the norm, and everything else is some form of deviation from that norm. In order to step away from these patriarchal logics, she emphasizes that a reworking of *why* femininity is frightening in patriarchal societies serves to

thoroughly question the view that femininity equates passivity or victimhood (1993:151). In Creed's view, woman is terrifying not because she *is castrated*, but rather because she *castrates*. This makes womanhood the agent, not the example, of punishment. As Creed puts it, this reworking "undermines Freud's theories that woman terrifies because she is castrated and that it is the father who alone represents the agent of castration within the family" (1993:151). The feminine in general, and the maternal in particular, is thus frightening because it threatens to punish—not because it presents an example of what happens if punishment is acted out (by patriarchy).

How, then, does the feminine enact castration as a form of punishment? Creed explains how the feminine wields the power to devour—to castrate through incorporation—and that this anxiety is expressed in art and culture through the monstrous womb (1993:157). As it relates to prison, this poses a dark counterpoint to how previous studies have regarded prison as uterine and nurturing (Duncan 1996; Fiddler 2007). This will be central to the present study's analysis of what prison is and does in the Western cultural imaginary, especially in Chapter 4.

The monstrous womb motif hinges on enclosed, threatening spaces and bodily corruptions. The human subject in general, and the individualistic subject in particular, thus fears the maternal as a site of castration via incorporation, since this entails dissolution, assimilation, and the loss of individuality. Basically, the monstrous womb represents a threat of return to the pre-symbolic: a womb spat you out, so it can eat you back up and turn you into nothing. As such, this threat is particularly palpable to patriarchal ideologies that premier the 'self-made man' and related, hyper-individualistic forms of subjectivity and selfhood (Creed 1993; Halberstam 1995).

The maternal castrator, as exemplified by the monstrous womb motif, also emphasizes (sexual) difference, instead of providing a false sense of (sexual) sameness *prior* to a castration of femininities carried out by masculine forms of punishment. This means that the monstrous-womb motif expresses fears tied to uncontrollable agency: it was not man-made and does not abide by man-made rules. Viewed as monstrous-feminine, prison can be understood as a site that devours, since its form of punishment is to engulf and incorporate imprisoned people into itself. Exploring prison through a monstrous-feminine framework also ties into questions of prison actualizing anxieties about control. Prison embodies

control over undesirable social elements, but to what extent is it controlled? Are we sure what prison is and does after many years of expansive, increasingly punitive legislations? Do Western societies have the social powers required to abolish prison, or will it continue to expand in spite of all the studies showing its many detriments?⁷ How agentic is prison, what pull does it have as a symbol that controls, rather than is controlled by, popular opinion and legislation?

Viewing prison through the monstrous-feminine lens also allows for a counterargument to the notion of imprisonment as exclusion (Sykes 1958; Crewe 2020). Prison contains, encloses, and devours. As such, rather than threatening exclusion from the clean and proper, imprisonment threatens incorporation into the abject **other**. When faced with a gaping, toothy monster, we do not worry about what we leave behind—we worry about being swallowed. As it pertains to prison, this threat arguably becomes especially troubling to the ruling and punishing, rather than ruled and punished, classes. This is because ruling classes have undertaken to define and keep the abject **other** on the other side of the border. Alternatively, as is the case with imprisonment, behind bars (cf. Barker 2013; Hill Collins & Bilge 2016; Hörnqvist 2013). Becoming part of that same abject entity (i.e. imprisoned) is thus in direct opposition to these classes sense of self. Such fears and anxieties about belonging to the wrong side of the fence that keeps the abject in place can be observed in fictionalized prison depictions. This study will explore how these classed (as well as gendered, racialized, aged, heteronormative, etc.) anxieties come to light in the narration of prison space.⁸

Since abjection deals with societal as well as individual boundaries, the monstrous womb motif is often expressed metaphorically in art and culture, through enclosed spaces and their enforcements of punishment (Creed 1993:55). This allows individual, social, and spatial borders to mirror one another in informative ways. Moreover, this metaphorical tie between enclosed spaces and the monstrous-feminine makes Creed's reasoning applicable to studies of prison depictions, since these depictions

⁷ This actualizes questions of welfare, however that discussion falls outside of the scope of the present study.

⁸ This perspective will be more relevant to some analytical themes than others. The question of individual, narratorial subject-formative anxieties is explored most fully in Chapter 5. See also Chapters 4 and 6, focusing more on how individual and collective subject-formative anxieties coextend.

fit neatly into the definition she offers of monstrous-feminine spaces as enclosed and threatening to selfhood. This definition clearly resonates with classic prison scholarship on prison's enforcement of several deprivations of autonomy (Sykes 1958).

Moreover, the monstrous-feminine space, often envisioned in popular culture as a haunted house, hidden room, cell, or claustrophobic basement, is horrifying "because it contains cruel secrets and has witnessed terrible deeds" (Creed 1993:55). These spaces also frighten due to their appearance; they are "dark, dank, empty, slimy, mysterious, foreboding", and tend to have (violent) crimes associated with them (1993:55). Added to this, these spaces also frighten due to their engulfment and entrapment of those who enter them. This is clearly all applicable to depictions of prison. As such, these traits make the monstrous-feminine applicable to studies of how prison is rendered abject in culture as an enclosed space of devourment.

Through abjection's coextension of borders of the individual and societal body, the image of the enclosed space becomes haunted by anxieties pertaining to the archaic mother and monstrous womb (Creed 1993:55). Furthermore, the "symbolization of the womb as house/room/cellar or any other enclosed space" is a set of conventions that are largely achieved through horror iconography (Creed 1993:55, see also Fiddler 2007:198). For example, bodily fluids like blood are some "of the most common images of horror associated with the [enclosed space]" (Creed 1993:55), as they drip from walls or spread across floors. As horror iconography, such corporeal waste also relates to how prison is imagined as a bloody, filthy "catacomb of rejection" (Smith, C. 2009:5), which perpetuates the idea of prison as abject to the societal body. Chapter 4 will elaborate on how horror iconography presents prison as a monstrous-uterine, enclosed space.

The monstrous womb motif also entails a controlling, incorporating force that brings about a deprivation of "autonomous identity" (Creed 1993:47). This furthers the ties that the monstrous-feminine has with classic prison scholarship on the deprivations of autonomy (Sykes 1958). As such, the monstrous-feminine is suited to further explorations of *hom*, and to what extent, prison is a site that deprives autonomy (Sykes 1958). For instance, Creed shows how those incorporated by the monstrous womb have their identities effaced to the point where it "is not that their identity has sunk irretrievably into the

mother's; their identity is the mother's" (Creed 1993:47). As such, the monstrous-feminine is tied to fears of having one's identity swallowed up, dissolved, and replaced. In this light, prison becomes a devouring deprivation of autonomy, as well as personhood itself, through dissolution. Relatedly, prisonization could be conceptualized as an instance of imprisoned people's identities being "the [abject] mother's" (Creed 1993:47), in other words becoming prison-identities; extensions of prison as a result of the assimilation it entails.

Furthering the link between prison scholarship and the monstrous-feminine, we might also note how Sykes defined prison as "a fort to keep the enemy within rather than without" (Sykes 2007:3). Since fears regarding prison are construed as threats to society from inside, rather than outside, its borders, this aligns social anxieties regarding prison with anxieties about the womb and its simultaneously generative and devouring power (Kristeva 1982:77). It exists within the (societal) body, but what manner of abjection does it generate (alone or through assimilation)? What does it spawn? Anxieties pertaining to creation from within are tied to the maternal and the archaic mother who "conceives all by herself"; without need of a male parent or co-creator (Creed 1993:27). Both Chapters 4 and 5 will explore the question of what prison conceives, and how.

Since the prison threatens to devour, rather than to penetrate or explode apart, its particular form of punishment is that of the maternal castrator. It is the womb that threatens to devour, not the phallus (Creed 1993:157). Phallic forms of penalty are, instead, sharp, stabbing, intrusive, and explosive (Creed 1993:157). The reading of prison as abject in this sense therefore provides space to interrogate established notions of imprisonment as state re-masculinization (e.g. Wacquant 2010). Moreover, such an interrogation shows how the notion of masculine punishment is more in line with prison's stabbing, explosive predecessors. The relative youth of prison, historically, might account for part of how it has continued a tradition of conceptualizing all punishments as equally phallic:

[W]e have grown so accustomed to seeing people locked up that it seems perfectly natural to us: the prison presents itself as an indispensable and immutable organisation, operating since times immemorial. In reality, up until the end of the eighteenth century, places of confinement served mainly to detain those suspected or found guilty of crimes to await the administration of their sentence, which consisted then in various corporeal

punishments (whipping, pillorying, burial, branding or mutilation, being put to death with or without torture), supplemented by banishment and condemnation to forced labour or to the galleys [...] Depriving people of freedom became itself a punishment, and the criminal sentence par excellence (to the point that it has become difficult to conceive or implement other penal sanctions without them appearing insufficiently severe) only with the advent of the modern individual presumed to enjoy personal freedom, imbued with a natural right to bodily integrity that could be removed by neither family nor state, except for the most serious motives.

Wacquant 2001:402-3

In light of monstrous-feminine devourment, Wacquant's account of prison lends itself to a view of it as an enforced return to the pre-symbolic. Through its revocation of personal freedoms, prison returns those it imprisons to a pre-individual, pre-autonomous state (cf. Sykes 1958). Prison removes personal freedom, thereby returning people to a pre-symbolic state where they had not yet entered into the symbolic order: clean, proper, patriarchal society. However, the version of the pre-symbolic embodied by prison is a corrupted, warped version of this child-like status. A pure return to child-like status is impossible, and as such prison's facsimile through devourment (or, in Sykes' vocabulary, deprivation) turns monstrous.

Creed's reworking of the whys, hows, and wherefores of abject femininities is important for the present study. It helps articulate how prison punishes (cf. Sykes 1958; Wacquant 2010), and how it is rendered abject in Western culture (cf. Smith, C. 2009; Valier 2002). Doing so, this framework can also be used to question established notions of imprisonment as a masculine form of punishment—The Father laying down the law (Wacquant 2010:2-3). Since prison is an enclosed space that incorporates those it imprisons (cf. Fiddler 2007), it is in line with the monstrous womb. As such, it threatens and frightens because it wields the power to *castrate by incorporation*, thereby inflicting loss of autonomy through the dissolution and undoing of individuality. In this light, prison is not merely an example of victimization by a superior (state) masculinity. It is monstrous-feminine. Imprisonment thus cannot re-masculinize and re-empower a disobeyed, patriarchal state (Wacquant 2010:2-3). It also does not threaten to exclude, as much as it threatens to violently include as a form of punishment. As an abject space, prison thus comes across as a threatening, devouring site that both is and creates the abject. This relates

to how release from prison has been conceptualized as post-rehabilitative rebirth, as well.

Undeath and Rebirth

Creed notes how the monstrous-feminine, enclosed space entails a “reworking of the birth scenario”: if subjects eventually do emerge from it, they do so “bursting forth into the unknown” (1993:56). As such, the monstrous womb possesses horrifying devouring as well as generative powers. The conceptualization of haunted spaces as symbolic of the womb thus entails an infantile status and potential for subsequent rebirth for those who dwell there—a notion easily tied to discussions of prisoners as infantilized through their loss of autonomy (Sykes 2007:75). However, unlike in previous studies of prison as uterine, the possible rebirth explored in this study is not framed in a positive, reformatory light (cf. Duncan 1996; Fiddler 2007). Instead, it is abortive, problematic, or frightening, since it entails being ejected into a new, unsettling environment after a dissolving, unbecoming—rather than developing or nurturing—experience. This also raises the question of what manner of bodies prison produces and ejects back into society. Here, the monstrous-feminine becomes a darker counterpart to how previous prison studies have envisioned prison as a nurturing, uterine space (Duncan 1996; Fiddler 2007). By contrast to the nurturing and thereby creating uterine space, the monstrous womb *unmakes*, and ejects the abject, messy results of this unbecoming back into society.⁹

Smith discusses abject prison imagery in a way that ties prison to both abject and uncanny notions of haunting (2009). He notes how prison has been described as an enveloping darkness, a “dungeon-tomb” where “cadaverous creatures exiled from the world” haunt its halls, “persisting as ghosts or monsters in a carceral living death” (2009:28). This equation of incarcerated and cadaverous bodies is interesting from a Kristevan point of view, since she posits the corpse as the ultimate in abjection:

The corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, I is expelled . . . How can I live without border?

Kristeva, 1982:3

⁹ See Chapter 4.

With this in mind, the already problematic implications of imprisonment as a form of civil death take on an additional layer. Imprisoned people, in this light, become socially determined as the ultimate abject, the most sickening waste, that the societal body can produce. Moreover, the gothic aesthetics of invoking such imagery of living death is clear (see Valier 2002). Through such imagery, prison becomes conceptualized as a space that turns those it imprisons into animated corpses, only to enact “harrowing forms of resurrection” (Smith, C. 2009:61; 209).

Envisioning prison as a monstrous space of living death and subsequent resurrection makes prison the part of the societal body that turns people into “cadaverous creatures” (Smith, C. 2009:28), and then ejects these creatures back into society. As such, prison is not only frightening because of the conceptualization of imprisoned people as the living dead; but also due to how prison space *turns them* into abject monstrosities. This is a monstrous-feminine process, beginning with devourment, followed by unbecoming, and culminating in monstrous rebirth. The present study will analyse how the novels narrativize both this process and narrators’ resistance to it.

However, prison is still largely motivated by means of positive, rebirthesque, or rehabilitating aims (Garland 2012; Smith, C. 2009). In this view, prison is envisioned as containing and rehabilitating, rather than creating, monstrosity. This protects society from guilt or doubt as to not only what kind of prison it has created, but also about what kind of society is created through the use of prison. Jewkes’ study of how prisoners are constructed as **others** sheds more light on this, by noting how this othering makes “some of the most punitive actions seem both ordinary and acceptable” (2007:454). In other words, prison’s own monstrous and monster-making properties become domesticated through arguments that paint it as a necessary evil. As such, the view of criminalized **others** as abject enables the powers that punish to deny their own monstrosity and the negative social effects of imprisonment (Higgins & Swartz 2018).

This denial—or repression—is key to maintaining the border between a clean and proper self and a monstrous, abject **other** (Douglas 2002; Kristeva 1982). Framing marginalized groups as abject through the use of “bestial language” (Higgins & Swartz 2018:92), which in itself is part of their marginalization, thereby enables state violence to come across as rehabilitative, or as “self-defence or a necessary act for progress” (Higgins & Swartz 2018:102), rather than as monstrous, abusive, or discriminatory.

This exemplifies how prison is understood as both a threat (that creates monsters) and a solution (that contains them), caught up in social processes of boundary maintenance and dissolution. This study is concerned with the former, both in terms of how prison creates monsters among subjects and in terms of how prison itself is monstrous.

The attempted boundary maintenance that prison is part of can collapse into an uncertain, unstable liminality. This leads us to the next section, that will delve into a discussion of prison as an uncanny institution. Where abjection deals with boundary maintenance, uncanniness can instead be said to deal with the impossibility of clear categorization. The uncanny concerns itself with “the familiar, unfamiliarized” (Hurley 2007:141); it concerns things and experiences that cause doubt as to what we thought we knew. For example, the studies discussed above exemplify how ideas about prison as a rehabilitative space aimed at betterment can be uncannily unfamiliarized in light of prison as a space of abjection. Moreover, the uncanny does not only cause doubts about what we thought we knew, but also about our very ways of knowing, categorizing, and structuring the world.

THE

UNCANNY

Abjection and uncanniness are linked in significant ways. For one thing, they both deal with fear and anxieties relating to (failed) separation and categorisation. For another, something that has been ejected as abject can return to unsettle or frighten as something uncanny. This would then disturb abjection’s attempts to solidify boundaries. Where the abject deals with boundary maintenance and transgression, the uncanny can be summarized as dealing with unfamiliarization. Notably, this unfamiliarization can unsettle spatial, conceptual, as well as temporal definitions. To make matters worse, these are often unsettled all at once. In short, what makes things uncanny “is precisely the way they subvert the distinction between the real and the phantasmatic” (Castle 1995:5). Consider, for example, the reveal of someone as a ghost or automaton in horror films.¹⁰ These figures are not just unsettling in the moment of the

¹⁰ A classic example of such an automaton-reveal can be found in Ridley Scott’s *Alien* (1979).

reveal, but because *they were there all along*, without our knowledge (Trigg 2014:81).

Uncanny encounters can be had with environments, as well as bodies. Here, we might consider spaces of endlessly repetitive, unchanging routine, or the twists and turns of inescapable labyrinths. Such spaces unsettle both our notions of what something really is and, more importantly, our ability to judge and assess things (like time, space, and the people around us) accurately. Be it with bodies or spaces, these kinds of encounters destabilize the boundaries that keep *un-* away from *familiarity* or even *reality*. As Castle points out, such uncanny encounters “[plunge] us instantly, and vertiginously, into the hag-ridden realm of the unconscious” (Castle 1995:5). This leads to a working definition of the uncanny for the purposes of this study: it unsettles hitherto stable definitions, categories, and ways of knowing, causing uncertainty as well as fear (Trigg 2014; Withy 2015).

The origin of uncanniness as an analytical framework is often, albeit not exclusively, attributed to Sigmund Freud, who published his influential work on this concept in 1919. There, he states that the uncanny “belongs to the realm of the frightening” (2003:123), but more importantly it “is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed” (2003:148). This highlights how uncanny things are not new, but returning or repeating. Moreover, the uncanny is about the collision between the remarkable and the mundane: about “being haunted in the *world of common reality*” (Gordon 2008:54, emphasis in original). As such, it is well-suited to studies of socio-cultural spheres such as political discourse or literary texts. Since the Freudian uncanny was largely articulated using Freud’s own close-readings of literary works (such as Hoffmann’s *The Sand-Man*), it is not surprising that the uncanny has become popularized as a theoretical concept in literary- and cultural studies (Castle 1995:10; Royle 2003; Trigg 2014).

As noted above, the uncanny unsettles subjects by bringing about a return of the repressed or an unfamiliarization of the familiar. Uncanny objects or events are thus inherently liminal, since they are *simultaneously* familiar and unfamiliar (Janicker 2015; Royle 2003; Trigg 2014; Withy, 2015). We have known them before, and now we know them in a new light. This new light, however, emphasizes how we did not know them as well as we thought we did in the first place. This actualizes the question of

what else we do not know as well as we think. Cue anxiety. Because of this duality, the uncanny is often creeping, eerie, and haunting, rather than shocking or visceral, which is more common in the realm of abjection. That said, much like abjection deals with expulsion, the uncanny deals with repressing or denying things that pose a threat to a subject's sense of self. We need things to make sense, and in order to do so they cannot be *both* familiar and unfamiliar. Cue repression. Taken together, that which has been ejected as abject—or repressed to deny its unwanted similarities to the self—can return to haunt as something uncanny. This applies to both personal and collective, societal phenomena.

In terms of the societal layer, Jorheim notes that sometimes, something might *appear* new, but was in fact “already there and only returns in a new guise” (Jorheim 2012:156). This means that history repeating itself might come across as newness or progress, when it is in fact merely a return or re-naming of something already there. As this study will show, enslavement and colonization remaining within imprisonment exemplifies this.¹¹ Valier ties this notion of remainders and returns to the “punitive turn” of the 21st century, figuring “the recent punitive ‘turn’ as a return of the repressed”, and notes that the repressed, in this case Western societies’ increasingly punitive legislations, is something that “returns *from within*” (Valier 2002:334). In other words, the ‘recent’ punitive turn is rather the return of past, punitive wishes to see punishments carried out, be it in the news or in town squares. Here, uncanniness is both spatial, from within, and temporal, as a return of the repressed—we thought we were moving forward, but we were moving in circles.

As temporal uncertainty, the uncanny can unsettle our sense of time in terms of history as well as the here-and-now. In the present, this can surface as uncertainties that render the passage of time, as well as ways of ‘making’, ‘gaining’, ‘doing’, ‘beating’, or ‘killing’ it obscure (cf. Corfield 2007:xv; see also Moran 2012). Questions of uncanny time, and the experience thereof, relates well to previous studies of the temporalities of imprisonment. Such studies have explored the passage (or non-passage) of time in prison through similar, albeit not explicitly uncanny, frameworks (e.g. Ferrell 2004; Rocheleau 2013; Steinmetz, Schaefer, & Green 2017). This study will turn its attention to such questions as well, particularly in Chapters 6 and 7.

¹¹ See Chapter 6, and aspects of Chapter 5.

Uncanny time, in short, blurs the lines between past, present, and future. It also complicates the idea of time passing in a linear sense, or at all, thereby replacing linearity with stagnation or circularity. In these cases, the temporality of uncanniness can just as easily surface through repetition; as a sense of having been here before, seen this before, or lived through this before (Royle 2003; Withy 2015). In these cases, the temporality of uncanniness can just as easily surface through repetition; as a sense of having been here before, seen this before, or lived through this before (Royle 2003; Withy 2015). In these cases, the temporality of uncanniness can just as easily surface through repetition; as a sense of having been here before, seen this before, or lived through this before (Royle 2003; Withy 2015). Such a sense of déjà vu can unsettle the familiar concepts of ‘past’ and ‘present’, or ‘old’ and ‘new’, themselves. As a result, the past and/or future, or their notable absence, can be keenly felt within and haunt the present. It is important to note that these hauntings can stem from both the future and the past, since this further highlights the temporal ambiguities of uncanniness. For instance, scholars have emphasized how both those dead and those not yet born can haunt and shape the meanings, developments, and inner workings of an institution (Royle 2003), and the present study will discuss how this relates to prison.

Another aspect of uncanniness as a temporal, as well as spatial, experience ties into expectations and familiarity with routine. Repetition can be one aspect of this, where predictability creates uncanniness through monotonous and seemingly automated, unthinking, and unfeeling practices. However, while too much familiarity with a routine can create uncanniness through things like déjà vu, breaks with familiarity can also be unsettling. Take, for instance, the process of reading. We expect words to appear after one another in sequences that make sense (Rimmon-Kenan 2002:45), *in ways that are familiar to us*, when and does occur not this feel we uneasy. This kind of uncanny encounter can also be a question of incomprehensibility, fo sgniht gnieb ylgnimees yrartibra ro lacinnesnon ni gnilttesnu syaw. Uncanny (un)predictability can also manifest through an unveiling of out of place-ness. This can manifest as odd disappearances, or

through finding

unexpected things

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When it comes to this study's analysis of prison autobiographies, the uncanny manifests in several ways. In addition to haunting and timelessness, seemingly endless repetition, interchangeable doubles, and eerie unpredictability will be shown as other ways that uncanniness is a key component of prison narrativization.¹³

Haunted Space and Prison Liminalities

In a sociological setting, haunting has been defined “a constituent element of modern social life” and a “generalizable social phenomenon of great import” (Gordon 2008:7). This study uses this notion of haunting to explore prison as an uncanny institution. How is it haunted? By what? And how does it haunt? To pursue this, the present study draws on how haunting has been defined in other studies of stories, as well as how it can be observed between the lines of previous criminological studies.

Furthering its liminality, the uncanny deals with both temporal and spatial liminalities in interlacing, inseparable ways. Uncanny, haunted space shapes time, while its time(lessness) controls the space. This actualizes the concept of timespaces, or spatiotemporality.¹⁴ These terms capture how time and space are coextensive. In cultural contexts such as films and literature, this coextension tends to turn up as haunted space. While both the past and the future can haunt present time (Royle 2003), haunted space has additional qualities. Studies of literary haunted space have shown that these timespaces capture how the uncanny is essentially a sense of being apart from the ordinary—in terms of being out time *as well as* out of place (Janicker 2015). Being returned to a pre-symbolic, monstrous-uterine space is one possible iteration of this type of haunted space (Creed 1993). Further adding to their non-ordinariness, haunted spaces are often difficult to define in terms of how large, deep, or long they are, in terms of where they are in relation to something (or anything) else, in terms of time spent there, and in terms of how they make sense. In short, haunted (and haunting) spaces are spaces apart from the ordinary in every conceivable way (Janicker 2015).

¹³ See chapters 6 and 7, in particular.

¹⁴ While it might be more common to write this out as “spatio-temporality”, that implies separation between these two realms. The point of this concept, however, *is that there is none*. As such, this study uses “spatiotemporal” throughout. The same goes for timespace, rather than time-space. Moreover, the interchangeability of these term underscores how neither time nor space is more important than the other, since these terms alternate the order in which the words are compounded.

Haunting, since it entails being out of place as well as time, is a useful tool for articulating and exploring how the lines between time and space dissolve in certain place-bound experiences. It is a form of spatiotemporal apartness, rather than a spatial apartness coupled with a temporal one. These are shifting spaces, where the past lingers, or the future intrudes, in unsettling ways. Haunted spaces, moreover, tend to subvert, corrupt, or mirror domestic spaces. Janicker emphasizes that “any space which is regularly used by, and thus bears the mark of, human occupants”, such as hotels, can essentially be marked as a domestic space. Domestic space is the most common setting for the haunted house motif, since haunting corrupts and subverts the safety otherwise associated with domesticity (2015:20, see also McKay 2020). As a result, their similarities to safety add to the unsettling, uncanny qualities of haunted spaces. In Chapter 6, this study builds on Janicker’s definitions of haunted space to explore how prison is narrativized as a haunted, as well as haunting, space apart from the ordinary.

Haunted spaces are liminal, since they merge space and time as well as safety and treat in inseparable ways. The relevance of haunted space for prison studies is further exemplified by how haunting is explained as temporary, “relative isolation” of subjects from the ordinary places and practices of society (Janicker 2015:21)—a description that arguably fits imprisonment. Moreover, the notion of haunted space also includes the enforcing or enabling of experiences that would be impossible in ordinary space (Janicker 2015:20), which is another description that fits imprisonment. Because of these defining traits, the spatiotemporal isolation that haunted space entails is a period of “being outside of society’s normal boundaries and confined to a space shrouded in mystery for those who do not share it” (Janicker 2015:21). With regards to prison, this shroud of mystery is evident in how, in lieu of real insights (Cecil 2015), prison is culturally imagined through Gothic conventions and “imagery of inmates as the living dead” (Smith, C. 2009:28, see also Cecil 2015; Garland 2012; Fiddler 2011b).

The notion of haunting has been used to explore unsettling and temporally ambiguous aspects of isolated and isolating spaces both in art and in physical spaces (Janicker 2015; McKay 2020; Royle 2003). Whether fictional or factual, these places have yet another thing in common: being marked by transition. A multitude of people occupy these spaces both simultaneously and over time (examples being hotels, homes, or schools),

going through the same motions. This gives rise to particular tensions stemming from the simultaneously crowded, lingering, and shifting nature of said space (Janicker 2015:122). This definition of haunted space is easily applied to prison. Additionally, the way that the concept of haunted space links several, similar places is also easily tied to the notion of total institutions. Goffman defines total institutions as places “of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable length of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life” (Goffman 1961:11). This definition has a lot in common with Janicker’s definition of haunted space. Like Janicker’s definition of haunted spaces (2015), Goffman defines total institutions as pushed away from ordinary space (Goffman 1961:11). Both concepts centre on isolation, removal from the ordinary, people within these spaces being like-situated due to the influence of the space, and impactful stretches of time being spent there. This sheds light on how, much like haunted space, the total institutions-thesis is arguably an uncanny concept. It merges attempts at boundary maintenance (by secluding people in spaces apart from the ordinary) with the failure of said attempts (these spaces and their routines are eerily similar to one another), and the subsequent, unsettling return of repressed similarities (between ‘object’ and ‘proper’ spaces and people).

While the concept of total institutions has been critiqued in terms of its usefulness for studying prison’s day-to-day realities, the same features that warrant criticism in that sphere might make it a better fit for questions of how prison (and other institutions) is imagined through culture. The notion of prisons as total institutions has been criticized because of “disjunctures between the theory and the actuality of imprisonment” (Moran 2014:36). But what of the imaginaries of imprisonment? Are there clear disjunctures between how imprisonment is culturally envisioned and the notion of total institutions, as well? It has been stated that the idea of total institutions is “fairly inaccurate as a portrayal of the structure and functioning” of prisons, since they are not as “cut off from wider society” as Goffman’s definition would suggest (Farrington 1992:6). However, this critique seems less applicable to the storytelling, communicative function of prison. Prison’s imagined realities instead seem to fit Goffman’s definition of total institutions, which is largely the same as Janicker’s definition of haunted space: as being apart from the ordinary, and marked by uncanny repetitions and spatiotemporalities. This will be discussed

more in-depth in Chapter 6, through this study's analysis of how prison haunts people and places around it.

Further adding to the reading of total institutions as uncanny, the way they are conceptually linked with one another through their similarities blurs their boundaries. As a result, total institutions are oxymoronically both pushed apart from the ordinary and blended together with each other. In the end, this blurs the line between 'ordinary' and 'apart' spaces, since few things are regarded as more ordinary or normative than the family home or domestic space, yet this too has been regarded as a total institution. This collapse of categorisation is one aspect of how uncanny, haunted space operates; by corrupting seemingly safe spaces, categories, or ideas (Janicker 2015). As such, haunting is a way of articulating the uncanny properties and processes at work in social institutions. Given how haunted space emphasizes unsettling and frightening things, it is an especially suited tool for studying social institutions associated with (past, present, or future) cruelties—such as prison. By building on notions of haunted space to explore prison as a haunting institution, this study thus also touches on the uncanniness of total institutions.

Since the uncanny pertains to the transgression and dissolution of (spatial, temporal, physical, or conceptual) boundaries, we might consider studies of prison soundscapes as hinting at yet another aspect of prison as an uncanny, as well as abject, institution. Studies of prison soundscapes have pointed out that “sound is a particularly powerful boundary-crosser” (Russel & Carlton 2020:296), and that this can have particular, unsettling effects in prison environments (see also Rice 2016). It can heighten a threatening atmosphere, distort, or complicate identifying its source due to a combination of open, echoing spaces and tight, isolating ones. This will be examined further in the present study, since the way sounds are described is one way that prison narratives can emphasize uncertainties, dissolution, and unfathomability.

Studies have also explored prison as a liminal site of boundary-crossing and blurred distinctions with regards to the mixture of freedom and captivity that occurs in visitation rooms (Comfort 2003; Moran, 2013). Here, the boundaries between captivity and freedom are shifting and difficult to define. In this sense, visiting rooms are uncanny since they unsettle seemingly clear distinctions between being (un)free. Noting that visitation rooms are designed to emulate homes, Moran highlights another uncanny feature of prison, albeit without labelling it as such (2013:344)—

by showing how visions of home haunt the space. A bed in a cell might fill the same basic function as a bed in a home, but their meanings are defined by their different settings. A zoomed-in view of a bed can be unfamiliarized if we zoom out, noting the room (*cell*) it is in, and the home (*prison*) it is part of. Haunted space thus twists and corrupts seemingly safe, domestic symbols, turning them into eerie reminders of the safety that is lacking. This shows how one aspect of prison's uncanniness lies in its unsettling similarities to other institutions. In this sense, it is both haunted and haunting. As haunted, it is filled with spectral traces of things like home or safety, as well as past, cruel misdeeds (both individual and institutional). As haunting, it can render other institutions uncanny through their unsettling and unwanted resemblances to prison (e.g. when comparing the similar practices of being in school to those of being in prison). Hereby, other spaces become haunted by spectral reminders of prison. In either case, prison dissolves boundaries between itself and things that might otherwise contrast it in multiple directions. This will also be discussed further in Chapter 6, through a discussion of uncanny doubles.

Apart from entailing unsettling spaces and eerily automated routines, which are clearly descriptions that fit prison, another staple theme of uncanniness is live burials. Live burials, too, can be expressed through haunted space, since they both isolate people in a timespace apart from the ordinary. For example, whatever is undertaken within haunted space generally lacks any impact on ordinary space, since it is separated from it. Lacking impact on ordinary space is here coextensive with lacking impact on, as well as being unable to live, ordinary life (Janicker 2015). As such, being in haunted space can be a form of live burial. As the name implies, live burials undo the boundaries between life and death. As was discussed previously in this chapter, this theme has been noted in prison studies where imprisonment has been configured as a form of live burial and civil death. This is due to its relative isolation from ordinary life as well as its connotations to civil death and resurrection. Being stripped of their citizen-status and locked away, imprisoned people become civilly dead (Smith, P. 2008; Smith, C. 2009). Along with infantilization and other deprivations of autonomy, civil death thus functions as one of the forms of social un-life imprisonment brings about (e.g. Garland 2012; Smith, P. 2008; Smith, C. 2009; Sykes 1958), which in turn ties into the forms of haunting prison can subsequently bring about.

Anxieties about the blurring of life and death have been culturally expressed in many ways. In addition to live burials, monsters like ghosts, zombies, and automatons are other examples of this boundary-blurring, since these figures tend to undo the life/death dichotomy itself (Freud 1919). They can be life-like in appearance and actions, yet they are not quite alive, at least not in the traditional sense. This liminality or not-quiteness is key to their unsettling, frightening capabilities. In short, they are both alive *and* dead, and because of this their existence disturbs our very ways of knowing dead from alive. Doppelgänger, or doubles, is another example of this. Doubling will be an important analytical tool when it comes to unveiling the uncanny in this study.¹⁵ Doubles have the ability to unfamiliarize the distinction between self and **other**, as well as life and death. The doppelgänger is explained by Freud as “persons who have to be regarded as identical because they look alike” (Freud 2003:141). In this light, the architecture terrible of 19th century prisons (as well as contemporary, cultural prison depictions that rely on the same horror iconography) can be regarded as a doppelgänger of the haunted castles of Gothic literature. This façade was designed to *double* haunted, Gothic castles. It was modelled to convey a “fearful, deterrent image of incarceration by means of horrific façades”, which was achievable by virtue of the public’s familiarity with gothic images of “dungeons, chains and abandonment” (Garland 2012:259). This invocation of terror through an intentional doubling of the imaginary castles and dungeons found in the Gothic literary canon thus made prison uncanny, in addition to its being abject in relation to the buildings around it. Here, prison’s uncanniness stems from the familiarity its onlookers would feel due to its, and their own, affinity with gothicity. As a result, fact and fiction could be *regarded as identical because they look alike*. Later, more modern prison architectures instead strived for anonymity and functionality. This superficial normalcy rendered prison uncanny in another way: through its similarity to any other building. Here, prison hides in plain sight. Realizing that something that looked like a school, factory, or apartment complex was a prison *all along* can thus actualize fears and anxieties about what lurks *within* ‘proper’ spaces (cf. Trigg 2014).¹⁶ In this case, its benign appearance shifts out of place and catches a different meaning if onlookers link its familiar,

¹⁵ See Chapter 6.

¹⁶ This also exemplifies the uncanny properties of the concept of total institutions.

domesticated façade to prison's violent, punishing, and othering functions. This also underscores how prison's uncanniness can be directed in different ways. Prison can both unsettle and be unsettled, exhibiting haunted as well as haunting properties.

In short, uncanny doubles cause anxiety through bringing the fragility of identity to light. How do we tell things apart if they look the same? How can (social or physical) death look so much like life, or life look so much like death? This doubt creeps in whenever things are so similar that one might substitute one for the other without even knowing it (Freud 2003:124). This can be applied to the function of uniforms in prison. Uniforms, which aim to separate those imprisoned from those who imprison, create a case of uncanny doubling in prison. By means of identical dress, imprisoned people are turned into doubles of one another rather than distinguishable, imprisoned individuals. Simultaneously, the uniforms of prison personnel turn them into each other's doubles as well. Moreover, these uniforms mark the difference between punisher and punishee. However, once people are identifiable through their uniforms rather than anything else, you could substitute the bodies within them—swapping self and **other** around—without noticing (cf. Freud 2003:124). Hereby, uniforms emphasize the need for categorization into self and **other**, as well as the fragility of these categories. Like Bronfen's tomb stones (Bronfen 1992:87), uniforms display a present absence—this time, of difference. This expresses both the abjection of the **other**, and uncanny, haunting similarities between it and the self. The othering of prisoners as abject through the use of uniforms attempts to categorize them and safeguard against any similarity they have to the (collective or individual) self, but this practice also shows how unstable and untenable this categorisation really is. This will be a recurring theme throughout the present study, especially in relation to questions of violence and how it shifts and haunts in different (yet similar) forms.

CHRONOTOPES

As evidenced by the review of relevant studies so far, haunting is not merely a pop-cultural phenomenon (Gordon 2008). For example, studies of crime scene hotel rooms have employed haunting, in order to explore these spaces as sites where violent pasts linger (McKay 2020). Additionally, prison has been explored as a timespace with a lingering past, albeit not as explicitly haunted, in previous studies (e.g. Moran 2012; Wacquant 2002),

and as an enforced, spatiotemporal experience of both weight and depth (Crewe 2011). This study will continue this train of thought by articulating prison as a haunted and haunting institution (Chapter 6), as well as by incorporating Bakhtin's discussion of chronotopes (Chapter 7). Chronotopes capture the coextension of space and time in written narratives (Bakhtin 1981). The chronotope can also capture how this coextension pertains to haunting, unsettling storytelling and the narrativization of different kinds of places. It captures how atmospheres are created in text, and how stories convey an idea of what it is like to exist in the environments they narrativize. Therefore, the chronotope is a useful tool for exploring "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature", and how abject and uncanny timespaces—such as prison—are created in texts through this "connectedness" (Bakhtin 1981:84). This approach to prison narratives, moreover, can add to existing scholarship regarding "what time might mean in the carceral context" (Moran 2012:305).

To define a prison chronotope, the present study will analyse the selected novels ways of narrativizing the importance of time for a sense of space, and the importance of space for a sense of time. To do this, the study partially relies on traits that Bakhtin centred on in outlining other chronotopes. For example, prison shares traits with the chronotope of the castle, which is defined by its "organic cohesion of spatial and temporal aspects and categories" with regards to how it incorporates the past into the present (Bakhtin 2014:246). This chronotope is thus closely linked to notions of haunting (Janicker 2015). Ghosts are common to this chronotope, as "legends and traditions animate every corner of the castle and its environs through their reminders of past events" (Bakhtin 2014:246). The castle thus also has affinity with the confined, monstrous-uterine space Creed defines, which often contains "cruel secrets" of the past, and "has witnessed terrible deeds" (Creed 1993:55). This study will show how prison exhibits similar past orientations, and how this shapes its narrativization as a timespace.

Moreover, prison also has similarities to Bakhtin's provincial town chronotope, which is a "locus for cyclical everyday life" where "there are no events, only 'doings' that constantly repeat themselves" (Bakhtin 2014:247), and where time drags itself, "viscous and sticky", through space (Bakhtin 2014:247). Clearly, this is reminiscent of prison scholarship on repetitive and dull prison life (e.g. Ferrell 2004; Rocheleau 2013; Steinmetz

et al. 2017). Moreover, this emphasis on stickiness in terms of both time and space highlights an abject disregard for boundaries, which resonates with the definitions of monstrous-feminine, incorporating space (Creed 1993). In essence, prison has elements of both the small town chronotope and the castle chronotope, while also exhibiting its own specificities. In Chapter 7, this study will go on to define the prison chronotope. This will, in turn, articulate prison's abjection and uncanniness as a narrativized timespace.

MONSTER-MAKING

In studying prison as abject and uncanny, the present study draws on insights from both criminological and cultural studies of punishment and monstrosity. Such studies have elaborated on how, why, and whence abjection occurs. For instance, by redefining the frightening properties of femininity in patriarchal societies (Creed 1993; Kramer 2007), or the role of colonialization and white supremacy in the abjection of oppressed groups (cf. Higgins & Swartz 2018; Khair 2015). These elaborations entail a reconceptualization of why and how the abject threatens to upset order and (collective) identity. These bodies of research emphasize that how, and whence, something can be ejected as abject has to do with both patriarchal and white-supremacist, heteronormative notions of purity and pollution (cf. Douglas 2002). For example, scholars have pointed out that “writing and reading the colonized as grotesque monsters in crime stories” allows the classes that hold the power to punish (and narrate) to deny these imprisoned bodies victim-status (Higgins & Swartz 2018:94). Rather than victims of state violence or oppression, these bodies thus become monstrous, abject threats to the collective self.

The most noticeable aspects of monster-making are located in, and on, the body. Monstrosity can happen to the body (of the self), as well as be inscribed on the body (of the **other**). Body horror tends to focus on the abject, physical, disgusting, and frail aspects of the human body, as it suffers and breaks in encounters with monstrosity. Meanwhile, monstrous, **other** bodies can be many things that the self is not: violent, sharp-toothed, bleeding, unnaturally enormous, or supernaturally strong. They can consist of fleshy, gross parts of an inexplicable mass, or be eerily similar to us on the outside yet horribly inhuman on the inside. They can threaten us directly, or offer a threatening view of what might happen to us due to some other force. The monster has many cultural forms. No matter their

shape, monsters, as Botting puts it, are always “constructions indicating how cultures need to invent or imagine” the **other** (2014:10), in order to maintain their own boundaries. Monsters “are pushed in disgust to the other side of the imaginary fence that keeps norm and deviance apart” (Botting 2014:10).

As such, the monster is a metaphor expressing cultural anxieties about (non)normativity (see Picart & Greek 2007). Following Botting’s definition of the monster as a construction of culturally determined deviance (2014), a feminist psychoanalysis enables a discussion that includes the powers that define the monster, rather than the monster itself as predetermined and reacted to (cf. Higgins & Swartz 2018). For the purposes of this study, this is relevant in relation to questions of prison novels’ narratorial voice, and how that voice draws on (and with) monstrosity in describing what it sees. To explore this, the present study draws on Halberstam’s critical, queering discussions of how monster-making expresses *relationships* between the (normative) ejectors and the (deviating) abjected **other** (1995). This is given particular attention in Chapter 5’s exploration of how subjects attempt to resist assimilation into the monstrous-feminine prison by turning on one another.

In light of Halberstam’s assertion that monstrosity is a relationship, rather than a trait (Halberstam 1995), monstrosity becomes a way of creating an **other** from socio-politically undesirable traits, rather than simply discarding them. This abjection is often accomplished by characterizing the monstrous **other** through tangible, physical signs of otherness, thereby making undesirability a visible quality. Such traits include sharp or discoloured teeth; an overabundance (or unsettling lack) of hair; discolouration (as either pallor or darkness) and sickness of the skin; sub-human posture; unnatural strength or size; unintelligible noises-qua-speech, and so on (see Chaplin 2011; Creed 1993; Rafter & Ystehede 2010; Simmons 2013). Hereby, monster-making is a form of sense- and self-making, as well. In short, this process of abjection shows how making difference is a way of making a self. Importantly, this means that the monsters of gothicized narration “have to be everything the human is not and, in producing the negative of human, these novels make way for the invention of human as white, male, middle class, and heterosexual” (Halberstam 1995:22). As additional studies have pointed out, this extends to questions of monster-making through criminalization as well as classic,

Gothic novels (Higgins & Swartz 2018; Ingebretsen 2007; Sothkott 2016; Surette 2007; Valier 2002).

Given that monstrosity captures cultural anxieties about the **other**, it inevitably also captures anxieties about the self and what the self needs to exist in opposition to (cf. Botting 2014). Importantly, these questions of normalcy and deviance relate to more than questions of criminalization and violence. For instance, drawing on Butler, Halberstam discusses how:

[I]n relation to Judith Butler's concept of "bodies that matter," the human proceeds from and produces proper forms of gender, race, and sexuality. "We see this most clearly," she writes, "in the examples of those abjected beings who do not appear properly gendered; it is their very humanness that comes into question." Furthermore, improper gender often brushes up against unstable sexuality and invokes a homophobic response. Halberstam 1995:164-5

Halberstam goes on to note how such *abjected beings* tend to be a result of a "tricky constellation of uncertain gender and improper sex" (Halberstam 1995:1165). They cannot be categorized within heteronormative gender binaries. This makes them abject *as humans*, since they disregard the systems and rules around normative gender. Deviating from normative civilization here becomes synonymous with deviating from humanity itself. Relationships that configure gender and sexuality in terms of normalcy and deviance can thus employ monster-making in order to avoid questioning these ordering systems, and this can take place in both horror fiction and criminal policies (cf. Halberstam 1995). The invention (and subsequent expansion) of prison as a way of containing undesirables fits neatly into this view. Such a view of prison emphasizes how deviance is a relationship between those with- and without power, rather than a set of objectively monstrous, deviant, or criminal traits.

Relatedly, studies of monstrosity in art and culture, as well as studies of monstrosity in socio-political discourse, have pointed out several ways in which monstrosity configures race, gender, sexuality, class and age as key parts of its boundary-threatening properties (Chaplin 2011; Creed 1993; Halberstam 1995; Khair 2015; Higgins & Swartz 2018; Picart 2006). This study pursues how prison functions as part of the attempted boundary maintenance that keeps "norm and deviance apart" (Botting 2014:10). While this study explores how these processes are present in prison autobiographies, their presence there are one facet of how prison performs this function in multiple, simultaneous fields—such as criminal

policy and popular culture. Regardless of whether we find monster-making in novels or criminal policy discourse, monstrosity is dependent on “a thrifty metaphoricity [...] which constructs a monster out of the traits which ideologies of race, class, gender, sexuality, and capital want to disavow” (Halberstam 1995:102). This construction of the monster is thus part of a social “gothicization, [which] while it emerges in its most multiple and overt form in the Gothic novel, is a generic feature of many nineteenth-century human sciences and ideologies” (Halberstam 1995:105, see also Rafter & Ystehede 2010).

To exemplify Halberstam’s assertion that monstrosity is “a generic feature of many nineteenth-century human sciences” (1995:105), we can turn to the history of criminological thought. Here, we might consider Lombroso’s gothicized definitions of ‘the criminal’ as relying on abject physicality in order to differentiate ‘us’ (clean and proper society) from ‘them’ (abject, deranged deviants) (see Rafter & Ystehede 2010). This has affinity with how abject monstrosity in culture is often constructed through a similar reliance on odd or physically repulsive details, in order to convey a sense of visceral threats and horrors. The monstrous body tends to be relayed in ways that enable the ejection of it as abject *on sight*, whether it be a legal keeping-away from society through imprisonment, or a cultural difference from the norm through pop-cultural tropes (Halberstam 1995).

Research on monstrosity outline how monstrous bodies do not conform to the boundaries of human bodies, and this can be a question of behaviour as well as looks. Halberstam notes how this non-conformism to normativity surfaces when undesirable bodies are defined through a gothic economy in both popular fiction and political discourse, both identifying “bodies in terms of what they are not” (Halberstam 1995:19). One example of this is the image of Jewish people in 19th and early 20th century discourse:

Gothic anti-Semitism makes the Jew a monster with bad blood and it defines monstrosity as a mixture of bad blood, unstable gender identity, sexual and economic parasitism, and degeneracy [...]

The monster Jew produced by nineteenth-century anti-Semitism represents fears about race, class, gender, sexuality, and empire – this figure is indeed gothicized or transformed into an all-purpose monster.
Halberstam 1995:91-2

Here, the relationship the monster-figure embodies is that between anti-Semitism and Jewishness, where the Jew has been made into a

condensation of *race, class, gender, sexuality, and empire*. In so doing, this discourse inscribes otherness onto Jewish bodies. Consider, relatedly, the demonization of asylum seekers in recent years, used to motivate the West's violent treatment of them (see Barker 2017). Scholars have also shown how prison has similar, monster-making functions, as a race-making institution that (re)produces a racist division between a white, Western self and a Black or immigrated other in Western societies. This race-making is one aspect of how prison creates—rather than constrains—deviance. Prison, like monsters, thus embodies a relationship, not a set of traits (cf. Halberstam 1995). The racial discrimination inherent in the prison system has been addressed in several Western contexts (Barker 2013; Hill Collins & Bilge 2016); as has imprisonment's impact on the oppression of (often racialized and/or queered) lower social classes (Comfort 2003; Hörnqvist 2013; Wacquant 2010). For instance, prison reforms have been criticized for constituting societal relief *from* the poor or other marginalized groups, as opposed to being reforms that would be implemented *for* said groups (Wacquant 2010; de Giorgi 2013). This exemplifies imprisonment as abjection: relief *from* deviant, unwanted, transgressive, or otherwise made-monstrous elements (cf. Halberstam 1995). This aligns with Valier's assertion that "gothic tropes are embedded in the practices of the institutions of crime control and punishment themselves" (2002:321). Similarly, Sothkott notes how sensationalist media depictions of crime and punishment is "often expressed in highly vindictive even 'Gothicised' language" (2016:443), that expresses both fear and fascination with deviance understood as monstrosity. Importantly, this rhetoric of monsters and gothicity includes cultural imag(inar)ies of both those who are punished and the institutionalized punishment practices they are subjected to. Imprisoned people and prison itself are thus merged in an overall discourse of abjection and monster-making. The present study will explore how both prison itself and those it subjects to its violence are monster-made in prison novels.

Monsters and Mirrors

While this chapter has already discussed monster-making as a process of abjection, monstrosity is also a question of mirrors—exemplified, among other things, by the uncanny doubles discussed above. As monsters become uncanny, they tend to hold up mirrors to their captors, hunters, or onlookers: we catch a glimpse of ourselves in the **other**, and this

realization has terrible implications for both of us. Monsters can also be useful critical devices; providing mirrors in which to see social processes in new lights.

Studies of how monstrosity functions as unsettling cases of blurred boundaries have made use of queerness, since queerness is inherently tied to non-normative boundary work. Such studies emphasize how queerness operates *within and between* categories such as age, gender, sexuality, or race, and how these categories, in turn, determine monster/viewer relationships (Halberstam 1995; Hughes & Smith 2009; Picart 2006). As a thing living in the space between permeable categories, the monster ignores, invalidates, or transcends the boundaries abjection aims to maintain. When it transcends or subverts categories, it cannot be categorized (and therefore, not placed in a normative hierarchy). When it is queered, the monster thus upsets attempts at ejecting it as abject.

From this, it follows that queerness itself is an abject **other** to patriarchal, heteronormative society (cf. Kristeva 1982). The notion of queer monstrosities in cultural discourse can thus be reversed into monstrous queerness, and thereby be linked to how things like queerness, homosexuality, and trans identities have been defined, policed, and punished by and in patriarchal, colonizing societies (see e.g. Carter 2007; Khair 2015; Schuller 2018).¹⁷ This link exemplifies how Gothic horror configurations and Western legislations can target the same bodies in their respective forms of othering as processes of patriarchal, societal subject formation. In both cases, when bodies and their actions are not easily categorized as socially (un)desirable, this poses a threat to patriarchal order's very ways of knowing. As such, queerness, when framed as a frightening, threatening, or unsettling phenomenon to the onlooker, is an uncanny encounter.

Uncanny monsters destabilize the distinctions between categories like norm and deviance or selfhood and otherness. When they do this, such figures or narrative tropes can also highlight the beast *within* the self. Consider, for instance, the metaphorical content of stories about werewolves or demonic possessions—these all discuss threats to acceptable gender-, race-, or sexuality projects that lurk inside, rather than

¹⁷ While the history of defining, legislating, and punishing forms of queerness in colonizing, patriarchal societies and the spaces they colonized is a long and worthwhile discussion, pursuing it further is not within the scope of the present study.

outside, the self.¹⁸ They actualize anxieties about “borderline natures”, especially in terms of “sexuality and identity” (Wisker 2009:128). Such monsters are often metaphorical, and representative of broader conflicts, such as between different national or social groups (Höglund 2011). Similarly, these monsters mirror how prison is tied to a threat from within, rather than without, an otherwise clean and proper societal body (Sykes 1958). Something undesirable has found its way into the desirable, thereby obfuscating any supposed line where the ‘good’ might end and the ‘bad’ begins. Monstrous bodies, in other words, perform much of the same social work as haunted spaces: they conflate notions of safety with notions of threat. As this study will show, both prison and those within it are often presented as monstrous, shifting bodies.

Regardless of whether its symbolism is primarily tied to gender, sexuality, or race in any given narrative, the werewolf motif always queers the self/**other** divide. It always conflates the bestiality of the deviant **other** with the normativity of the civilized self—the werewolf is a beast *within* an otherwise civilized body. This makes the werewolf a useful metaphor for queering challenges to conventional categories of race, gender, and sexuality, since it foregrounds how ‘deviance’ can lurk inside *any* body (or anybody). Because of this, its conflation of self and **other** emphasizes the arbitrariness of how we define deviance. The foregrounding of internal, hard-to-see threats that might erupt from *any* body given the right—meaning wrong—circumstances exemplifies how anyone could be in the wrong place at the wrong time; be it under a full moon after having suffered an infectious bite or under the pressure of debilitating circumstances after having suffered cumulative disadvantages and diminishing opportunities (Sampson & Laub 1997).

Adding further monsters to the societal discourse on deviance, studies suggest a queering, conceptual link between the wolf and the witch; identifying both of these motifs as cultural imaginings of “sexualized predatory deviants” (Wisker 2009:128). Importantly, the link between these motifs enhances the queerness of them both, especially in terms of gender and sexuality. Exemplifying this, scholars have mentioned fairy

¹⁸ The theme of blurring purity and danger within the same body is often quite intentional in such motifs. An example of this can be found in the poem that has become emblematic of Universal’s classic horror film *The Wolf Man* (1941): “Even a man who is pure in heart; and says his prayers by night; may become a wolf when the wolfbane blooms; and the autumn moon is bright.”

tales such as *Hansel and Gretel* and *Little Red Riding Hood* (Wisker 2009; Warner 1995). *Little Red Riding Hood* renders the wolf “kin to the forest dwelling witch, or crone; he offers us a male counterpart, a werewolf who swallows up grandmother and then granddaughter” (Warner 1995:181). The wolf thus becomes “representative of the dangers of sexual ravishment or taboo relationships”, and, like the monstrous womb, embodies the threat of being devoured (Wisker 2009:128). The wolf, then, clearly has affinity with monstrous-feminine motifs like the cannibalistic witch, archaic mother, and surreptitious old crone (cf. Wisker 2009; Creed 1993).

The uncanniness of these motifs stems from their mutual embodiment of threats to both bodily boundaries and to the boundaries of organizing, societal concepts like gender, sexuality, and race. By mirroring one another, these masculine and feminine figures threaten boundaries in ways that cut across heteronormative, Eurocentric conceptualization. As such, they threaten gender as well as our ways of understanding it. Because of this, these monstrosities embody threats in ways that upset heteronormative, binary oppositions that determine the meanings of youth and old age; whiteness and non-whiteness; masculine and feminine gender- and sexuality projects, and so on (Wisker 2009). This makes these monsters not quite either—unbelonging to categorization as such. Queer monstrosities, embodying the not-quite, the uncanny, thus displace not only the line between categories that abjection seeks to hold in place, but the ways of holding that line as well (cf. Halberstam 1995; Kristeva 1982).

Lastly, another example of how monsters have been analytically useful in criminological research can be found in how studies employ the zombie. For one thing, it is evident in the image of prison as filled with the living dead (Smith, C. 2009). Moreover, studies show that the zombie motif is often articulated in media coverage of drug (ab)use and its policing, and this motif is also used metaphorically in studies of these same themes (e.g. Gutsche 2013; Linnemann, Wall, & Green 2014; Swalve & DeFoster 2016). The zombie also features in women’s stories about their own bodies on drugs (Fredriksson & Gålnander 2020). In other words, this monster is ingrained in Western culture to such an extent that it seeps into both criminal policy discourse and individual sense-making narratives. In all of these cases (Fredriksson & Gålnander 2020; Gutsche 2013; Höglund 2011; Linnemann et al. 2014; Picart 2006; Smith, C. 2009; Swalve

& DeFoster 2016), the use of monstrosity-metaphors deals with questions of otherness, deviance, stigmatization, and non-conformism and how they relate to a normative perspective. As such, studies that hold society up to these monster-mirrors show how monstrosity is used to express society's marginalizing, sensationalizing, or demonizing tendencies within a dominant, normative discourse (cf. Botting 2014). Making society see itself in these mirrors also shows how monstrosity-as-otherness is characterized in line with what "white, male, middle class, and heterosexual" ideologies deem undesirable, threatening, or even frightening (Halberstam 1995:22)—otherwise such mirrors would not unveil as much as they do. For the purposes of this study, monstrosity will be part of the analysis of how prison autobiographies narrativize prison (and those it houses) as abject as well as uncanny.

Because of its Eurocentric, patriarchal bias, the monstrous is linked to fears of the non-masculine; non-heteronormative; non-white; and outright uncategorical (since hierarchies presuppose clear-cut categories). This is often expressed in culture through the creation of (un)natural, or bestial monsters (Creed 1993; Halberstam 1995; Khair 2015; Kramer 2007). In zombie iconography especially, the monstrous body is envisioned as belonging to humanoid beings who lack human reason and critical faculties. Here, the monstrous body embodies fears linked to the disintegration of the brain, "the organ associated with the production and organization of identity" (Chaplin 2011:248). This links it to patriarchal fears regarding the production of a self-made, independent, and reasonable self. However, it also ties into more generic, human fears about life and death, and the divide between mind and body. In such cases, the monster frightens because it displays the precariousness of both normativity and human life itself. It unveils humanity's de-humanized, non-human, formerly human, or not-quite-human alternatives. To accomplish an effectual embodiment of these fears, monstrous bodies are often envisioned as human bodies devoid of humanity, or as traces of humanity uncannily located in unhuman bodies. Both the zombie and the aforementioned *doppelgänger*, for instance, examine questions of individuality and individualism as well as questions of human agency, and the anxieties relating to the absence of these traits as an over-all absence of humanity (Royle 2003; Withy 2015). As such, while they can embody both the abject and the uncanny, monsters can also embody both generic and subjective anxieties about life and identity. This study draws on these

insights to explore how monstrosity is used to convey both generic and subject-formative cultural anxieties in prison narratives.

In addition to obfuscating the ability to distinguish between self and **other**, monstrosity can also be liminal by blurring the boundaries between different, monstrous parts of a whole. This can destabilize the very notions of beginnings and endings. Here, we might consider body horror's reliance on abject, gory details, where blood and other forms of human waste often make it difficult to ascertain where one thing ends and another begins, or cover the walls or floors of a space (cf. Creed 1993). In these cases, abject details can be tell-tale signs of uncanny wholes, since they become stand-ins for overwhelming and unknowable entireties of violence and suffering. Distinctly human body parts tend to become part of obscure, shifting, non-human bodies, or spaces such as basements and hidden rooms become filled with or even made from innumerable, indistinguishable human materials (cf. Creed 1993; Halberstam 1995). In this way, abject, in-your-face horror can merge with an uncanny, uncertain dread of the unknown.¹⁹ This exemplifies how the abject and uncanny properties of monstrosity can be coextensive, feeding off of one another. It also shows how spaces, as well as bodies, can combine and coextend in unsettling ways that upset categorization. Such combinations of abject and uncanny imagery will be one aspect of this study's analysis of prison space. The study thus explores how prison space as well as the bodies within it are painted as monstrous, as well as how categories like self and **other** might become blurred in the process.

THE GOTHIC

As outlined above, both abjection and uncanniness are prevalent in Gothic modes of culture and literature, and the tropes and stereotypes commonly found there. While gothicity itself is not a theoretical perspective, this study does explore how prison novels make use of gothic narrative modes. As this chapter has discussed, gothic metaphors help articulate abject and uncanny social processes (cf. Gordon 2008; Valier 2002). Moreover, this chapter has also shown how such metaphors are an explicit part of how punishment generally, and prison specifically, have been gothicized

¹⁹ In the cultural sphere, such merges of abject detail and uncanny, unfathomable entireties are common to H.P. Lovecraft's novels and Konami's *Silent Hill* series of games, to give a few examples. The latter is especially adept at blurring spaces together with bodies in unsettling ways.

(Garland 2012; Smith, C. 2009; Sothkott 2016; Valier 2002). Previous studies have explored the gothicness of prison, as well as the gothicization of crime and punishment-narratives more broadly (e.g. Fiddler 2011b; Fredriksson 2019; Picart and Greek 2007; Smith, P. 2008; Sothkott 2016; Higgins & Swartz 2018; Rafter & Ystehede 2010). This study follows suit by exploring what prison's reliance on gothic aesthetics accomplishes in terms of its storytelling function. What fears come to light through these gothic conventions in prison autobiographies? How are they dealt with? And what is the Gothic, anyway? For the purposes of this study, the gothic might be summarized as a specific mode of narration. While narrative criminology has paid attention to how stories function as a form of human sense-making (see Maruna & Liem 2020), this body of research has been less concerned with the pop-cultural sphere or the genre conventions at play in these sense-making processes. The present study regards the gothic as one such set of genre conventions, and considers their impact on how prison is made sense of in Western culture. This section uses this definition to briefly summarize how the Gothic itself, in addition to the previously discussed ways abjection and uncanniness have been observed within it, is relevant to the present study.

While the Gothic could be defined in different more or less broad ways, this study uses a definition that narrows it down to a set of specific moods and aesthetics that pertain to storytelling and the narrativization of prison space.²⁰ The narrative conventions of interest here, moreover, focus on the frightening.²¹ As a literary mode, the Gothic is considered to originate with Horace Walpole's novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). Later classics of the genre include titles like Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818).²² Such stories deal with themes of identity, haunting, otherness, transgression, punishment, and (non)belonging. As a narrative genre filled with threats and dangers, the

²⁰ This study will not, however, devote time to a discussion of the emergence of Gothic sensibilities from a historical, socio-political perspective. For insights into this background, see e.g. Castle 1995; Botting 2014; Rafter & Ystehede 2010. This study also stays away from questions of gothic subculture, since that is irrelevant to the questions at hand.

²¹ While it falls outside the scope of this study, the Gothic does also include themes focused on romance and desire.

²² Notably, *Frankenstein* is also widely recognized as the birth of the related genre of science fiction: another genre where punishments and prisons are prevalent themes and settings.

Gothic is full of gloomy, oppressive, dark, and dreary things and themes (Botting 2014; Chaplin 2011). It features ghosts and monsters, madness, cramped and crumbling spaces, isolation, desolation, rejection, and dejection. Moreover, the Gothic is heavy on ambiguity in its treatment of these themes (see e.g. Botting 2014; Chaplin 2011; Creed 1993; Trigg 2014). Threats within this genre might pertain to the body as well as to the mind or spirit, since the boundaries of these realms are often transgressed, dissolved, or merged in Gothic narratives.

Moreover, the Gothic is a genre of liminality and ambiguity in terms of form, as well as content. For instance, the Gothic often relies on simulated truth-claims to situate narratives,²³ and the reliability of narrators is sometimes dubious.²⁴ As a result, ghosts are not always what they seem, and monsters might be more humane than their makers. Law-making might turn out to be a worse evil than law-breaking (Halberstam 1995). This makes gothic a useful set of narrative conventions to look for in narrative-criminological studies, since they have a long history of articulating and framing social anxieties in ways that can elucidate both the speaker and that which is spoken of.

To convey its dark and dreary themes, the Gothic often relies on horror iconography (e.g. dark, secluded spaces, threatening objects, monstrous bodies, and bodily injury). However, while most horror is gothic, not all gothic storytelling can be categorized as horror (see Botting 2014; Chaplin 2011; Trigg 2014). That said, horror iconography is an important part of gothic, and it is central to the present study since it is also a key aspect of how prison is conveyed in culture (see Fiddler 2011b; Garland 2012; Smith, P. 2008; Smith, C. 2009; Sothkott 2016). Since this study uses a definition of the gothic as a set of dark moods, atmospheres, tropes, and aesthetics in storytelling, the horror-iconographic elements of gothic will be central to its analysis. This boils down to questions of how prison stories rely on horror-imagery in order to set the scene, breathe life into the space, make a point, or create a character. Horror iconography, then, is one way that the abject and uncanny properties of prison are made visible in narratives.

²³ See, for example, the aforementioned *Frankenstein*, or Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000) for a more recent example.

²⁴ *Dracula* exemplifies this well, alternating as it does between multiple first-person narrators. Another classic example of unreliable narration is Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898).

One common occurrence in gothicized stories is the attempted identification of things “in terms of what they are not” (Halberstam 1995:19). This identification focuses on frightening or unsettling qualities, and uses genre conventions to show how *they* are not like *us*. Prisons are *not* part of clean and proper society; law-breaking, deviant, or imprisoned people are *not* an integrated part of the normative social order, and so on. This relates to how gothic narratives are often cautionary: warning us to not do *this* (e.g. deviate), or we might end up like *that* (e.g. shunned, killed, or locked away).²⁵ Moreover, since a genre’s conventions, stereotypes, and concepts are by their very nature broadly agreed upon in the societies that use them (Masschelein 2011), gothicization speaks to generic, diffuse social anxieties. Therefore, it can elucidate collective, cultural fears that span multiple, different subject-formative processes across both time and positionality. As such, it is no surprise that Gothic classics as well as contemporary horror so often revolve around the all-encompassing question of life and death.

In addition to painting prison as a dark and threatening house of ghosts and monsters (Smith, P, 2008; Smith, C. 2009), the presence of gothic conventions in prison novels lends them an air of timelessness, since these conventions position prison stories—and the fears they express, distil, or direct—within a genre of cultural expression that has maintained steady popularity and seen relatively little change for several hundred years. Studies of Gothic literature and film have elaborated on how the fears expressed in gothic modes of culture can express both specific fears tied to certain subject-formative processes and broader, more generic and timeless fears tied to (human) life and death (e.g. Chaplin 2011; Höglund 2011). However, despite nuances shifting over the years, the Gothic genre has remained fairly stable over time (see Cavallaro 2002).²⁶ Themes of threat, despair, (un)life, and (non)belonging remain central to it. As such, the use of gothic conventions in literary texts can express fears

²⁵ Taken together, the many re-tellings and adaptations of Stoker’s *Dracula* exemplify this when it comes to (un)desirable, (non)normative femininity. Over time, questions of (un)acceptable femininity and the ways it can and will be punished have been played out on the body of Lucy Westenra, in particular.

²⁶ While there have definitely been changes in the form of feminist and de-colonizing perspectives and plots, gothicity has nonetheless remained anchored in the same kinds of tropes and conventions. What we fear might change, but how those fears can be expressed in ways that make narrative sense has remained recognizable since the Gothic’s inception (see e.g. Botting 2014; Cavallaro 2002; Chaplin 2011).

tioned to subject formation as well as how these worries fit into diffuse, generic fears that transcend questions of time and perspective.

Studies have shown how not only popular culture, but punishment- and crime policy discourse as well, can be gothic (see e.g. Picart & Greek 2007; Sothkott 2016; Surette 2007). For the purposes of this study, this discourse includes the question of prison autobiographies as a fictionalized form of storytelling, featuring gothic narrative conventions like dark and dreary moods and settings; horror iconography; found manuscripts; and unreliable narration.²⁷ As studies have shown, such gothic conventions are part of the social, communitive work prison performs in society (e.g. Cecil 2015; Fiddler 2007, 2011b; Garland 2012; Smith, C. 2009). While Gothic conventions have influenced both prison design and prison stories (e.g. Fiddler 2011b; Garland 2012), “themes of confinement and doomed flights from imprisonment are crucial Gothic conventions”, themselves (Carrabine 2011b:55). Moreover, while the Gothic has a history of dramatizing a societal “preoccupation with boundaries and their collapse”, scholars have noted that this same description fits Western penalty and crime policy discourse as well (Valier 2002:320). In other words, gothicism and prison are bound up in the same over-all process of dealing with social fears. Furthermore, they are both articulated from a white-supremacist, heteronormative, and patriarchal perspective. For example, where crime stories express “a distinct colonizer/colonized relationship” (Higgins & Swartz 2018:92), gothic stories similarly articulate “colonial definitions of the colonized” (Khair 2015:8), as well as other oppressive definitions of oppressed groups. By exploring this interconnectedness of gothicity and punishment, the present study analyses how articulating prison’s gothicity can help unveil the wider societal processes of abjection and uncanniness that prison is part of.

A PROJECTED AND PROJECTING PRISON

Where the abject deals with life *or* death, the uncanny deals with life *and* death—with destabilized and inseparable categories. Prison, as this study will explore, embodies both the abject and the uncanny in myriad ways. As it will also show, this embodiment is largely dressed up in gothic conventions and horror iconography. Prison is bound up in processes of

²⁷ See Chapter 3 for details on how the form and function of prison autobiographies have affinities with Gothic genre conventions.

differentiation and separation as well as processes of seepage and coextension. Both of these processes, moreover, relate to subjective anxieties tied to power hierarchies and social histories as well as to more generic anxieties about life and death, self and **other**, or past, present, and future temporalities.

Emphasizing prison's liminal standing as an imagined reality, studies have pointed out that the "power that operates in and through penalty" pertains to more than "what is seen, known and displayed, whether in panoptical, governmental or spectacular practices. This power also involves the invocation of horrors and imaginative engagement" (Valier 2002:320). In other words, imprisonment is a blur of imagined horror and visible reality. Much of this imaginative engagement is broadcast through media and popular culture, and consists of anxieties projected onto **other** bodies, times, and places. Indeed, "for the vast majority, state punishment is only made visible through mediated representation" (Carrabine 2012b:47). This kind of commingling of fact and fiction has given rise to questions of how "contemporary societies are saturated with images of crime" (Carrabine 2012a:463), and how criminology ought to approach this saturation as a cultural phenomenon. This study regards this saturation as an expression of societal unrest, anxieties, and fears. As such, it approaches prison novels as a sphere where these fears are played out. In a previous study of how prison has been communicated as a fearful space in literature and visual arts, Carrabine notes certain recurring tropes and traits:

Whatever the conditions were actually like inside the old prisons, we see them persistently spoken of as places of evil, where profane pleasures, abject misery, and infectious diseases all mingled in what seemed like a grotesque distillation of the world outside. In fact, many literary and visual sources drew attention to the failings of the legal system and relished the opportunity to mock the rituals of punishment, while portrayals of criminality oscillate between admiration and condemnation, thereby conveying multiple and contradictory images of deviance.

Carrabine 2012b:49

This observation highlights both abject and uncanny elements of how prison is envisioned: the misery, infectious disease, and evil show its abject status, while its distorted distillation of the outside world and the oscillation between adoration and condemnation of criminality can be considered uncanny. As such, the "contradictory images of deviance"

might be considered as an interplay of attempted ejection on the one hand, and haunting return or unsettlement on the other. For example, the notion of criminality oscillating between being admired and condemned shows the inherent uncertainty of categories like normalcy, deviance, and aspiration (see also Duncan 1996). Through art and culture, society expresses its struggle to decide on whether deviance is aspirational or abject: in effect emphasizing the fragility of the border between (il)legal, (un)desirable behaviours. Prison is a central figure in this struggle, embodying the imagined boundary between pure and punishable behaviours (cf. Botting 2014). As such, prison is a shifting and erratic construct, depending on what threats are imagined in what ways.

As a site that receives the twisted results of projected, collective anxieties in the form of punishable bodies, prison is a phantasmagoric space. It is also phantasmagoric in the sense that collective anxieties and ideas about deviance as well as about prison itself are projected onto it (Fiddler 2011a). A phantasmagoria, in short, projects culturally relevant fears and anxieties onto external surfaces. The mechanical phantasmagoria of the 18th and 19th century was a device that conjured images of ghosts and displayed them in a way that both questioned and emphasized their fictitiousness—they were evidently fake. Yet, they were *there* (see Castle 1995). Their presence underscored their absence, and vice versa. Prison is similarly real, yet imagined, and often portrayed in ways that, like the ghosts of the original phantasmagoria, are fake (Cecil 2015). As such, these portrayals speak more to the cultural anxieties at play in imagining prison than to prison realities. As a space given meaning by cultural imaginings and anxieties, prison is a real space *and* myriad fictions. It is both out of sight (as real) and readily available in plain view (as imagined). As long as prison is perpetuated as a receptacle of public anxieties, the “message of Gothic prison-ness does not need to be projected onto a façade. It exists as a place myth, stripped of an apparatus” (Fiddler 2007:204). Prison thus no longer needs its frightening 19th century façade, since its standing as a site of horror- and ghost stories exists independent of its materiality in society’s communication with and about itself through art and culture.

Moreover, the view of prison on offer in popular culture is decidedly panoptic. The panopticon’s governing “idea was that inspection would be continuous from a central watchtower, but the inmates could not know whether they were being watched in their peripheral cells because of a series of blinds shielding the inner tower” (Carrabine

2012b:59). As a parallel, any one of us can pick up a prison novel, film, or documentary and get an immediate glimpse inside. However, apart from occasional, explicit intertextualities, these texts lack insight into one another.²⁸ Moreover, what we see once we look is more likely to be a phantasm: a projection of agreed upon *ideas* about imprisonment, as opposed to insights into ‘real’ experiences (cf. Cecil 2015). While we can see inside myriad fictionalized cells, the views on offer are gothicized in order to express cultural anxieties in ways that make narrative sense vis-à-vis the public (cf. Garland 2012). Adding the familiar precursor “Based on a true story...” to such an account puts them squarely in the phantasmagoric realm; they are fake, *yet they are there* (cf. Castle 1995). The resulting prison is thus a phantasmanopticon; we can look into any part of it, but what we will see is not a reality but a projected, anxiety-fuelled imaginary.

The horror-fuelled imaginings that make up discursive prisonness are not limited to the likes of infotainment, literary works, or films. As this chapter has discussed, studies have shown how these horror-iconographic imaginings find their way into law-making, language, and news as well (e.g. Higgins & Swartz 2018; Sothkott 2016; Linnemann et al. 2014). As most of the studies discussed here exemplify in one way or another, the very notions of normalcy and deviance express cultural anxieties about who and how we should be. In the grand scheme of this discourse, prison’s socio-cultural, storytelling function distils these worries by making them tangible, embodied both by prison and by the deviant and punishable **other** it houses. This embodiment is then displayed throughout all the interlocking systems where criminality is imagined and defined.

In short, while this study focuses on pop-cultural manifestations of prison, it is important to note that prison is not only gothicized in its pop-cultural presence. As studies have shown, “gothic tropes are embedded in the practices of the institutions of crime control and punishment themselves” (Valier 2002:321; see also Carrabine 2011b, 2012b; Sothkott 2016). As such, while prison’s gothicity is often emphasized and communicated to a wider public in art and culture, it is present in its practices as well. Studying prison autobiographies thus offers

²⁸ Importantly, that is not the same as to say that authors of one text could not possess insight into other texts. Moreover, the existence of genre conventions and canonical literature has caused some debate about whether or not all storytelling is intertextual to some extent, but that is a discussion for another time and place.

a window into this facet of what prison is and does in the global West. As Valier puts it, “contemporary gothic populism is a hybrid form, developing through the complex intersections of law, penal practices, [and] popular culture” (2002:322). In and across all of these interactions, gothic aspects of contemporary penalty challenge and change “collective identities and formations of individual subjectivity” (Valier 2002:322). Prison’s gothicness is thus built into both its imagined and its practical aspects, and into both broader, generic and specific, subjective anxieties. Because of this, this study does not set out to tackle the question of either a practical or phantasmatic aspect of prison, but the question of how the two are entwined.

As this chapter has shown, prison exists at an intersection of many things. It is real and imagined, the canvas and the projector, abject and uncanny, haunted and haunting. This study attempts to capture this blurring of spheres by studying how prison comes across in commercially published prison autobiographies, since this genre is situated inside the grey area where real and imagined, as well as generic and specific, aspects of prison’s being merge. When and how are fears and anxieties tied to specific social positions, and when are they not? Which fears are treated as simply human, and which are tied to be(com)ing a punisher or punishee, (im)proper (part of) society, and so on? How do these stories express subject-formative processes on a societal level? Since commercially published books rely on collectively agreed upon genre conventions, while the autobiographical format entails subjective viewpoints, these narratives are a useful space to interrogate both the generic and the subject-formative aspects of how prison is narrativized. As such, studying prison autobiographies is well suited to explorations of how prison is gothicized, abject, and uncanny as a social, storytelling institution.

CHAPTER 3

EXECUTION

True crime as a form of infotainment is an increasingly popular genre (Cecil 2015; Valier 2002). But to what extent is it actually *true*, and does that matter to how or why people find it entertaining? Prison autobiographies, like any autobiography, are marketed as true. However, it is most likely the *idea* of them being true that intrigues their readers (Cecil 2015), since it is more or less impossible for them to ascertain the extent of the novel's truthfulness (cf. Valier 2002:321).

While prison autobiographies are considered as true accounts of prison life, they are also a commercialized form of entertainment. The process of editing, publishing, and marketing a novel brings inevitable layers of fictionalization to the story (Cecil 2015). As such, prison autobiographies exist in a grey area, where fact and fiction merge and become difficult to separate (Valier 2002). For the purposes of the present study, this interplay of fact and fiction is what makes them interesting, since it emphasizes how prison is both a physical and an imagined reality. Importantly, studies have suggested that gothic tropes underpin both real and imagined aspects of punishment (see e.g. Higgins & Swartz 2018; Sothkott 2016; Valier 2002). Previous studies have also observed a link between true crime and the gothic, noting that "Gothicism is a powerful set of conventions that codes the reconfiguration of boundaries between the legal and the extra-legal, and between the public and private spheres, and in which the politics of the new terrain of infotainment are played out" (Valier 2002:333). As such, autobiographies can be regarded as both fictionalized and gothicized.

While this is a criminological enquiry into the social, storytelling functions of prison, it is also a literary study that largely focuses on language and narration. Narrative criminology, while advancing our knowledge about how narratives structure sense-making processes, has paid relatively little attention to literary narratives and how we might draw on literary theory or materials in order to pursue criminological questions

(see Maruna & Liem 2020). Rather, narrative criminologists primarily tend to work with interviews and ethnographies, and storytelling as a form of individual, social sense-making (e.g. Gadd & Farrall 2004; Presser 2009; Stone 2016; Vaughan 2007). This study, by contrast, explores commercially published autobiographies as a form of societal communication—not as individual, ethnographical accounts. As such, this study is closer to literary theory than narrative criminology usually is. However, taking inspiration from literary theory and merging that with the narrative-criminological field is a promising fit given the common interest in storytelling as a window into humanness (Maruna & Liem 2020:127). As such, a more literary narrative criminology would be useful for furthering our analytical interactions with different types of storytelling. Moreover, literary theorists are not often occupied with documentary formats such as the true crime genre. As such, narrative criminology occupies a promising, and fairly uncontested, position for engaging with these questions in a way that merges literary- and sociological methodologies.

This ties into questions of knowledge production. As Smith states, “[d]iscourse and ideology can be investigated as actual social relations ongoingly organized in and by the activities of actual people” (Smith, D. 1990:160). Things like gender, sexuality, age, and race are thus perpetually (re)created in societies, not least through the use of popular culture. According to Smith’s conception, discourse (e.g. crime policy discourse) is not limited to text, “though it is organized by and in relation to the text” (1990:162). In the case of this study, this means that society’s understanding of, and discourse surrounding, issues of criminalization and punishment are largely organized by and in relation to texts like pop-cultural prison depictions. Smith goes on to note:

The conception of discourse used here originates with Foucault in whose work it defines an assemblage of ‘statements’ arising in an ongoing ‘conversation’, mediated by texts, among speakers and hearers separated from one another in time and space (Foucault 1972). The notion of discourse displaces the analysis from the text as originating in writer or thinker, to the discourse itself as an ongoing intertextual process.

Smith, D. 1990:161

This is in line with the present study’s view of autobiographies as part of an ongoing conversation that Western society has with and about itself. As

such, this study is not concerned with authorial intent or reader response theory.

From one point of view, a book does not care what you think about it. Things are either present or absent in it. Similarly, we are agreed that words mean things—or you would have no hope of understanding what you are reading right now. From another point of view, the meaning of words can shift, and books might say whatever it is they say, but how is it read, and what does that, in turn, say about something larger than the books themselves? And what is that larger something? Genre? Context? Whose context, the author's or the reader's? Or is it the text's context? Is it a question of present-day context, or a question of what the text can tell us about the time it was written? And who decides?

The question of *who decides* emphasizes how study design is a form of decision making—choosing what knowledge is interesting to pursue, as well as how to obtain it. This actualizes sociological, constructivist notions of knowledge production. If this would have been a purely literary study, it is unlikely that questions of methodology would have received much explicit attention. As far as this is a literary study, it is a close reading of prison autobiographies that pays particular attention to how narrators weave a prison out of words. It focuses on things like iconography, euphemistic language, metaphors, and metonymies, which tie narrative studies to both linguistics and semiotics. As a narrative criminological study, this analysis wonders how these narratives resonate with larger, collectively held anxieties that centre on prison as either cure or cause. As such, this investigation is at home in narrative criminology, given its interest in storytelling as a narrative sense-making process (Sandberg & Ugelvik 2016).

For instance, narrative criminologists have pointed out how “stories are very much about creating boundaries between self and others” (Sandberg & Ugelvik 2016:132; Copes 2016). Arguably, this is one of the primary functions of prison stories. Moreover, it has been suggested that “narratives only hinted at may be the most important ones” (Sandberg & Ugelvik 2016:132; Sandberg 2016). Here, a psychoanalytical framework is useful for unveiling what lies beneath these hints. It allows us to see clearly “the haunting way systematic compulsions work on and through people”, and to “see into the abstractions” to “comprehend the elusive concreteness of ghostly matter (Gordon 2008:197). The abstract, in other words, has the capacity to unveil hitherto unseen ways of understanding.

One way that narratives can hint at something ‘more’, ‘other’, or ‘untellable’ is through their use of metaphor and metonymy. This study explores the metaphors, metonymies, and other symbolically intriguing turns of phrase available in autobiographical prison narratives, while keeping an eye on how they imply, or hint at, ideological positions and underlying cultural anxieties. This actualizes a social layer in the study: who speaks about whom or what without being critiqued or questioned (i.e. whose books are a commercial success)?

Ideology underpins the rationale behind prisons, by forming and confirming ideas about who should fear or loathe whom, and why. Such ideas are not only expressed by imprisonment practice, but also in language. For example, any narrative implies particular ideological positions—occupied by both the narrator and the narratee. Since this study is interested in both the narratives themselves and in their broader implications, the question of ideology is actualized in both the textual layer (“What ideological standpoints are ‘taken for granted’ by this narrator?”) and the social layer (“What ideological standpoints are ‘taken for granted’ by these works as a whole? What are the ‘unspoken truths’ that this body of literature relies on to make sense?”). In Western cultures, prison is an expression of colonizing, patriarchal ideology, expressing race-, gender-, sexuality-, and class-based inequalities (see e.g. Higgins & Swartz 2018; Hörnqvist 2013; Wacquant 2002; 2009). How does this ‘show up’ in prison autobiographies? Since there is no ‘beyond’ ideology (Žižek 2008), narratives will either be in line with this white, heteronormative patriarchy, or they will oppose it somehow—thus manifesting different ideological standpoints.

Similar things can be said of researchers. As researchers, we decide on what questions to ask, and asking research questions is arguably an ideological endeavour. For instance, this study is concerned with prison as a haunting and haunted site, and a site of narrative monster-making. It would be ideologically different to study monstrosity as such, and prison as a cage that keeps monsters safely locked away. As such, ideology weaves its way through both the texts under study, their social context(s), and any and all means of studying them. Smith notes how texts, (in this case, popularized prison autobiographies), are both embedded in and organize social relations (Smith, D. 1990:162). However, these kinds of popular media “do not stand in stand in a uniform relation to their ‘audience’ (Smith, D. 1990:162). Instead, their meaning shifts as they are “entered

into widely varying social relations” (Smith, D. 1990:162). To exemplify, prison autobiographies will mean something different, and thus help to organize different social relations, when discussed among abolitionists versus among those in favour of increased punitivity. As such, texts structure social relations both vis-à-vis themselves (i.e. a book to some extent controls how, and with whom, you can reasonably discuss it), and among readers vis-à-vis each other (e.g. whether or not you can expect dis/agreement). This relates to how the narrator addresses the reader. Pop-cultural texts generally position its audience to root for the main character, who in autobiographies becomes coextensive with the narrator. We should **other** who they **other**, like who they like, and so on. This poses problems in a genre where popular, commercially successful titles are often written from white, heteronormative viewpoints—especially considering that the point of view of these texts thus does not express the voices of the Black, queer, or otherwise non-normative bodies often subjected to imprisonment (Hill Collins & Bilge 2016:39).

This necessitates an untangling of objectivity and subjectivity in the research process. Granted, things are present in books regardless of whether or not anyone is there to read them. However, no study encompasses everything that is present in a book. For instance, this study focuses on the *frightening, unsettling* aspects of abjection and uncanniness in the explored books. This is not the only way to regard either the abject and the uncanny or the books in question. So, while a book might not care what you think is important about it, what you think is important enough to study will impact what you choose to tell others about it. It is on this side of things that we can meaningfully discuss the researcher as an active participant in knowledge production, rather than an impartial observer. Of course, this is actualized in things like posing a research questions and choosing which titles to close-read. Moreover, it is actualized in how we, as researchers, decide to view the material. For instance, depictions of criminologically relevant phenomena are often conceptualized as *representations* in studies thereof. In essence, this often boils down to questions of (in)accuracy, prejudice, and stereotyping: how does X representation match Y reality? This is a tried and true way of knowledge production that sheds light on how (often harmful) (mis)representations function in society—but it is not the only meaningful one. As cultural criminologists have pointed out, it is no longer reasonable or even doable to differentiate meaningfully between crime and control and their

mediated representations (Carrabine 2012a:463; Ferrell and Van de Voorde 2010:36). In line with this, the ubiquity of images depicting crime and punishment in Western culture could also be studied as cases of *presentation*. This ties into the cultural work performed by prison novels as works of factual fiction or fictionalized fact—the extent of truth or fiction is largely irrelevant to the social, cultural work these novels perform. Rather, the popularity of a work (or of true crime as a pop culture phenomenon, for that matter) says something about how society views prison, prisoners, and itself. As such, images of punishment can be viewed as presentations of a culturally held idea, rather than as representations of an external object. As such, when the present study discusses what is ‘shown’ or what ‘information’ is available for analysis, this pertains to what is visible in the texts themselves, not to how well they represent something outside themselves. Similarly, when a given ‘experience’ in a narrative is mentioned here, this pertains to experiences such as they are depicted in the text. A depiction of an experience is still a depiction, and it is this narrated layer, rather than the experience that inspired it, that concerns this study. In short, it is a question of narrated experience, and the experience offered to the narratee, not of the author’s experience as such.

Being part of how societies talk to and about themselves, prison novels are manifestations of a collective unconsciousness (cf. Gordon 2008). As such, while “prison exists as both mythology and materiality” (Smith, P. 2008:59), regarding prison imagery as *representations* would imply distance between the thing itself as a material reality and the imagery showing it. Distancing prison from itself in this way would separate it into fragments where one is real, while the others more or less accurately portray this reality. This risks obscuring, rather than unveiling, the anxieties that shape prison as a socio-cultural, storytelling institution. Culturally, collectively imagined prison realities are just as real as the physical buildings when it comes to what prisons, overall, *are* to the societies that use them. As such, this study regards the autobiographical prison novels explored here as presentations of a factual fantasy. To what extent this fantasy is (mis)informed is an unrelated question. The phenomenon of prison novels is regarded as an emotionally charged, collective carceral imaginary, rather than more or less accurate representations of the real. In short, this means that the present study makes no particular distinction between prison as a building and prison as a text or an image. Rather, all aspects of what prison is merge in creating a collective, cultural idea of

prison. This means that the prison-as-text is not construed as a representation of some other aspect of prison. It is one aspect of prison, such as it exists in Western society's ongoing conversation with and about itself.

Since this study regards texts as presentations of the emotionally charged carceral imaginary, rather than representations of the real, it differs significantly from convict criminology's aims of penetrating "the reality of [prisons as] distant social worlds" (Richards 2013:380). With this study's view, prison is not distant, but culturally pervasive. As such, the present study concerns the imaginaries circulated among the general public; the fictions that shape collective, cultural understandings of prison. Using this view of society as a collective (un)consciousness as a starting point, the present study draws on feminist developments of psychoanalysis in investigating how prison distils and directs collective fears and anxieties of belonging and otherness.

Previous research has provided a solid foundation with regards fiction's influence on societies' understanding of prison (Cecil 2015; Fiddler 2011; Garland 2012; Smith, P. 2008; Smith, C. 2009). Both cultural prison depictions and academic discourse on crime and punishment are full of metaphorical and allegorical turns of phrase (Garland 2012; Higgins & Swartz 2018; Sothkott 2016; Valier 2002). For instance, both prison depictions and studies thereof have a history of viewing prison as a tomb and imprisoned people as the living dead (Garland 2012; Smith, C. 2009). Focusing on what metaphors in prison novels express can unveil the anxieties that underpin a cultural envisioning of prison as a tomb and those imprisoned as ghosts and monsters. However, prison studies have been less focused on how such metaphors function as a key aspect of prison's cultural work.

Relatedly, studies have pointed out how drawing on, and with, metaphors can be analytically useful in theorizing and knowledge production (Swedberg, 2014:84). The use of metaphors, metonymies, allegories, and analogies can "be used to capture something that is hidden and so far has resisted analysis" (Swedberg, 2014:81). As it pertains to prison studies, the use of metaphor is already pervasive in prison discourse, but not in the critical sense that examining their usefulness as analytical tools would suggest. Arguably, prison discourse uses a specific, gothicized set of tropes (i.e. words that communicate stories, see Sandberg 2016), metaphors, and stereotypes (Garland 2012; Smith, C. 2009; Sothkott

2016). Moreover, these metaphors and stereotypes (like all aspects of prison) have been shaped by collective anxieties. Therefore, studying *how* tropes, metaphors, and stereotypes common to prison discourse operate could inform our understanding of the anxieties that shape and sustain them. A psychoanalytical framework is useful here, since it is uniquely positioned to interrogate what lies beneath these metaphors, capturing what might otherwise remain hidden (cf. Swedberg, 2014). Importantly, this work can happen in two directions: by interrogating already present metaphors, and by viewing narratives through new metaphors that help elucidate and unveil what is hinted at by the narratives (cf. Sandberg & Ugelvik 2016:132). For example, the monstrous womb motif Creed outlined is a useful new metaphor for rethinking prison space (1993).

CAPTIVATING NARRATIVES

Smith discusses the “phenomenon of textually mediated communication, action, and social relations” as a sociologically important question (1990:209). In regarding femininity as one such social relation, Smith notes that “to explore ‘femininity’ as a discourse means a shift away from viewing it as a normative order reproduced through socialization, to which somehow women are subordinated. Rather, femininity is addressed as a “complex of actual relations vested in texts” (1990:163). For the purposes of this study, we can regard otherness in a similar light. Rather than deviance that is reproduced through socialization (such as legislation; imprisonment; and the consumption of culture), otherness is a complex of relations. Specifically, the relation between (individual and collective) self and **other**. In pop culture, this also relates to consumerism, expressed in the relation between art and economy. By targeting the white, professional middle-class man, large parts of popular culture configure otherness or even monstrosity as the relation between said audience and its various **others**: women, Black people, queer people, and so on.

Marketed and largely understood by the reading public as true and terrible stories (Cecil 2015), prison autobiographies can be viewed as an example of the “interconnection in [different people-processing institution’s] logic, historical enactment, and social effects” (Hill Collins & Bilge 2016:157). This is in line with the view of culture as a “complex of actual relations vested in texts” (Smith, D. 1990:163). As fictionalised accounts of prison life, these texts are part of at least two logics; that of imprisonment and that of commercial literary success. Moreover, both

prison and popular culture are spaces that mark belonging and otherness, giving them similar social effects. To this extent, they can be regarded as “the same phenomenon; they differ only in the different symbolic network which supports them” (Žižek 2008:62). The symbolic networks of imprisonment on the one hand and cultural, often stereotypical images of otherness on the other both express and distil the same phenomenon—collective, cultural anxieties pertaining to normalcy and deviance. This echoes Gordon’s definition of power as an “ensemble of social relations that create inequalities” (Gordon 2008:4). As we can see, this ensemble of social relations acts out power hierarchies in interlocking, simultaneous symbolic networks. Additionally, this idea of interlocking symbolic networks is echoed in intersectional studies of violence and power as well, noting how “violence is not only understood and practiced within discrete systems of power, but [...] forms of violence within separate systems might in fact be interconnected and mutually supporting” (Hill Collins & Bilge 2016:55). The class-, gender-, and race-making violence of imprisonment on the one hand and the Gothic genre on the other can thus be regarded as *mutually supporting systems of power, expressing the same phenomenon*—attempts at cementing boundaries between the clean and proper and the defiling and dangerous within the boundaries of patriarchal, heteronormative, (post)colonial societies (cf. Douglas 2002; Kristeva 1982). Adopting a queer, intersectional feminism thus helps to capture how violent narration creates the **other** in simultaneous, interlocking places (e.g. punishment discourse and pop culture), out of the multiple, undesirable traits defined by white-supremacist heteronormativity (Halberstam 1995).

Situated in a grey area comprised of interwoven symbolic networks, prison autobiographies embody aspects of both prison such as it is understood in Western societies’ cultural communication with and about itself, and of Western pop culture and its often stereotyping (re)productions of otherness. Drawing on intersectional, feminist concepts and critiques thus enables the present study to explore how patriarchal heteronormativity **others**, uncannily encounters itself in the **other**, and subsequently attempts to (r)eject this encounter through renewed abjection in and through prison.

While the autobiographical prison novel contains inherent truth claims, the fact that it is a commercial genre also entails what are often unknowable degrees of fictionalization. The process of writing about

prison experiences, especially when said writing is geared towards publishers and a prospective audience, is a form of storytelling. As a form of storytelling, autobiographies draw on conventional storytelling techniques to create suspense and engage the reader in the interest of commercial success. Therefore, prison autobiographies, especially those published and distributed by big publishing houses, are to be regarded as fictionalized narratives rather than realistic accounts (Cecil 2015). Moreover, prison autobiographies are arguably not only fictionalized (Cecil 2015), but also inherently gothicized narratives. This gothicity stems from both the subject matter—prison, which has historical ties to gothicity (Fiddler 2011b; Garland 2012; Smith, C. 2009)—and from the autobiographical format’s affinity with certain gothic conventions. As such, the prison autobiography has gothic tendencies both in terms of style and content. In terms of style, the prison autobiography is not unlike the found footage-genre of film, or the gothic trope of the found manuscript, where narratives are framed by telling the audience or readers how *real* letters, video tapes or journals were discovered and in turn (in)form the subsequent story (Chaplin 2011). Within such narratives, the narrator “professes to be no more than a collector of documents, a compiler of the facts of the case. The reader, of course, is the judge and jury, the courtroom audience, and often, a kind of prosecuting presence expected to know truth, recognize guilt, and penalize monstrosity” (Halberstam 1995:20). In prison novels, this comes into play when imprisoned narrators attempt to differentiate themselves (as innocent) from other (justly) imprisoned people. The problems here do not arise so much from their claims of personal (moral or legal) innocence, but from their occasional willingness to keep other people in the penal system they criticize, oftentimes by making them seem monstrous (and therefore justifiably penalized).

A related gothic narrative convention of the prison autobiography is the framing of narratives as being based on not only true, but also unbelievably unsettling or gruesome stories. The framing of frightening stories as true tends to emphasize both the *unbelievability* and the *need* or even moral obligation for readers *to believe* in the ensuing narrative. An interesting aspect of this is how the autobiographical format of the prison novel shows prison as an abject and uncanny space from *up close and within*. This proximity to prison offers readers particular perspectives. Firstly, such narratives offer detailed information about prison space and prison experiences from a first-hand perspective, in ways that tend to be

gruesome or shocking. The image of prison is thus both intense and close to the reader. Secondly, such narratives offer proximity through renderings of prison space as well as prison time in inescapable detail. This differentiates the prison autobiography from other forms of prison discourse, where the image tends to be more general and given from outside perspectives, such as through visual media and news reports (cf. Cecil 2015).

Selection

Several aspects were considered in the selection of specific prison novels for this study. Novels that included imprisonment but were largely set in or revolved around other things were not considered. Since the analysis is focused on prison, including novels that are primarily about something else might risk “repressing, so to speak, the bulk of [their] narrative”, by elevating a less central episode for that particular story (cf. Castle 1995:121). For this study, the most important selection criteria were (i) that the novels were autobiographies, and (ii) that they were both *about* and mainly *set in* prison.

Another important aspect in the selection process was the status, or approximate popularity, of the work. The reasoning here has been that the more (internationally) popular a story is, the more ingrained it can be in Western society’s conversation with and about itself (see Garland 2012). The more popularized a work is, the more it might be in line with genre conventions and the dominant discourse of factual fictions of prison life. While this was not a question of measuring the sales numbers of individual novels, it did restrict the selection to novels distributed by commercial publishing houses. Self-published prison novels have different characteristics, such as being subjected to less professional editing in the service of commercial success. As such, they were excluded.

In addition to being picked up by publishing houses, indicators of stories being a large or popular part of society’s ongoing conversation with and about itself when it comes to prison included adaptations from books to film or TV-series. Having been adapted into other formats indicates that a book has made an impact, and that its story has been widely circulated and appreciated. The popularity-criterion also accounted for things like widespread media attention; awards; re-releases of new editions; or having the standing of a classic work within its genre. In order to gauge some approximation of how popular a work has been (outside of the obvious

markers like Hollywood movie adaptations), pages like Goodreads were used to search for and assess titles. These sites were useful for finding information about different titles in order to see whether they seemed to have attracted a wide and/or long-lasting readership.²⁹

In addition to these criteria, the narrators' perspectives were also of interest. In an attempt to broaden the picture of prison available for analysis, the study includes stories narrated by different kinds of voices. However, given the popularity-criterion, most of the included titles have been authored by white, straight men, and often by people occupying fairly educated, middle-class positions (cf. Nellis 2012). Of course, this, in itself, says something about whose view of prison is given credit and attention in Western cultural imaginaries. Noticing this led the study to focus on how white supremacy sees itself (and avoids seeing itself) in the prison system it is responsible for having constructed. While the study did not set out with this aim in mind, the selection process prompted a critical view of whiteness and how it operates in the narrativization of prison.

A related aspect that seemed important for an analysis of prison novels was the question of who speaks about what place. As such, one consideration has been whether or not to limit the included titles to those authored by people imprisoned in their own home countries. This could avoid cases of othering that centre on questions of (non)belonging to the country itself and its culture, rather than on prison as such. However, this kind of national othering was only notable in cases where narrators were imprisoned in significantly different cultures to their own (e.g. Swedes imprisoned in Kaliti in *438 Days*). Narrators imprisoned in countries other to their own, but within Western culture, generally did not narrate prison using the same overt, nationalistic othering. As such, the selection was limited to stories about imprisonment in a Western setting, narrated by Western voices.

Moreover, the present study has opted to avoid novels by strictly political prisoners. This is because political prison autobiographies can be considered a sub-genre with particular characteristics uncommon to other prison autobiographies. These characteristics pertain both to the reasons for imprisonment, and to the experiences and stories told thereof (cf.

²⁹ Notably, this assessment has not included checking the sales-numbers of different titles. However, books having phrases along the lines of “international best seller”, or referencing film/TV adaptations, on the cover of a re-release was considered a good indicator of commercial success.

Carrabine 2012b:68; De Marchi 2020). Such texts often include specific types of community-building and resistance(s) to corruption, which give these narratives a different tone. In short, they can be said to depict community rather than isolation, and punishment for thinking rather than acting. These narratives tend to focus on the regime in charge, rather than on prison space as such. While there are titles included in this study that do have political elements to both their story and the actions that the narrator is imprisoned for (e.g. *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*), none of the narrators are in prison due to dissenting opinions alone. A similar consideration was extended to prisoners of war, as they can be considered a form of political prisoners as well. Moreover, their imprisonment could be considered as less reform-oriented than what is featured in 'regular' prison stories. However, prisoner of war-stories often feature imprisonment due to more than dissenting opinions or 'wrong' allegiances alone, even if the definitions of a punishable offence in these stories exist within a wartime logic.³⁰ While stories about prisoners of war have a lot in common with stories about political prisoners, they also have a lot in common with 'general' stories about imprisonment outside of wartime- or politically oppressive logics, and do not tend to share the focus on regimes rather than prisonness often evidenced in political prisoner's narratives. As such, prisoner of war-narratives were not excluded along with political prisoner-narratives (although they were not deliberately sought out on the basis of being wartime novels, either).

Given the aforementioned criteria, the search has been conducted with a rather open approach. Books have been included and excluded along the way, thus finetuning the criteria for inclusion. Finding titles that have been turned into Hollywood movies or TV-series was arguably easier than tracing classics in the genre of prison novels. Finding classics was a process that involved using anything from lists of prison novels online to suggestions from other scholars. In some cases, the books themselves made explicit mention of other prison autobiographies. In these cases, the

³⁰ This study features two prisoner of war narratives: *The Enormous Room* and *The Great Escape*. While they show different (war)times, and places, they do have one thing in common that they do not share as clearly with the other prison stories explored here: an often humorous, sometimes sarcastic tone. This might be due to the power dynamics at play in prisoner of war stories. War prisoners are arguably on more even footing with their captors (i.e. enemy soldiers of comparable and familiar ranks) when compared to the social groups generally subjected to 'ordinary' imprisonment (i.e. poor and marginalized groups) by means of state legislation.

material helped guide the search for more texts. This also speaks to a novel's status, since its inclusion in other works means that it has ongoing relevance for later novels within the same genre.

While circumstances surrounding the books and their authors have been important in assessing the status of a literary work and its suitability for the study, such considerations have not been part of the subsequent analysis. Moreover, while the selection process considered film adaptations as a criterion, I have not watched any of these adaptations in order to avoid getting mixed up in different iterations of the same story. As such, no adaptations are included in the analysis.

Selected Titles

Title	Author	Time (set in)	Place (set in)
Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist	Alexander Berkman	1900s	USA
The Enormous Room	E.E. Cummings	1910s	France
Papillon	Henri Charrière	1930s-1945	French Guiana
The Great Escape	Paul Brickhill	1940s	Germany
Inside Alcatraz	Jim Quillen	1940s-1950s	USA
In the Belly of the Beast	Jack Henry Abbott	1950-1980	USA
Dead Man Walking	Sister Helen Prejean	1980s	USA
Newjack	Ted Conover	1990s	USA
A Prison Diary	Jeffrey Archer	2000s	UK
Orange is the New Black	Piper Kerman	2000s	USA

Figure I: Selected titles in diegetic chronological order.

Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist is widely regarded as a classic both in prison literature and in autobiographical writing more generally. Part of its acclaim has to do with its treatment of homosexuality, which the narrator is horrified of at the beginning of the story only to find himself attracted to men towards the end. First published in 1912, the book has been re-released several times by different publishing houses.

The Enormous Room is the story of a prison in France during World War I. The story spans a relatively brief amount of time—the author was imprisoned for about four months—but it has nonetheless become a classic within the genre of prison novels. Moreover, the author has received several awards for his literary work in general, which has furthered the status of this work as an acclaimed prison novel.

Papillon, largely set in the Devil's Island penal colony of French Guiana, depicts both imprisonment and attempted escapes. It has been adapted to film not once but twice (in 1973 and 2017). The book was also a best-seller upon its release in 1969, and has since been published in over 20 languages. Additionally, this novel has been accused of varying degrees of overt fictionalization, which has led to doubts regarding some of its truth claims. However, since this study is not interested in verifying the veracity of the explored novels, this is simply an interesting facet of this novel's notoriety.

The Great Escape depicts the incarceration and subsequent escape from a German prisoner of war camp in 1944. First released in 1950, *The Great Escape* has been re-released in multiple languages and editions, and it was adapted into a (by now classic) Hollywood film in 1963. The film, in turn, was nominated for several awards.

Inside Alcatraz has contributed to, and is now partially kept relevant by, the success of the now decommissioned Alcatraz as a tourist spot. Like *Papillon* and *The Great Escape*, *Inside Alcatraz* also depicts escape attempts, which has contributed to its popularity. While prison escapes can be regarded as a sub-genre within prison novels, these novels still all centre on prison as both the site and the theme of the novel. Escape is but one of many themes in the story.

In the Belly of the Beast, like most novels included here, is widely regarded as a classic in its genre. This is largely due to its being introduced and edited by renowned author Norman Mailer. However, it is also due to the events surrounding its publication. Published in 1981, it is comprised of letters received by Mailer from Jack Henry Abbott. Due to these letters, Mailer supported Abbott in his bid for parole, which was successful—much like the book itself. However, Abbott killed a man shortly after his release, and was convicted and returned to prison. Ironically, this murder coincided with favourable reviews in *The New York Times*. These reviews stated that the book was “the most intense, I might even say the most fiercely visionary book of its kind”, and that “Mailer saw this immediately, and we must be grateful to him for getting these letters into publishable form and - a job more difficult - for helping to get Abbott out on parole” (Des Pres 1981). The confluence of the book's success and the author's reincarceration have made it stand out in the genre. Moreover, the book has inspired films (e.g. *Ghosts... of the Civil Dead*) and been adapted into plays (e.g. the off-Broadway production *In the Belly of the Beast Revisited*).

Dead Man Walking is another classic in the genre, and was adapted into a Hollywood film by the same name in 1995. This film, in turn, was nominated for several Golden Globes and Academy Awards. This story offers a different perspective from the others, since the narrator is neither imprisoned nor employed by the prison. Instead, she functions as a spiritual advisor to men imprisoned on death row. As such, this is the only novel in this study from a visitor's point of view.

Newjack was authored by an investigative reporter, and this title garnered quite a bit of media attention and outrage upon its release in 2000. Having been denied entry as a reporter, Ted Conover got a job working at Sing Sing in order to write about it based on his experiences. This is the only story explored here that is narrated from the point of view of prison personnel.

A Prison Diary: Volume I, HELL was originally published in 2002, using the nom de plume FF 8282. Later releases made use of the author's real name, Jeffrey Archer. This substituted the mystery of the book's initial release with a familiarity with its author. Archer's status as a public person both as a politician and as an author before the publication of these prison diaries thus gave them additional attention.

Orange is the New Black was originally published in 2010, and was later turned into a hit Netflix series that spun off and continued its story. Among the titles explored here, this is the only one from the point of view of an imprisoned woman. Along with *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*, it is one of two titles that explicitly discusses questions of homosexuality and queerness in prison from an inside perspective. Other titles contain these themes, but these two give it more attention and approach it from within rather than without (although *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* arguably moves from without to within throughout the story).

While these titles span different times and places, this is not a historical study. As such, the narratives are not primarily studied as relics of their socio-historical contexts. Rather, they are studied as parts of a bigger whole: the ongoing storytelling about prison that lingers, shifts, and perpetuates itself both within and across Western societies. As such, rather than being viewed as socio-historical artefacts, this study regards these novels as a part of the same overarching discourse as today's true crime phenomenon. While they were written in the past, they are still read today. Moreover, their ahistorical standing in culture relates to their gothicness—as gothicized infotainment stories, they possess the same narrative traits as

outright fictional, timeless horror stories. In other words, what is important for this study is that texts, while written in other times or places, can still linger as part of prison's ongoing, storytelling function.

Subjects as Society

The stories explored here were selected because they are set in, and are about, prison. Additionally, this study limited its scope to successfully commercialized autobiographies. This limitation, in turn, led to a white, often heteronormative, middle-class sample of authors and narratorial voices. However, the selected titles offer more variety than they might seem to at first glance. These narratives present prison through the eyes of visitors (*Dead Man Walking*); guards (*Newjack*); imprisoned men (e.g. *In the Belly of the Beast*; *Papillon*; *Inside Alcatraz*); imprisoned women (*Orange is the New Black*); educated, upper middle-class people incarcerated for the first time (*Orange is the New Black*; *A Prison Diary*); people from lower classes who have been imprisoned repeatedly and lack normative education (e.g. *In the Belly of the Beast*; *Inside Alcatraz*); people in queer relationships (e.g. *Orange is the New Black*, *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*); people in heteronormative relationships (e.g. *Newjack*; *Orange is the New Black*); people imprisoned for war crimes (*The Enormous Room*; *The Great Escape*); for non-violent drug- or perjury offences (*Orange is the New Black*; *A Prison Diary*), for violent offenses (e.g. *Papillon*; *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*; *In the Belly of the Beast*); as well as for thefts and prison escapes (*In the Belly of the Beast*; *Inside Alcatraz*). These novels are narrated by people of different ages, genders, and sexualities, and tell stories from different historical time periods and places in the Western world. As such, while the narratorial voice is a Western, white one in all the explored titles, other aspects of this voice shift from un- to well-educated, masculine to feminine, queer to heteronormative, young to old, and so on. Within and between these voices, one might discern a wider, societal voice. While this voice does not span *all* facets of Western society (i.e. it lacks perspectives that are not white), it does capture much of how Western prisons are understood by the social worlds that use them.

With this in mind, it is noteworthy that the stories of prison explored here, especially with regards to prison's horrors, are very similar across and within this shifting, over-all voice. As such, as far as these stories speak to the prison novel genre itself, it seems stable over time and across narratorial perspectives. What does change, however, is the

vocabulary used when imprisoned people are depicted as **others**. For example, older texts (e.g. *The Enormous Room* and *The Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*) use derogatory terms (especially for Black people) that are largely absent in newer works. However, this does not coincide with a more or less monster-making tone: the absence of certain derogatory words in newer novels do not seem to imply that Black, queer, or women characters are not still subjected to the same narratorial violence as in older texts. It just takes on new forms. In other words, while certain parts of the monster-making vocabulary shift over time, the presence of monster-making narration still remains largely unchanged. This will be especially prominent in Chapter 5 of this study.

This consistency holds true for the space, as well as its inhabitants. While certain texts explored here might use horror iconography more than others, this does not vary along categories of either narratorial voice or historical time. Prison and the otherness that it enforces, then, looms large across and between categories of space and time, as well as across the different subject positions from which it is narrated. This shows how prison is deeply ingrained in the Western cultural imaginary, and has the power to haunt and unsettle between and across socio-historical and intersectional specificities.

Across all the subject positions exhibited by the narratorial voices in this study, prison consistently comes across as a space of abjection and uncanniness. While the abject **other** sometimes shifts, the process of abjection itself remains (see Kristeva 1982). Similarly, while different kinds of haunting were apparent to different narrators (e.g. imprisoned people and their captors were haunted by different aspects of prison life), prison is nonetheless always a haunting presence in these texts. As such, the analysed stories all exemplify how prison is charged with feelings of fear and threat, and how this enables it to exert a haunting presence on society in general (cf. Fiddler 2011a:85). In other words, exploring different narratorial voices can capture what prison, as a storytelling institution, *is*, both within subjective viewpoints, and between and across them. And what it is, in terms of how it relates to general as well as subject-formative anxieties, is abject and uncanny. Analysing prison stories, moreover, not only confirms that prison *is* abject and uncanny—it also offers nuanced insights into *how*.

CODING AND ANALYSIS

Analysing the novels was largely a question of looking at how prison space was presented within the narratives. More specifically, it was a question of looking at how prison was presented as a frightening, threatening, or unsettling space. This quickly led to finding the study's two broadest analytical categories, which derived from the study's theoretical framework: abjection and uncanniness. These were the clearest, broadest categories for defining and sorting *how* prison space came across as unsettling, disgusting, monstrous, threatening, or frightening. Many examples relied on abject, explicit depictions of prison as a dirty, dangerous space. Meanwhile, just as many painted a picture of prison as an uncanny space, defined primarily by its uncertainties and lack of tangible boundaries. Importantly, both these kinds of examples were always present within the same text, and often overlapped to create interesting mergers of the tangible and the terrible.

The initial analysis of the texts was mainly undertaken on the pages of the books themselves. The first step of the analysis was repeated close readings of all the texts, paying close attention to how prison was narrativized. How does space 'come alive' on the page? Narrativization is about the literary creation of space as something that can be experienced—this differentiates it somewhat from narration, which is more about how things are described in the story as a whole. Descriptions are, however, part of this process of narrativization.

In the close readings, the texts were regarded both as their own universes, and as a superimposed whole where each text contributes to (and exemplifies) an overarching carceral imaginary. However, this was not a comparative undertaking. Rather, the books are viewed as different examples of the same thing—not as more or less in line with one another. In the first close reading of each novel, the analysis focused on how prison was narrativized using horror iconography, and how various metaphors, tropes, and turns of phrase were used. These initial readings were largely focused on what is visible in the text. This meant looking at *what the text actually says*, and how it establishes relationships (e.g. through monstrosity) between the narrator and the characters and/or the space, rather than immediately delving into unveiling *what that means* or how that aligns with theory and might inform the understanding of collective anxieties regarding prison. Those steps came later, after all the initial readings. Subsequently, the observations of what was present in the narratives led

to the formulation of analytical themes (embodied by this study's empirical chapters), based on what turned up repeatedly, across all or multiple texts.

During the close readings, sections of text in the novels were highlighted in different colours to denote different themes. These initial colour codes were broad, and largely based on theoretical points of departure. For instance, things relating to formulating a prison chronotope were coded in lilac, different forms of uncanniness in blue, and abjection in pink. Initially, there were other colours denoting other themes as well (seven in total), but these three were used most frequently. Of course, these themes were not mutually exclusive, and each theme could contain multiple ways for it to manifest. For example, the abject could show up as processes of abject ejection or devourment, as well as through more visceral, physical traces of such processes. In other words, it could be a verb, as well as a noun or an adjective. However, both the latter forms speak to the former: they are traces or results of the process of ejecting, creating, or displaying the abject.

Along with the colour codes, I made notes in the margin to capture when things stood out as particularly informative, or how a particular segment stood out as abject, uncanny, or a mixture of both. This was a theoretically guided way of looking at the texts, paying particular attention to how narratives made use of things like 'boundary maintenance', 'body parts', 'time loops', 'monstrosity' 'repetition', or 'uncertainty' in narrativizing prison. It was also rather open approach, where things could be marked as important or interesting, but without certainty as to how they would fit into the bigger picture just yet. The analysis thus grew from a mixture of theoretical and empirical input.

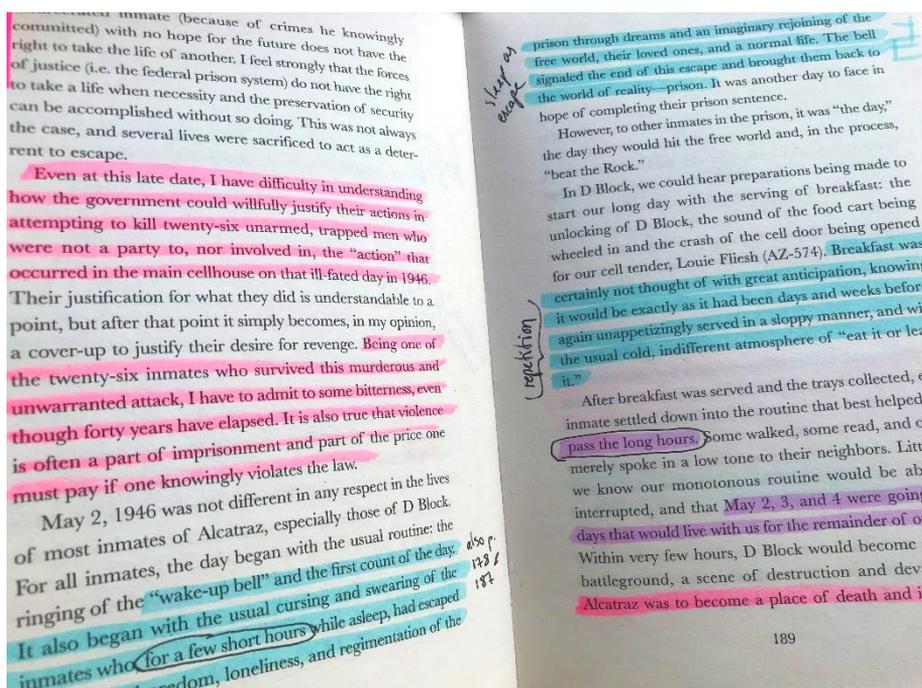


Figure II: Colour coding and note-taking exemplified on the pages of *Inside Alcatraz*.

Colour coding makes it easy to get an overview of which themes are more prevalent in any given text—just flipping through the pages will reveal more or less of this or that. Going through which colours, and thus what themes, were the most prevalent in the initial coding led to a subsequent, more detailed analysis. This, along with how texts were included and excluded throughout the study,³¹ made an intertextual layer become apparent. Some texts made explicit mention of one another, but more often they drew on the same metaphors or expressions as one another in their narration (e.g. prison as a womb/tomb; time as dragging and slow; imprisoned people as merged together). When themes, expressions, and ways of narrativizing prison space were present across most if not all of the explored texts, these findings helped fine-tune the broad, theoretical colour codes, which was a key part of turning these initial codes into this study's empirical chapters. This fine-tuning involved making more notes in the margins, to tie pages and novels to one another or to remind myself of what about the highlighted section sparked my initial interest. This was

³¹ In total, around 20 titles were read while fine-tuning the selection criteria.

especially crucial when re-reading the novels in light of both themselves (now that I knew how they ended) and one another throughout the study.

Once all the texts had been close read, common threads that weave their way throughout all the narratives became visible. As such, this study relied on methods common to literary studies. At this point, assembling all of the quotes in one document became necessary in order to discuss them all together, across different themes and titles. To do that, this now-printed research publication started as little more than a collection of quotes, containing many different thematic subheadings created as a means of sorting the material. Eventually, after many iterations of making the novels speak to one another as well as to theory and prison research (Gordon 2008), more specific themes emerged. First, the *monstrous-feminine* (Chapter 4), which deals with how prison is an abject, monstrous-uterine site that enacts punishment through incorporation and dissolution. This theme focuses on abject otherness, and the physical, loathsome iconography that expresses it. The second empirical chapter (Chapter 5) is organized around *subjective ejections of the abject* within this already abject prison space. Here, the analysis moves from prison as an abject body to the creation of abject bodies within prison—both by prison and by those inside it. This chapter focuses largely on cis-sexist, racist, and homophobic narration in narratorial attempts to remain whole and resist assimilation. The third empirical chapter (Chapter 6) deals with themes of *haunting*, and how prison is a shifting, ambiguous timespace. As a haunted, and haunting, house, it is liminal and unsettling. Here, things like punisher and punishee, or death and escape, become uncanny doubles of one another across time and space. Finally, the last empirical chapter (Chapter 7) outlines a *prison chronotope*, in order to better interrogate prison as a narrativized timespace where stagnant, looping time and labyrinthine, repeating space merge and unsettle each other in creating a sticky, claustrophobic environment.

The themes sprung from looking at things like what words were used; how narrators set the scene; what was the focus of the story; how physical or spectral fears or threats were; or how much story-time and text-time was devoted to presenting prison space. For instance, was one year in prison dealt with in detail across several pages, or dealt with quickly in a brief paragraph? What about one night? How much text-time the novel devotes to different stretches of story-time contributes to the over-all atmosphere, and says something about how important different events are to the story. Similarly, how time and space are narrated as linked in

different ways became a noticeable feature of the explored texts. Moreover, a story's choice of words is an important aspect of how prison space is narrativized, and how this narration hints at positions of power. Here, the presupposed agreement between narrators and narratees is important, since it hints at underlying ideologies. Are we talking about convicts or imprisoned people? Are people's pronouns honoured or denied? Are those who work in prison officers, guards, screws, or pigs? Other examples of word-choice have more to do with horror iconography, and include the different tone of describing a space as dark or as pitch black; small or claustrophobic.

Analysing Othering Narration

Since studies of otherness always produce an **other** (Puar 2012:52), scholars have emphasized the need to elucidate how academic concepts and tools, "ways of knowing, may also constitute structures of knowledge production that can themselves be the object of intersectional critique" (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall 2013:795-6). This is in line with the call "to be suspicious of monster hunters, monster makers, and above all, discourses invested in purity and innocence" (Halberstam 1995:27). The danger lies in how academic tools might themselves reinforce inequalities that they aim to explore, critique, or reduce. This necessitates a careful, critical approach to studying the metaphors and horror iconography tied up with penal imagery. This is especially true when it comes to popular titles in the mainstream, since mainstream entertainment tends to prioritize white, heteronormative narratives (cf. Carrabine 2012b:68). As studies have pointed out when it comes to prison's (re)presentation in autobiographical literature over time, "most of the literature is written by privileged prisoners" (Carrabine 2012b:68).

In light of these issues, prison novels can be considered as one aspect of how prison functions as a race-making institution (Wacquant 2002). Prison novels reinforce stereotypes pertaining to race, gender, and sexuality through the use of narratorial othering. This narratorial othering can be regarded as a form of violence, and an example of the reproduction of "a distinct colonizer/colonized relationship through cultural recreation" brought to light by Higgins and Swartz (2018:92). Here, ejecting the **other** as abject through narration becomes an attempt at solidifying the border *between* "colonizer/colonized", whereas the dissolution of that border becomes an encounter with the uncanny. Such

encounters unsettle the boundaries between self and **other**, as well as ideas of what should or could be considered as abject, and from what point of view. While “no individual lives every aspect of his or her existence within a single identity category” (Chun, Lipsitz and Shin 2013:923), the same cannot be said of fictional(ized) characters—or their narrators. Therefore, fictionalized prison narratives in general, and gothicized prison narratives in particular, can offer insights into how prejudice manifests through metaphors and stereotyping characterization. This positions autobiographical prison novels within the broader question of how societal, collective involvement in harm and punishment is expressed through the sharing of stories (cf. Presser & Sandberg 2019). This, in turn, can be used to shed light on the (re)production and subsequent abjection of otherness that prison entails as a culturally imagined, ideologically charged reality (see Fiddler 2011b; Sothkott 2016; Higgins & Swartz 2018; Smith, C. 2009).

Studies show that there are tendencies in gothic literature to prioritize and express “colonial definitions of the colonized” (Khair 2015:8), which is similar to the tendencies to reproduce “a distinct colonizer/colonized relationship through cultural recreation” in crime policy discourse (Higgins & Swartz 2018:92). Such cultural othering of Black and other non-white bodies is often achieved by the use of “bestial language” (Higgins & Swartz 2018:92), marking said bodies as abject, and oftentimes monstrous to the perceiving, colonizing point of view. This shows how violent othering is present in language both in legislative and entertainment-oriented narratives. Feminist scholars have levied similar critique against heteronormative, masculine definitions of undesirable or threatening femininities and sexualities, and of the equating of abjection with femininity (e.g. Creed 1991; Halberstam 1995). This gives rise to a particular set of methodological problems pertaining to any discussion of prison’s gothicity (cf. Smith, C. 2009; Sothkott 2016), since the same position of power and privilege governs the cultural work performed by prison as well as by the gothic. From this patriarchal, colonizing point of view, gothicity and prison address and distil cultural anxieties, aiming them at specific bodies by rendering them as deviant, criminalized, monstrous, or otherwise **other** (Höglund 2011; Khair 2015). The bodies in question tend to be that which the colonizing patriarch views as different in a negative sense: non-Western; non-white; non-masculine; non-cis; or non-heterosexual. As such, the monstrous **other** to be either narrativized or

imprisoned tends to be a racialized, feminized, or queered body, or a space somehow associated with the colonized; feminine; or sexually ambiguous (see Höglund 2011; Chaplin 2011; Khair 2015). In an attempt to avoid reinforcing these othering processes instead of interrogating them, the present study views narrators' voices in prison autobiographies as sites of narratorial othering, rather than as voices that can describe a pre-existing **other**.

Narrators or Authors?

While the autobiographical genre entails that the narrator is also the author (at least to a large extent), the present study makes a clear distinction between the two. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, the present study is interested in the image of prison available for public consumption. In short, its interest is in the narratives themselves as parts of how prison is collectively imagined. The author is irrelevant to this interest, since (s)he does not exist within the text. Secondly, this study has neither an interest in nor the access to the authorial intent behind these narratives. Given the editing process between writing a first draft and a novel's eventual commercial publication, there is no way the present study could make claims about authorial intent since the authors—unlike the narrators—exist outside of the text, and thus outside of the material under study.

As other scholars have put it, an “author may embody in a work ideas, beliefs, emotions other than or even quite opposed to those he has in real life; he may also embody different ideas, beliefs, and emotions in different works” (Rimmon-Kenan 2002:88). This point emphasizes the ethical problems that a study of authors based on their novels would entail. To paraphrase Rimmon-Kenan, literary works present ideas without representing the author as a person. As such, it is worth reiterating that I do not make any claims about the individual experiences or intentions of the authors who wrote the novels explored here. Instead, the present study focuses on the narrators; the storytellers that exist solely within the fictionalized account they recount. This also means that no biographical information about an author that is not offered within the story itself as information about the narrator is included in the analysis. As an extension of the analytical distinction between the authors-as-people and the narrators-as-text, the analysis uses first names when referring to narrators, as opposed to last names when referring to authors.

While the authors and their intent fall outside of the scope of the present study, the truth claim inherent in the autobiographical genre does not, since the notion of a story being based on true events impacts the reception of a narrative and the cultural work it can perform vis-à-vis narratees and implied readers (Chaplin 2011; Rimmon-Kenan 2002).

(Un)Reliable Narrators

It is not uncommon, in introductions or in stories that follow, that certain aspects of the storytelling rely explicitly on hearsay, and retell the stories and rumours narrators themselves have been told by others (e.g. Mailer's introduction in *In the Belly of the Beast*). It is also common that narrators express more implicit forms of uncertainty about aspects of their story, such as about how much time has passed, or how large a space was. Such instances tie into another common convention in terms of gothic narrative conventions—the unreliable narrator.³² A reliable narrator can be considered as giving “an authoritative account of the *fictional truth*” (Rimmon-Kenan 2002:101, emphasis added). Contrariwise, an unreliable narrator is one “the reader has reasons to suspect” concerning the (fictional) truth of their account (Rimmon-Kenan 2002:101). Narrative unreliability thus has to do with whether a narrator “misreports, -interprets or -evaluates, or if s/he underreports, -interprets or -evaluates” (Shen 2013:1). Narrators might reflect on such questions within the story:

I realize, as I write, that there will be those who say or feel that I am partial, and only see the side of the inmates, having been an inmate at Alcatraz. This is not true, because realizing that I had such mixed emotions years ago, I delayed writing this book until I could be fair and objective.

Quillen 2015:187

Here, the narrator of *Inside Alcatraz* reflects on his own possible unreliability. Similar occurrences were found in several novels. Often, this was tied to how prison space impacts the narrator and their ability to tell ‘the right’ story. Since this study is interested in how prison is presented, rather than represented, this is an interesting faced of what narrativized prison space is. Narratorial unreliability is thus an informative feature of these kinds of stories, not a detriment to them.

³² While narratorial unreliability is not exclusive to gothicized storytelling, it is arguably more common there than in most other forms of storytelling.

Main reasons for narrative unreliability tend to be a “narrator’s limited knowledge, his personal involvement, and his problematic value-scheme” (Rimmon-Kenan 2002:101). For example, if it is unclear whether a narrator is haunted in a supernatural sense or seeing ghosts in a psychological sense, that causes narrative unreliability. As readers, we cannot know if the story itself is supernatural or not, because we cannot trust the narrator’s account. Narrative unreliability thus arises from a disconnect between the story and the storytelling. Importantly, it is still a disconnect *within* the story—not in relation to anything outside of it.

Narrators, when unreliable, are often reliable in some ways but not in others; “it is very common for the narrator to report the events accurately but misinterpret and/or misevaluate them” (Shen 2013:1). Here, we can use Henry James’ horror classic *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) as an example, where the narrator “can be seen as a reliable narrator telling the story of two haunted children, but she can also be considered an unreliable, neurotic narrator, unwittingly reporting her own hallucinations” (Rimmon-Kenan 2002:104). At this point, it is important to emphasize that it is not the purpose of this study to divide the narrators of the explored texts into groups of who is reliable or not. Rather, as it pertains to prison autobiography, (un)reliability becomes interesting with regards to how imprisonment is relayed to readers. It also relates to how narrators can draw attention to their own act of telling, or attempt to avoid drawing attention to it. While accounts of imprisonment might be unreliable in relation to certain aspects (e.g. misevaluations of how big a space is; how many people are in a room; the time spent in a place), such misevaluations are reliable in the sense that this confusion is often narrated as part of the imprisonment experience. Confusion becomes part of the story, as it is caused by the space. We do not always get an accurate retelling of details or interpretation of events, but we do get a sense of what the experience does to the narrator’s ability to evaluate their situation. This plays into the notion of prison autobiographies as fictionalized accounts; unreliability has an impact on the narrative that can enhance the storytelling. As such, the fictional and the factual are not mutually exclusive. Rather, prison autobiographies are always both.³³

The idea of prison autobiographies as factual fantasies is key to the present study’s approach to both the material and the analysis thereof.

³³ In this sense, studying ‘true’ stories is somewhat different from studying ‘pure’ fiction.

With an approach to these texts as presentations of a culturally imagined reality, narratorial unreliability becomes part of how that factual fantasy is culturally perpetuated. It becomes part of what makes the story what it is, instead of an obstacle to finding out how things were 'behind', 'before', or otherwise outside of the text. Moreover, this focus on what is present *within* the text itself also ties into the present study's view of narrators as separate from authorial intent.

Narratees, Readers, and the Public

Another important methodological distinction has to do with what these texts are, for the purposes of this study. Since the autobiography has inherent truth claims, it is easy to misconstrue the autobiographical novel as a reliable, ethnographic first-hand account. However, this is not a study of the individual experience of imprisonment. Nor is it a study of a general experience of imprisonment, derived from select individual samples. Instead, this is a study of the image of prison made available to the public. As such, and as previously mentioned, the analysis does not focus on the author. However, it also does not focus on the reader as a physical, actual person experiencing the texts (or prison through the texts). The aspects of the explored texts that are of interest here are i) the texts themselves as a view of what prison is and does as a social institution, and to some extent ii) how the texts, by means of their narrators, position the narratee. The narratee, unlike the actual reader and much like the narrator, is a textual construct (Rimmon-Kenan 2002:89). "The narratee is the agent which is at the very least implicitly addressed by the narrator" (Rimmon-Kenan 2002:90). For the purposes of this study, the narratee is closely linked to notions of 'the public', 'society', and 'the reader' or 'viewer', since all of them are *recipients of the story*. While the narratee always receives it, being a textual construct (i.e. a position given by the text), other recipients exist outside of and more or less far away from the text. However, the fact that certain texts are more popular, and therefore more culturally ingrained in society than others, says something about to what extent the narratee-position of these texts agrees with the discourse surrounding them. It is in this light that this study regards 'readers' and 'the public' as closely linked to the narratees of popularized, commercialized prison novels.

Reading Reflexively

While qualitative methods situate the researcher as an active part in knowledge production, the interpretive work involved in close readings of published novels differs somewhat from other qualitative approaches. To a certain extent, any novel is separate from any attempt at analysing it—things are either present in it, or not. The story either involves certain elements, or it does not. It follows that asking questions of a novel actualizes other forms of knowledge production than, for instance, asking questions of people.

While the researcher decides on what to look for and how to code it, a novel does not alter its contents based on who reads it. Here, reflexivity becomes a question of being aware of to what extent one is attuned to certain aspects of a story at the possible expense of others. An example of what *not* to do, that speaks to these points, can be found in the 2018 Golden Globe nominations. *Get Out*, directed by Jordan Peele, can be broadly defined as a horror-drama about racism. Importantly, it depicts these horrors from a Black perspective, which makes the film different in tone and focus from generic horror in the white mainstream. While *Get Out* was understood and lauded by critics and large parts of its audience, **other**, whiter parts of the movie-going audience were reportedly laughing in theatres while watching it, and when the Golden Globe nominations came around the film was nominated as a comedy. While the film has satirical elements to it, labelling a horror-drama that has even been described as a documentary of the Black experience *as a comedy for white audiences* goes a long way towards harmfully misrepresenting the subject matter. As a parallel to study design, this raises questions of what aspect of an explored text a study could, and should, focus on.

While this study focuses on the unsettling, frightening, or threatening aspects of prison, that is not to say that those are the only themes available in the narratives—or in the theoretical framework of abjection and uncanniness. This all boils down to questions of study design, as well as researchers' perspectives on and sensitivities to various aspects of a texts. Simply put, sexist narration might be more obvious to women readers, racist narration might be more obvious to Black readers, and so on. Relatedly, genre conventions will be more evident to those acquainted with the genre, and tropes to those familiar with the culture they are prevalent in. In short, different readers, nominating committees, or researchers will see, and recognize, different things. As for my own

research, as a white cis woman, I am more likely to notice some things at first glance than others. Moreover, since the explored novels span different times and places, their relative distances to my own social realities also mean that certain aspects of these novels will have stood out immediately while others might have become more apparent as the study progressed. As such, this study has been a process of re-evaluating my own knowledge production processes and go-to ways of sense making, in tandem with analysing the novels themselves. Of course, the selection of material will also impact the over-all data available for study in any research project. For example, the present study's lack of Black authors means that it will lack Black perspectives on how and why prison can be frightening and unsettling. This lack speaks to a broader point relating to whose narratives become popularized in the mainstream, since part of the study's selection criteria was based on commercial success.

When it comes to the study of how prison novels portray prison as frightening, these fears are arguably articulated in a way that is supposed to speak to a specific audience, given that commercialization entails a target audience (i.e. the professional middle class) (Hörnqvist 2013). Moreover, the recent surge of interest in true crime and infotainment as an overarching genre of entertainment has arguably extended the prospective audience even further. Notably, the audience authors envision when writing a first draft and the audience that editors and publishing houses envision during processes of commercialization might not always align. The concepts of reader, audience, and narratee often merge within this study. That is not to say that there are no distinctions between them. For instance, the narratee is a purely textual construct, just like the narrator, while the reader or audience can be concrete as well as implied. However, for the purposes of this study, these positions are all viewed as *given by the text*. As such, they do not refer to any real body, individual or collective, but rather to the position that such bodies take if and when they encounter a text. In line with this, the present study is not concerned with the experience of either individual authors or individual readers as it relates to the explored texts. Instead, the study focuses on how carceral horror is expressed in the selected prison novels, and how these expressions situate narratees—which is how they, by extension, also situate its readers and target audience.

As a researcher, being part of an intended target audience can be both a detriment and a strength to any study of cultural expression. While

being part of the target audience is not at all synonymous with being part of the actual audience, it does mean that some aspects of one's social position are likely to be in line with what the story wants them to be. Disregarding questions of personal taste (e.g. I do not consume true crime content in my time off), being part of a target audience entails that the popular culture under study is directed towards some aspect of one's own social position. As such, this study is a case of studying aspects of culture from *within* that same culture. Meanwhile, that does not equate to being in a position that aligns or agrees with the text. From a semiotic perspective on ideology, this can be boiled down to a question of whether or not the researcher occupies a position that makes them likely to agree with or recoil from an ideological message (see Chandler 2011). To use another example from the cultural sphere, an incel is likely to respond differently from a feminist to Solanas' SCUM Manifesto (1967). It follows that their potential close readings of it would pose different research questions and yield different results. However, neither one of them is likely to mistake it for a travel guide or a cook book.

Similar things can be said for narrative studies of prison stories. While researchers' perspectives on what is interesting or important might differ, there are still unmistakable things *present in the text*. That said, we might place our focus differently. For instance, reading the novels from a critical standpoint has factored into my wanting to focus on how narrators create monstrosity, and what that says about whose fear is articulated in what ways. A less critical approach might focus on the monsters, rather than the monster-making. However, either approach would have to take monstrosity into account, since it is clearly present in the texts. Moreover, since fictionalized, gothicized narratives rely on certain tropes and genre specificities, the extent of one's cultural affinity with these aspects of a text matter for what observations, coding, and analysis any researcher is able to produce. It follows that being part of the target audience means that certain aspects of the narratives will be relatively easy to unpack, while others will be more elusive.

Quotes and Presentation

I read all of the novels in their English original versions, or as published English translations (where applicable). As such, the quotes are lifted straight off the pages, without any additional editing or translation. Moreover, whenever the quotes are being paraphrased in the subsequent

analysis, this is marked in italics. Where sections of text have been omitted for clarity, this is marked by an ellipsis in square brackets: [...] Similarly, when clarifying information has been added to a quote, this is included in square brackets as well.

MOVING FORWARD

Cultural depictions, as forms of storytelling, influence people's understanding of crime and punishment, merging fact and fiction in the process (Carrabine 2008:99;130; Cecil 2015). Moreover, storytelling is "a basic device for creating, providing and assigning meaning" to (collective or individual) experiences (Sandberg & Ugelvik, 2016:129). As such, prison's function as a setting, plot, and teller of stories becomes increasingly relevant as an object of study. By examining how prison is narrativized as a social, cultural institution, we can explore how it is interlaced with cultural anxieties. This entails working with metaphors and metonymies both when they are already present in the text, and when adding them can help elucidate the socio-cultural work that prison autobiographies perform.

Valier notes that the interplay of fact and fiction in contemporary penalty is especially suited to psychoanalytical analyses of their gothic, and gothicizing, content. In her study of the powers of horror in contemporary penalty, she notes that:

Dramatizing crime and punishment through a gothic register of trauma and horror hence demands scrutiny of the nexus *between law and the literary/visual*. A process of mutual implication pertains *between the real and the fictive*, which comes about through the merging of news and political debate with entertainment as 'infotainment'. It is hence as necessary to explore the powers of horror in contemporary penalty as they are invoked through the *texts and images circulated in true crime stories*, newspaper articles, television programmes and movies as it is to examine the gothicism of statutory changes, individual legal judgments and policy statements.

Valier 2002:321

For this study, it is important to note both the liminal space in which infotainment (such as autobiographies) exists, and the assertion that punishment is based on gothic tropes both in practice and in its cultural expression (see also Valier 2002:320). This study grapples with this liminality by exploring the social, communicative content of prison autobiographies as abject and uncanny. While this study does not regard

these novels as representations of the real, it does not regard them as pure fiction either—they are part of the liminal space that Valier defines *between the real and the fictional*.

While this liminal space might sound obscure, it is constantly on display in various forms of true crime stories. In a sense, this means that this study grapples with how “criminology needs to rethink its relations with the ascendant power of spectacle” (Carrabine 2012a:463). Since prison replaced “the old spectacle of the scaffold” (Smith, C. 2009:53), it has arguably gone on to become a pop-cultural spectacle in its own right. Its appeal as horror-laden entertainment only seems to increase, given the rising interest in gritty, true crime narratives (Cecil 2015). The blurring of fact and fiction in true crime stories adds an air of spectacle to the mundane, transforming prison life from boredom to action (cf. Carrabine 2012b; Cecil 2015; Gordon 2008; Valier 2002). Here, psychoanalysis and narrative criminology share an interest in both *what* is said, and in *how* it is said (cf. Gordon 2008:194). The prevalence of horror iconography in factual-fictional prison imagery thus lends itself to an exploration of how prison is an abject and uncanny social institution, and what this tells us about the collective anxieties it distils and displays.

CHAPTER 4

PRISON AS AN ABJECT MOTHER

*With no job, no money, no possessions, no phone privileges,
I was verging on a nonperson.
Kerman 2013:64*

That prison is an isolating space that keeps its inhabitants away from the rest of society should come as no surprise to anyone acquainted with scholarship on punishment (e.g. Garland 2012; Smith, P. 2008; Smith, C. 2009; Sykes 1958). In light of its isolating properties, coupled with its rehabilitative, rebirthesque aims, studies have considered prison as a uterine, mothering space (Duncan 1996; Fiddler 2007; Pheasant-Kelly 2013). Such studies explain how the conceptualization of imprisonment, and the enclosed space it entails, as a metaphorical womb implies an infantile status and a potential for subsequent rebirth for its inhabitants. Studies have also suggested that the routine care that imprisonment entails is akin to the mothering of children (Duncan 1996:27). Fiddler suggests two ways of “examining the uterine space of the prison. It can either be seen as a nurturing, maternal space or as the locus of a rebirth” (2007:198). This chapter devotes its attention to a third option: prison as a monstrous uterine space that devours and assimilates, enforcing incorporation.

In the novels explored in this study, prison is often narrativized in line with monstrous womb iconography: as a “voracious maw, the mysterious black hole that threatens to give birth to equally horrific offspring as well as threatening to incorporate everything in its path” (Creed 1993:27). As this chapter will make apparent, prison embodies these traits by threatening to incorporate people regardless of their official status as captive or captor. Moreover, it denies rebirth of the clean and proper, instead it creates the unmade, abject, and monstrous.

In defining the monstrous-feminine, Creed critiques the traditional view of femininity as abject. She emphasizes that a reworking of *why* femininity is abject to patriarchal societies is needed, since this will question the assumption that femininity equates ejected, abject victimization. In Creed's view, woman is terrifying not because she is *castrated*, in essence lacking something essential to the masculine subject position (as is the view in Freudian psychoanalysis), but rather because she *castrates* (1993). As such, this view centres a femininity that terrifies because of its power to punish—to castrate via incorporation and dissolution. This chapter combines this view with the existing scholarship on prison as a uterine space (e.g. Duncan 1996; Fiddler 2007), and as a space of infantilization and deprivation of autonomy (Sykes 1958).

The monstrous-feminine, uterine prison is a space where people are undone, unmade, and unborn. As such, prison's assimilating, dissolving potential is an embodiment of how "the castrating mother takes back the life she once created" (Creed 1993:82). Consequently, while prison is a removal from the clean and proper, patriarchal symbolic order, it is also an incorporation into the abject. As part of this taking back, Creed also emphasizes how, "the womb signifies 'fullness' or 'emptiness', but always as *its own point of reference*" (Creed 1993:27, emphasis in original), and not in relation to phallic, patriarchal logics. As an aspect of the unconscious in art and culture, the monstrous womb motif thus resonates with Gordon's definition of such spaces as disturbing zones where things are "animated by invisible forces whose mode of operation work *according to their own logics*" (2008:46, emphasis added). In order to discuss prison's monstrous-uterine incorporating, dissolving properties, it is important to note this defining trait of the monstrous womb as being outside of the symbolic, patriarchal logics that govern clean and proper society (Creed 1993). This chapter therefore begins by analysing how prison is a monstrous-feminine space that functions as its own point of reference, according to its own logics. Moreover, this chapter explores how monstrous-uterine prison space, like the uterine prison space suggested in previous studies (Duncan 1996; Fiddler 2007), might attempt "to create new life" through reform and assimilation—however, this process succeeds "only in creating monsters" (Creed 1993:56).

ITS OWN POINT OF REFERENCE

Images of prison as an ungoverned, independent, and self-referential space are rife in the prison autobiographies explored in this study. These depictions offer views of a prison that is both a space apart from the ordinary and a space that only ever answers to itself, ungoverned by any external forces. *Orange is the New Black* offers this example:

Now here, in my third prison, I perceived an odd truth that held true for each: no one ran them. Of course, somewhere in those buildings, some person with a nameplate on their desk or door was called the warden and nominally ran the place, and below them in the food chain there were captains and lieutenants. But for all practical purposes, for the prisoners, the people who lived in those prisons day in and day out, the captain's chair was vacant, and the wheel was spinning while the sails flapped.

Kerman 2013:333-4

Prison is a space that *no one runs*. Unlike Duncan's view of prison as a nurturing, maternal "cradle on the sea" (1996:24), this story presents a prison that is more akin to a drifting ghost ship. It has no leader or captain, but rather functions as its own point of reference, abiding by its own rules that no one *really* understands. Similarly, the narrator of *Inside Alcatraz* notes how Alcatraz, isolated on an island in the water, "was a law unto itself and it should be with shame that our federal prison system looks at this prison" (Quillen 2015:190). In *Newjack*, the narrator similarly notes that not a "single spot on land offers a good vantage point of the whole" prison, its rules are often inexplicable, and finding the way in (or out) is near impossible due to how the space twists, turns, and eludes being made sense of (Conover 2011:58). Altogether, these narratives give prison an agentic as well as arbitrary air; it is a law unto itself, no one runs it; and there is "no reason whatever" for the rules it enforces (Berkman 2015:293).

At its strongest, this agentic space has the power to kill. For instance, *Dead Man Walking* offers a telling view of prison as a murderous space:

The fact that anonymity is granted to the executioner intrigues me. I've heard that in Utah, when Gary Gilmore was executed by a firing squad, blanks were inserted into one of the rifles so that those firing the guns would not know for certain if they killed the man. No doubt, the uncertainty helps diffuse responsibility.

Prejean 2013:104-5

Here, the way the execution is carried out makes non-agentic agents out of everyone involved in the process. The executioner is not agentic to the point of being a responsible individual—he cannot even be sure he *is* an executioner. This diffusion of accountability makes the executioner, whoever he is, an unknown, and even unknowable, extension of prison itself. Prison is what kills—it only enacts these deaths through other, assimilated, bodies. Prison personnel thus become the limbs, arms and trigger fingers of prison. This is indicative of prison as a site that assimilates both those imprisoned and those who work there. Here, individual identities have not merely “sunk irretrievably into the mother’s; their identity is the mother’s” (Creed 1993:47), since the only identifiable killer is prison itself. This exemplifies how prison exhibits an internal logic, rather than answers to an external one, which makes prison difficult to grasp or comprehend—which is a theme that will recur throughout this study’s analysis.

UNDRESSED, UNBORN, AND UNIFORM

Prison devours and incorporates, and this extends to anyone who comes into contact with it—regardless of their official function as punisher or punishee. The theme of incorporation by, and assimilation into, prison space is exemplified across all of the explored texts. This incorporation, in turn, hinges on the dissolution of individual identities. The abject prison thus disrespects borders to the point of dissolving them.

In *Nenjack*, the narrator, Ted, depicts dissolution in the prison experience as being immersed in “a big body of water”. As indistinguishable drops constituting a whole, individuals are “all in it together”, equally subservient to prison rules regardless of their official status (Conover 2011:62). This shows how enforced immersion into prison’s own logic effaces individuals, regardless of their function. Imprisoned people are absorbed into “one big green-clad undifferentiated mass” (Conover 2011:221); losing their individuality and turning into uncanny doubles of one another. These interchangeable bodies look “as undifferentiated as a great school of fish” to Ted (Conover 2011:222). Likewise, prison personnel merge into a sea of grey uniforms; existing as duplicated automatons whose sole purpose is to unquestioningly maintain order within the rules prison put in place (Conover 2011:274). Seeping through the stitches of uniforms meant to keep distinctions between captors and captives in place, prison here comes across as boundless in its

deprivation of autonomy and identity (cf. Sykes 1958). It is a permeating environment that disregards the borders constituting both rank and individuality. This deprivation-as-dissolution is noticeable in *Orange is the New Black*, too. Once inside prison, Piper is stripped of her personal items, and thus of her self:

[A prison officer] put my own clothes in a box—they would be mailed back to Larry, like the personal effects of a dead soldier [...]. In minutes I was transformed into an inmate.

Kerman 2010:40

Stripped of her identity, Piper comes to feel that she is “verging on a nonperson” once her assimilation into prison has begun (2010:64). Likening her situation to that of a *dead soldier*, her life and identity are effaced as she is swallowed up by prison, *transformed*. Her narrative suggests that her loss of autonomy is experienced as bearing similarities to non-life. This narrative thus lends itself to the idea of imprisonment as civil death. Being *transformed into an inmate* is equated to a loss of life and selfhood, as her identifiers are sent to her partner *like the personal effects of a dead soldier*.

This loss is a transformative, immersive experience; being transformed into an inmate, Piper dissolves into the loud, messy “human stew” of prison (Kerman 2010:69). A similar kind of dissolution is evident in *Inside Alcatraz*, where Jim notes how he “became another minute particle of the large mass of humanity of San Quentin” (Quillen 2015:311):

As I looked about me, it was as though the room began to close in, with some strange odor that dominated the air and stifled me. I suddenly realized it was an odor I must learn to live with, the smell of marking pen that gave me my new identity. It was on my bedding and my clothing, making me into another nonentity in the world of the criminal. I was engulfed with the realization that I was no longer a person, but instead AZ-586, a criminal who had been sentenced to serve forty-five years in the federal penal system.

Quillen 2015:4

Again, the notion of being stripped of one’s identity is a clear and foundational aspect of imprisonment as assimilation. Here, this sense of assimilation centres on both Jim’s name as well as his clothing and surroundings. As a result, Jim is *engulfed*, both by prison itself and by the realization that it is turning him into a *nonperson*. This theme of assimilation into and subsequent dissolution by prison is also echoed in *Papillon*, where the narrator, by the same name, summarizes the prison system as “a pit

full of sticky liquid that was to dissolve me slowly and cause me to disappear” (Charrière 2005:462). This is clearly in line with monstrous-feminine iconography, signifying the monstrous womb as a site of punishment through incorporation and dissolution (Creed 1993). Similar to Piper, Papillon goes on to describe the dissolution of identity that imprisonment entails:

‘strip!’ Everybody slowly took off his clothes. It was cold and I had goose-pimples.

‘Leave your things in front of you. About turn. One pace backwards.’ And there in front of each of us was a heap of clothes.

‘Dress yourselves.’ The good linen shirt I had been wearing a few moments earlier was replaced by a rough undyed canvas job and my lovely suit by a coarse jacket and trousers. No more shoes: instead of them I put my feet into a pair of wooden sabots. Up until then I’d looked like any ordinary type. I glanced at the other six—Jesus, what a shock! No individuality left at all: they had turned us into convicts in two minutes.

Charrière 2005:36

Like Piper, Jim, and many others, Papillon is faced with the effacement of his individuality. Being *turned into inmates*, they become assimilated by prison. The importance of one’s own clothing for achieving a sense of identity is also exemplified in *A Prison Diary*. When Jeffrey receives a package of his own clothing, changing into them makes him feel *almost human*:

Once back in my cell I discard my two-day-old pants and socks to put on a fresh set of clothes, and now not only feel clean, but almost human.

Archer 2002:122

Here, wearing one’s own clothes becomes a symbol of humanity in a space that threatens to dissolve and assimilate it. This is also evident in *The Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*, when Alexander receives civilian clothes for the first time in thirteen years and finds himself alive again: “This garb is the visible, tangible token of resurrection” (Berkman 2015:474).

Like these narratives, Jack’s story in *In the Belly of the Beast* also shows how prison incorporates, assimilates, and dissolves those it imprisons. Along with noticing his own assimilation into prison, Jack also notices a gradual change in the men imprisoned alongside him:

They say that people who live together gradually begin to look alike. Married couples begin to “look” like one another because their facial

expressions reflect an agreement about things around them, because their mannerisms and idiosyncrasies have become similar. They say it is a sign of genuine love—that the lover and the beloved grow into one. I have seen it. We all have. We all know it takes years of living together for lovers to become “look-alikes”. Something deep within me, however, turns over in its grave each time I notice that I look like my “brothers” who have been in prison all their lives.

Abbott 1991:85

Here Jack, not unlike Ted in *Newjack*, addresses a doppelgänger motif among imprisoned people. In pointing out how he and *his brothers* have all been assimilated, he also points out that they have become *interchangeably similar* to one another. Through the enforced incorporation into prison, they have also begun merging with one another as their identities dissolve. Additionally, by addressing the other imprisoned men as his brothers, Jack furthers the idea of prison as a metaphorically maternal space.

Furthermore, Jack’s story (like many of the other novels explored here) features many of the classic hallmarks of monstrous-feminine environments in art and culture. Spaces that metaphorically or symbolically convey the monstrous womb often consist of enclosed, isolated spaces; bodily matter on walls, floors or ceilings; narrow passageways; and an air of constant supervision (Creed 1993:18-9; 23). All of this is exemplified in *In the Belly of the Beast*:

My first acquaintance with punitive long-term solitary confinement had a more adverse and profound spiritual effect on me than anything else in my childhood.

I suffered from claustrophobia for years when I first went to prison. I never knew any form of suffering more horrible in my life.

The air in the cell vanishes. You are smothering. Your eyes bulge out; you clutch at your throat; you scream like a banshee. Your arms flail the air in your cell. You reel about the cell, flailing.

Then you suffer cramps. The walls press on you from all directions with an invisible force. You struggle to push it back. The oxygen makes you giddy with anxiety. You become hollow and empty. There is a vacuum in the pit of your stomach. You retch.

You are dying. Dying a hard death. One that lingers and toys with you.

Abbott 1991:25

This environment is constraining, claustrophobic, and threatening to *unmake* Jack. The walls close in, the space toys with him as it smothers him, the air vanishes. This is all in line with the monstrous-feminine

iconography of the archaic mother, who is a terrifying presence because she castrates through such unmaking, dissolving processes—possessing “all-consuming, incorporating powers [...] to tear apart and reincorporate all life” (Creed 1993:22).

Imprisonment, thus far, has been painted as dissolution and devourment. This is indicative of prison as a monstrous-feminine space (cf. Creed 1993). In addition to the power to castrate via incorporation, another aspect of the monstrous-feminine pertains to the notion of maternal authority. Kristeva describes maternal authority as part of a pre-symbolic state; where the subject is not yet fully whole and proper, or fully separated from the maternal. In other words, before the subject is its own, whole individual (1982). Since it precedes individuality, maternal authority is tied to notions of learning to maintain a clean and proper body. Socially, culturally, and collectively, this translates to learning how to be and behave in the patriarchal, white-supremacist, heteronormative symbolic order. This is a lesson which rehabilitation arguably mirrors, in aiming to re-educate subjects on matters pertaining to existing as a clean and proper member of the societal body (cf. Duncan 1996; Garland 2012).

To fully constituted subjects who are already part of the symbolic order, the notion of subjection to maternal authority is a horrific one, because it implies a return to this pre-symbolic oneness with the maternal (Creed 1993:13). As such, cultural imagery connoting maternal authority tends to include blood and other bodily fluids to denote this unbecoming, or reclaiming, thus filling (both fictional and reading) subjects with disgust, fear, and loathing (Creed 1993:13). This kind of imagery highlights the frailty of the symbolic order metonymically, by inscribing it on the fragility of a subject’s body.

From this point of view, we can discern the idea of prison as an abject mother in how supervision and rehabilitative ambition come across as parental. This is exemplified by how Jack feels like he has been “raised” by prison, and has become “a product of prison conditions” as a result (Abbott 1991:24). At age 37, Jack still considers himself as “barely a precocious child”, rather than a realized individual (Abbott 1991:13). Scholars have pointed out that “the gaze of the state” functions as a key aspect of imprisonment, acting like the “parent [those incarcerated] never had” (Sloop 1996:2). Its gaze is present because of the feelings of constant monitoring which imprisonment gives rise to, and this is visible in the novels explored here:

The night counts were very irritating, even though prisoners were not required to stand. The flash of light shining on our faces would wake us and drive home the realization that, even in sleep, we were being continuously watched.

Quillen 2015:122

This continuous supervision is in line with prison as an agentic, monstrous-feminine space where the archaic mother knows and sees all (Creed 1993). Here, incorporated bodies are linked to prison in ways that threaten *constant watching*—they have become indistinguishable from prison itself, since “their identity is the mother’s” and as such she can always see, sense, or direct them (Creed 1993:47). This creates a panoptic environment, permeated by (sometimes invisible) discipline, especially in the early stages of this incorporation and for resistant subjects who feel themselves slipping, gradually, into this prisonness. These stories thus show how penal and parental discipline double one another. Prisoners are equated to children (Sykes 1958), while prison becomes the uncanny double of a gazing, controlling parent (Sloop 1996). By extension, this doubling makes prison an uncanny double of domesticity, in its dark mirroring of the safe space of the home. The nurturing mother thus has a nightmarish double in the devouring prison (cf. Duncan 1996).

Maintaining order in this uncanny prison space is not so much an individual act as it is an enactment of assimilation into the prison itself; of being the hands that act on what this archaic gaze perceives (as was evidenced by the executioners in *Dead Man Walking*). In addition to his previous accounts of guards as assimilated into a sea of uniforms, Ted speaks of his position as a prison guard being “like the mother of a nightmarishly large brood of sullen, dangerous and demanding children” (Conover 2011:234). Again, prisoners are reduced to a childlike status (cf. Sykes 1958). Moreover, these childlike people are a *nightmarish, dangerous brood*. In order to handle them, guards coalesce into a decidedly maternal whole—being *like a mother* to the prison’s nightmarish children, Ted functions as an extension of the monstrous-feminine prison itself. This oneness with prison is presented as a frightening experience, emphasizing how prison’s incorporation is unsettling for punishers and punishees alike. To Ted, this process is not just frightening because of the *monstrous brood* that prison spawns and which he must handle, but because of what Ted

himself *becomes* as the enforcer of prison's monstrous rules (Conover 2011:244).³⁴

Adding the monstrous-feminine to already existing scholarship on prison as embodying a parental gaze (Sloop 1996; Sykes 1958), as well as prison as a nurturing, uterine space (Duncan 1996; Fiddler 2007), helps articulate how prison is a sociocultural embodiment of the monstrous womb. It expresses maternal authority; as exemplified by its power to reclaim, devour, and dissolve subjects while constantly seeing, sensing, and directing them. In some cases, this results in people in prison having no autonomous identity left to them outside of their function in prison as an object, uterine space (cf. Creed 1993:47). Even if Jack were released, ejected into the world outside, he feels certain that he would return:

I would have returned, over and over again. I would have been a thief or a jive-talking dope fiend who has no idea of anything else in life except singing the blues and paying his dues in prison. Why? Because that is what the government, the state reared me from childhood to be; that is what adjusting to prison does to a man.

Abbott 1991:97

Once assimilated, Jack has little hope for a life outside prison. His belief that he will repeat *endless returns* to prison comes across as less of a question of *having adjusted* to prison, and more as one of being *assimilated into* it. He has never formed a non-imprisoned identity. This is also alluded to during his transportation there, as Jack explains how he was told that he “was being sent there to be *reduced* to a punk, to be *shorn of my manhood*” (Abbott 1991:79). This exemplifies the castration via incorporation that imprisonment entails. Jack is given an explicit reason for his imprisonment: to be *reduced*, and *shorn of his manhood*. Effectively, this shows how prison becomes the maternal castrator through its processes of reducing, dissolving, and incorporating individuals.

This maternal castrator, *reducing men's manhood*, is also visible in Ted's narrative. To him prison is where, inevitably, “grown men are infantilized” (Conover 2011:234). These stories thus all tie into Sykes' view that imprisonment is a reduction of the imprisoned individual's level of autonomy from adulthood to childhood, which poses a threat to the prisoner's self-image (2007:75). However, the analysis of these novels shows how this threat is arguably not one of castration understood as

³⁴ See Chapter 6 for more details on this point.

being cut off from the symbolic order. Rather, the threat lies in being *swallowed up by the monstrous-feminine*, and incorporated into the abject. This chapter will go on to analyse these processes of incorporation in more detail.

The enforced dissolution of distinct identity that uniforms exemplify take an intensely abject turn in these novels' depictions of solitary confinement. Across the explored novels, solitary confinement is a claustrophobic, timeless, and isolating space.³⁵ These spaces embody the idea of a space apart from the ordinary (cf. Janicker 2015), enforcing punishments within the already painful punishment of imprisonment itself: "a place of punishment within a place of punishment" (Conover 2011:126). *The Box*, like most spaces of solitary confinement, is narrativized as a frightening, threatening space:

Perlstein gave me a lighter and sent me down to the north-facing gallery by myself, with instructions to light inmates' cigarettes. (Like other inmates, they could smoke but they were not allowed to have matches.) This was unexpectedly frightening. All I knew about Box inmates was that they were very, very bad. I thought of Agent Clarice Starling approaching Hannibal Lecter's cell in *The Silence of the Lambs*. Downstairs at the Box was the lowest level of hell.
Conover 2011:128

The Box is *unexpectedly frightening*, and filled with *unknown threats*. In the place of the unknown, Ted draws on what he does know: *these inmates are very, very bad*—fictional horror icon Hannibal Lecter-bad. Descending the stairs into the Box is to descend into the *lowest levels of hell*. This geographical detail—being below—is a recurring trait of the horror of how solitary confinement and other layered spaces of punishment are narrativized. However, more often than not, it is the space itself, rather than its inhabitants, that is the reason for these horrors. For instance, in *Papillon* the monstrosity of solitary confinement is ascribed to the space itself. This passage also emphasizes the layers of imprisonment within imprisonment that this space entails:

[I]'d have to do two years of solitary on the Ile Saint-Joseph. The convicts called that prison the man-eater. [...] I ought to be very happy at having only two years to do in this prison within a prison.
Charrière 2005:255

³⁵ The timelessness aspect will be analysed more closely in Chapter 7.

While the prosecutor wanted to send Papillon *into the man-eater* for eight years, he *only* had to stay there for *two*. Moreover, like is the case with *In the Belly of the Beast*, this story offers a devourment-metaphor for prison that originates among imprisoned people: it is a *beast* and a *man-eater*. Entering it is to be *swallowed up* and *descend*. Being a site that *devours*, prison clearly fits a monstrous-feminine interpretation.

PART OF THE (W)HOLE

One of the clearest examples of prison's assimilation of those who enter it can be found in *The Enormous Room*. In this extreme form, prison has turned individual bodies into its own building blocks. Consequently, everything belongs to one, giant whole. The narrator, Edward, encounters it for the first time as an *enormous mass of fleshy parts*, a mass with "trillions of hands" and "quadrillions of itching fingers" (Cummings 2014:32):

I lift my eyes. I am standing in a tiny oblong space. A sort of court. All around, two-story wooden barracks. Little crude staircases lead up to doors heavily chained and immensely padlocked. More like ladders than stairs. Curious hewn windows, smaller in proportion than the slits in a doll's house. Are these faces behind the slits? The doors bulge incessantly under the shock of bodies hurled against them from within. The whole dirty nouveau business about to crumble.

Glance one.

Glance two: directly before me. A wall with many bars fixed across one minute opening. At the opening a dozen, fifteen, grins. Upon the bars hands, scraggy and bluishly white. Through the bars stretchings of lean arms, incessant stretchings. The grins leap at the window, hands belonging to them catch hold, arms belonging to the hands stretch in my direction... an instant; then new grins leap from behind and knock off the first grins which go down with a fragile crashing like glass smashed: hands wither and break, arms streak out of sight, sucked inward. [...] Trillions of hands. Quadrillions of itching fingers.

Cummings 2014:32

Here, prison is a merger of mortal and mortar; bodies and bricks. More than a mere building, prison is a collection of humanoid traits, derived from its already-completed assimilations of those it has devoured. Moreover, by focusing on repeating and shifting details in this way, *The Enormous Room* emphasizes how a comprehensive picture of prison is impossible. The extent of these repetitions becomes impossible to measure, wherefore the narrator resorts to numbers that convey this overwhelm: *trillions of hands* with *quadrillions of fingers*. Standing in front of

prison, the view on offer is one of infinite, minute parts that come together to create an undulating, living body-building. Its mass of already-assimilated teeth, eyes, and fingers shift in perpetual, overwhelming motion. Prison thus becomes a sort of Frankensteinian monster, made up of many different bodies. Through this moving, organic presentation, prison becomes an extreme embodiment of agentic space. This space is not only agentic but also *alive*—it *bulges* outward, *sucks* inward, and *pulsates*. With its humanoid features, it is perpetually *grinning*, *watching*, *r e a c h i n g*, and *s t r e t c h i n g*.

Depicting a living, breathing space, this narrativization adds more detail to the *man-eating beast* prison is outlined as in Jack's and Papillon's stories. When stories narrativize prison space through these kinds of carceral body horror, bodies and their parts merge into the overwhelming entirety that is prison. This conveys prison's indescribable whole metonymically, by focusing on the smaller details that can be described. But what happens when prison's innumerable fingers grab you? Ted's narrative hints at an answer to this, in describing a prison that continues to "grow" through the years, continuing "to swallow thousands of inmates into its malevolent, malodorous maw" with an appetite that only increases with the passage of time (Conover 2011:202). These stories thus show how prison embodies the monstrous womb and its "voracious maw", devouring and assimilating everything in its path (Creed 1993:27).

For Jack, like many others, assimilation happens in solitary confinement. This does not take place not in Ted's *box* or Papillon's *man-eater*, but in *the hole*. The hole is narrativized as a space of isolation and dissolution. In terms of horror iconography, this is not unlike the principle workings of the maternal castrator; "it presents us with a graphic, explicit, disturbing image of the mother carrying out the law, enforcing retribution" by reclaiming and dissolving subjects (Creed 1993:148).

The hole cements a border between it and the space around it, since it is isolated from the rest of prison. However, the hole also dissolves borders between inside and outside, and between self and **other**. For one thing, the lights are never turned off. They are unavoidable, "present even when you close your eyes", visible through your eyelids as it "throbs away in your mind" (Abbott 1991:29). The space seeps in, becoming coextensive with the mind of the inhabitant. As a result, this dissolves both the boundaries between self and space and those between night and day. Jack's only way to estimate the time spent here is by counting the number of

times he has been fed. There is nothing on the walls to inspire his imagination, and there is no toilet, bed, or running water. Further adding to, and perhaps the most important for, the particular atmosphere of this space is the floor. It tilts; shifting Jack's balance and throwing off his equilibrium as it inclines towards the centre of the room. At the centre, there is a hole for waste disposal. From it, stains radiate outward; creeping across the floor, *reaching* (Abbott 1991:29). The presence of **other** bodies is marked by what they left behind—their ejected abject becomes their proxy, making them inhabit the space in a haunting, spatiotemporally ambiguous yet decidedly physical, abject way. They are present, yet absent, in effect haunting the space. Their presence permeates the air as a permanent stench (Abbott 1991:29):

[W]hat faces you is a cesspool world of murk and slime; a subterranean world of things that squirm and slide through a noxious sewage, piles of shit and vomit and piss. There is the smell of unwashed feet and nervous sweat of bodies foreign to yours, so closing your eyes gives no relief. If you are in that cell for weeks that add up to months, you do not ignore all this and live "with it"; you enter it and become a part of it.

Abbott 1991:29

The hole is a *subterranean, abject world*, threatening to dissolve you while exhibiting the traces of the people it has already incorporated. The hole, then, is not a space that merely isolates. It dissolves physical, individual, and temporal borders in its management of bodies in its particular timespace. Jack cannot *live with* the space, or even exist as a separate entity within it. He is *assimilated* by it. By means of prison's enforced incorporation, he dissolves and *becomes part of* the (w)hole.

The hole is not the only isolating, dissolving space visible in these novels. Nor is it the only one Jack mentions in his story. As a juxtaposition to the blinding brightness of the hole, we are also faced with the blind and lightless experience of *the blackout cell*:

I tried to escape from the jail. The jailers opened a cell that had not been used in twenty-five years and placed me in it under prison discipline—a starvation diet of a bowl of broth and a hard biscuit once a day. It was a blackout cell. I was given a canvas sleeping mat and the door was closed on me. There was an iron sink-and-toilet combined in the corner, and other than that, there was nothing except about two inches of dust on the floor.

I was in total darkness. Not a crack of light entered that cell anywhere—and I searched, in the days that followed, for such a crack along every inch of the door and the walls. The darkness was so absolute it was like being in ink. [...]

In this entire process, I was fed without a glimmer of light. Darkness muffles sound. The only sound I ever heard—outside of my own movements and mutterings—was the bang of the keys and the creaking of the apparatus once a day.

The only light I saw was when I closed my eyes.

Abbott 1991:26

Here, Jack is suspended in murky, inky darkness. This liquid, dark suspension in isolated and isolating space is a monstrous mirror to the uterine, nurturing capabilities of prison space outlined in previous research (cf. Duncan 1996; Fiddler 2007). Moreover, unlike the hole, the blackout cell deprives Jack of light rather than floods him with it. This *absolute, liquid darkness* also impacts sound, *muffling and distorting it*. Again, we are presented with immersion and dissolution into the whole. The cell dissolves boundaries of time, space, and sound, leaving little to no ways of discerning the passage of time or the full extent of the space. Additionally, this cell is a space of abject disgust. Like the waste covering the floor in *the hole*, this cell is filled with dirt *that has not been cleaned for over twenty years*. Like the hole, this dark, muffled space is also home to unsettling **others**—in this case, numerous insects that invade Jack's personal space without warning:

I counted twenty-three days by the meals. Then once I rose, thirsty, and felt my way to the sink. I felt the cup and I grasped it in my right hand. I closed my eyes for a moment and a shower of red and blue rained on me. I opened them to midnight darkness. With my left hand I felt for the button on the sink. I pressed it and could hear the trickle of water. I held my cup under it until I judged it full. Then I raised the cup carefully to my lips and tilted it back to drink.

I felt the legs, the bodies of many insects run up my face, over my eyes and into my hair. I flung down the cup and brought my hands to my face in an electric reaction and my eyes closed and the fireworks went off again.

I heard someone screaming far away and it was me. I fell against the wall, and as if it were a catapult, was hurled across the cell to the opposite wall. Back and forth I reeled, from the door to the walls, screaming. Insane.

When I regained consciousness, I was in a regular cell. I had been removed from the blackout cell. Every inch of my body was black with filth and my hair completely was matted.

Abbott 1991:27

This space is narrativized by using several staples of horror iconography: darkness; dirt; isolation; temporal uncertainty; creeping, unseen touches experienced without warning; screaming, violent rebirth from the space—and all in a space that seems haunted, having a life of its own, *throwing Jack around the room*. Furthering Jack's dissolution in this space, *his own voice* now comes from *someplace far away* from himself. He has lost definition. It is unclear where he is—is he here, listening, or there, screaming? Even more disconcerting, there is an air of uncertainty regarding whether or not he is all in one place, since he seems to be fragmented, *hearing himself scream from far away*. *Insane*, screaming from outside of himself, his mind has dissolved into the murky, liquid darkness around him. Only then, once this assimilation is carried out and he screams himself unconscious, does he find himself returned to a *regular cell*. Once he has left the blackout cell, however, his body is still smeared and matted with its lingering remains. Unlike in other studies of prison as a locus of rebirth (e.g. Fiddler 2007), here, rebirth only served to return Jack to prison in a worsened state.

A similar space is narrativized in *The Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*, when Alexander finds himself waking up in a strange, new place:

I awake feeling tired and chilly. All is quiet and dark around me. Is it night? My hand gropes blindly, hesitantly. Something wet and clammy touches my cheek. In sudden affright I draw back. The cell is damp and musty; the foul air nauseates me. Slowly my foot feels the floor, drawing my body forward, all my senses on the alert. I clutch the bars. The feel of iron is reassuring. Pressed close to the door, my mouth in the narrow opening, I draw quick, short breaths. I am hot, perspiring. My throat is dry to cracking; I cannot swallow. "Water! I want water!" The voice frightens me. Was it I that spoke? The sound rolls up; it rises from gallery to gallery, and strikes the opposite corner under the roof; now it crawls underneath, knocks in the distant hollows, and abruptly ceases.

Berkman 2015:36

Here, too, sounds echo and distort. Like Jack, Alexander finds his own voice *distant and unfamiliar*, hinting at his dissolution and change. His voice is more part of prison space now, than part of himself. The sounds he makes *crawl around the space*, leaving him behind and taking on a life of their own. Also similar to Jack, Alexander finds that his dark, unsettling surroundings are shared with some *clammy, unknown thing that touches his face*. Contrasting this, the solid boundary of the iron bars is reassuring. It offers a sense of solidity and boundary maintenance in the face of this foul-

smelling, wet, clammy, distorted and distorting space. Later, Alexander adds another example of how both sounds and bodies dissolve, fragmenting in and fragmented by prison space. Here, too, prison exhibits living, monstrous qualities:

The silence grows gloomy, oppressive. It fills me with mysterious awe. It lives. It pulsates with slow, measured breathing, as of some monster. It rises and falls; approaches, recedes. It is Misery asleep. Now it presses heavily against my door. I hear its quickened breathing. Oh, it is the guard! Is it the death watch? His outline is lost in the semi-darkness, but I see the whites of his eyes. They stare at me, they watch and follow me. I feel their gaze upon me, as I nervously pace the floor. Unconsciously my step quickens, but I cannot escape that glint of steel. It grimaces and mocks me. It dances before me: it is here and there, all around me. Now it flits up and down, it doubles, trebles. The fearful eyes stare at me from a hundred depressions in the wall. On every side they surround me, and bar my way. I bury my head in the pillow. My sleep is restless and broken. Ever the terrible gaze is upon me, watching, watching, the white eyeballs turning with my every movement.

Berkman 2015:46

In attempting to portray the unspeakable, Alexander presents metonymic details to somehow convey a sense of the whole. *Eyes stare at him from a hundred unknown places*, which is in line with the iconography used to depict the stretching, grinning, pulsating prison of *The Enormous Room*. Here, the idea of maternal supervision (Creed 1993), or a “parental gaze” of the state (Sloop 1996), takes on clear, monstrous qualities. Moreover, Alexander hears how the space *breathes like a monster* from his position *inside it*, which furthers the notion of having been swallowed. This space devours him *while it watches him*. This combination of traits makes the space disorienting, since it seems comprised of parts that do not go together in a natural way—inside the belly of the monster, the monster watches Alexander. Moreover, Alexander’s story presents readers with a prison that not only *watches, breathes, touches, swallows, and pulsates*. It also growls, bellows, and shrieks:

A heavy nightmare oppresses my sleep. Confused sounds ring in my ears, and beat upon my head. I wake in nameless dread. The cell-house is raging with uproar: crash after crash booms through the hall; it thunders against the walls of the cell, then rolls like some monstrous drum along the galleries, and abruptly ceases.

In terror I cower on the bed. All is deathly still. Timidly I look around. The cell is in darkness, and only a faint gas light flickers unsteadily in the corridor. Suddenly a cry cuts the silence, shrill and unearthly, bursting into wild laughter. And again the fearful thunder, now bellowing from the cell above, now muttering menacingly in the distance, then dying with a growl. And all is hushed again, and only the unearthly laughter rings through the hall.
Berkman 2015:227

Waking up from a nightmare, Alexander is surrounded by *confused, and confusing*, sounds. Like in other stories, these sounds have living, monstrous qualities. Like some indescribable creature, the space makes *unearthly sounds that echo throughout it*. Moreover, prison's moods are ever shifting; there is *thunder, growling, silence, and laughter*. This, too, emphasizes a sense of unpredictability and unknowability. Not only is prison an amorphous, agentic, monstrous space; it is also prone to mood swings.

In *Papillon*, we find yet another dissolving, subterranean space that distorts both sights and sounds in its assimilating processes. The scene is set when our narrator wakes up in a strange place after having been knocked out in a fight with prison guards:

I woke up two stories lower down, stark naked, in a flooded black-hole. Slowly I came to. I ran my hands all over my aching body. There were at least fourteen or fifteen lumps on my head. What was the time? I couldn't tell. Down here there was neither night nor day; no light of any kind. I heard a knocking on the wall, a knocking that came from a great way off.

Thump, thump, thump, thump, thump. This knocking was how we communicated with each other. I had to knock twice if I wanted to answer. Knock: but what with? In the darkness I couldn't make out anything I could use. Fists were no good—their blows were not sharp or distinct enough. I moved over to where I imagined the door was, for it was a little less dark over there. I came up hard against bars I had not seen. Reaching out in the darkness I came to understand that the cell was closed by a door about a yard from me, and that these bars I was touching prevented me from getting to it. This way, when anyone wants to go into a dangerous prisoner's cell he is in no danger of being touched, because the prisoner is in a cage.
Charrière 2005:41

Again, the notion of prison as a monstrous-uterine space is easy to see in this isolating, flooded, underground space where *Papillon* finds himself naked, wet, and injured. Moreover, this space nullifies speech, reducing the agency and personhood of its inhabitants by enforcing a pre-symbolic

muteness. Papillon's voice is useless as means of communication—as is his body. As Jack and Alexander with their distorted voices, Papillon is barred from communicating or expressing himself as a civilized individual. Instead, they are all reduced to echoes within the space. Moreover, this subterranean site is yet another example of a light-less, timeless space that confuses its inhabitants in terms of night and day and the passage of time. Similarly, Papillon is later locked in a different “underwater black-hole” (Charrière 2005:203), where he spends twenty-eight days (Charrière 2005:201):

I left the office and they took me to a staircase that led underground. After we had gone down more than twenty-five steps we reached a very dimly-lit corridor with cages to the right and the left. One of the cells was opened and I was shoved in. When the door on to the passage closed a smell of decay rose from the slimy earth floor. I was hailed from all sides. Each barred hole had one, two or three prisoners.
Charrière 2005:197

Like so many of the other isolating spaces in these novels, this one too is *subterranean, slimy, dark*, and reached via obscure or confusing routes. In this underground cell, water floods the space for a few hours at a time, a couple of times a day. At its worst, the water reaches halfway up Papillon's body (Charrière 2005:197-201). Moreover, the water is filled with *revolting, inescapable* critters:

The water began to rise. It was almost up to my ankles. [...] Very, very gradually the water rose. [...] I heard a noise in the water: it was a sewer-rat as big as a cat splashing about. It tried to get up the bars. I took hold of one of my shoes and when it came towards me I fetched it a great swipe on the head. It ran off down the corridor, squealing. [...]

This coming in of the water, the rats, the centipedes and the tiny waterborne crabs, was the most revolting, the most depressing thing a human being could possibly have to bear. A good hour later, when the water ebbed away, it left half an inch of slimy mud.
Charrière 2005:201

Where Jack felt suspended in ink (Abbott 1991:26), Papillon is immersed in slimy, murky water. This water seeps into everything, and makes Ted's metaphor literal: here, imprisoned people really are immersed in “a big body of water”, “all in it together” (Conover 2011:62). Across most if not all of the explored texts, prison space is somehow narrativized as immersive in a wet, messy sense. This immersive, dissolving wetness

makes bodies coextensive, both with each other and with the space itself. After having been in the “underwater black-hole” (Charrière 2005:203) for about a month, Papillon’s reunion with his friends confronts them all with how the space has changed him:

I must have looked rather old-fashioned because they never stopped saying ‘Is it really you? It’s not possible. What have those swine done to make you look like this? Speak—say something. Are you blind? What’s wrong with your eyes? Why do you keep blinking them like that?’

‘Because I can’t get used to this light. It’s too bright for me. My eyes are used to the dark.’ I sat down, looking towards the inner part of the cell. ‘It’s better this way.’

‘You smell of rot. It’s unbelievable. Even your body smells rotten.’

Charrière 2005:205

Being soaked in the underwater space has changed Papillon to the point where his friends barely recognize him. *Partially blinded and smelling of rot*, he has become like the space itself: *foul-smelling and adapted to the dark*. Once dissolved and assimilated, moreover, the problem of communication and voice(lessness) evidenced in these stories becomes less pressing. Jack exemplifies this as follows:

My body communicates with the cell. We exchange temperatures and air currents, smells and leavings on the floor and walls.

Abbott 1991:46

Having *become part of* the space, Jack’s communication is no longer hampered by a need for speech or his own, distinct voice emanating from his own, distinctive body. Instead, his body is immersed in the temperature, filth, and airflow of the space.

The notion of prison as monstrous-feminine, uterine space that threatens to dissolve and incorporate can be observed in yet another way in *Inside Alcatraz*. Rather than depicting an isolation cell as uterine, this time the story focuses on tunnelling as an attempt at rebirth. The narrator, Jim, goes down “into the tunnel to see if it was at all feasible [to escape through]. [...] The tunnel was as described: narrow, shallow, and hot” (Quillen 2015:157-8). What follows is a hot, claustrophobic, and painful labour:

This time I crawled down inside. The iron plate was closed and I moved a few feet to my left, away from the trap door. This was to be the

crucial test as to how well and/or how long a person could stay enclosed in that hot, stifling environment without either passing out or panicking. As I crawled away from the door, I must admit, my heart was pounding not only from heat and anxiety, but also from a sincere case of claustrophobia. I was also in fear that I would push too hard on an old and ready-to-break pipe, causing it to rupture, at which time I would be scalded to death without the slightest chance of escape.

After moving possibly ten feet down the tunnel, I realized I had made several mistakes. First, I had crawled into the tunnel wearing only a T-shirt to protect my upper body, thinking the less clothing I wore, the better, because of the heat. The mistake became evident, however, the first time I touched the large pipe where the asbestos covering had fallen off. I received a burn that became a blister before I could move my arm. [...] My second mistake was in not checking before I moved away from the door, to determine if it was possible to turn around in this small, confining area. As I found out later, after several severe burns on my arms, this was indeed an impossibility.

Quillen 2015:158

Crawling into the hot, stifling tunnel, Jim tries his best to neither panic nor pass out. This space is both constrictive and risky, since one false move threatens to *rupture steam pipes and melt the would-be escapee*. Moreover, this space is presented almost exclusively by using elements popular to horror iconographies of the monstrous-feminine—such as narrow tunnels and warm, wet spaces of transition that threaten bodily injury (see Creed 1993). Given *Inside Alcatraz's* focus on the horror-elements of the tunnel-space and its direct threat to Jim's life and safety, this space is a clear example of a monstrous uterine space. Going down into the tunnel could provide escape, but it seems more likely to dissolve him in the heat. This becomes especially clear when these attempts eventually prove futile. While the space hinted at a possible escape, it only provided threat, injury, confinement, and dejected ejections back into prison. As such, it corrupts the safe, uterine iconography articulated in previous prison studies (Duncan 1996; Fiddler 2007). When Jim retreats through the tunnel after yet another test, the novel offers a twisted rebirth scenario:

I stayed as long as I could and, when I began to feel slightly faint, started my slow, cautious, backwards retreat to the door. When I reached a point where I could see light filtering in around the door, I felt a great sense of elation. I honestly thought we had a chance and this was to be our way out of the prison. As I got directly under the door, the intensity of the heat even seemed to dissipate to a degree, possibly because of the cool, fresh air from the basement.

When I believed I had reached the total limit of my endurance, I gently tapped the trap door. It was opened immediately and six hands reached in to pull me from the tunnel. When the cool air of the basement hit me, it was as though a giant cooling fan had been turned on. It felt like heaven, except that it seemed more difficult to breathe than in the tunnel. For a few minutes I experienced severe pains in my chest with each inhalation. This soon passed. I was soaked with perspiration, as though I had stepped into a shower with my clothing on. My face and body were red and flushed, and looked as if I had a tremendous sunburn.

Jack, having anticipated that I would look like this, had turned on the shower to lukewarm and laid out a change of clothing for me. With the help of the others, he took me to the shower, stripped my clothing off, and pushed me in. After a couple of minutes my normal colour had returned and I was able to come out of the shower.

Quillen 2015:160-1

This attempt draws on similar uterine iconography to what has been explored in other studies of prison (escape) stories (Duncan 1996; Fiddler 2007), but here, the delivery is not to freedom *but back into prison*. Hands reach in to pull Jim out of the hot, messy tunnel; he struggles to draw breath; he is soaked and damaged; and is eventually cleaned and dressed. In Jim's case, his tunnelling, penetrative efforts only lead him back, again and again, into prison. The monstrous-uterine space thus complicates masculine, individual agency, and renders these men's attempted rebirth laborious, dangerous, sticky, and in the end—abortive. This shows how separation from the devouring, incorporating monstrous-feminine prison becomes impossible.

DISCUSSION

This chapter has explored how prison exhibits properties of the monstrous womb—incorporating, dissolving, and assimilating subjects, and adhering to its own internal logics (cf. Creed 1993; Gordon 2008).

The analysis shows how the stories examined here all exemplify prison as a devouring space that dissolves identities as well as bodies. This monstrous-uterine space enforces immersion into murky, sticky, foul-smelling liquids, and dissolves bodies into a state of coextension—both with each other and with the space itself. People look like doubles of one another through the enforcement of uniforms, and the space dissolves boundaries around distinct bodies through darkness, isolation, and echoes. The way these stories narrativize incorporation and dissolution through

echoes resonates with studies of how sounds impact the atmosphere in prison (e.g. Herrity 2019; Rice 2016; Russel & Carlton 2020), as a potent boundary defiance and unsettling property of the space. This chapter adds to this body of research by showing how fragmented and boundary-defying sounds are part of prison's incorporating, assimilating properties.

Many of the stories analysed here show the process of assimilation as narrated from within, showing how individuals gradually disintegrate and become part of prison itself. However, the stories this study analyses also offer examples of completed assimilation, showing prison as a mass of already-devoured parts. In such cases, prison tends to be narrated through what this study labels carceral body horror. Carceral body horror showcases the abject merger of (parts of) individual bodies with prison space itself. As a result, this creates a living, breathing, and disorienting space. In short, these narrativizations show the insatiable, voracious maw of the monstrous womb in action (cf. Creed 1993), and showcases the abject results of its appetites.

As this chapter shows, prison embodies threats of monstrous-feminine punishment—devourment by, and incorporation into, the monstrous womb. It is a space of dissolution and merger, where “every other looks like every other other” (Castle 1995:126). Because of this, the primary threat imprisonment poses to subjects is one of assimilation into the **other**, rather than exclusion from the rest of society. With this finding, this study adds complexity to previous ideas about what threats and deprivations imprisonment poses (e.g. Sykes 1958). Where the established view is that prison threatens to exclude and section off (Crewe 2020), this study thus offers a contrasting view: that prison threatens *incorporation into the abject*.

Horror iconography is a prevalent feature of how these threats of incorporation into the **other** are articulated. Such iconography is part of prison's history of being imagined as a bloody, filthy “catacomb of rejection” (Smith, C. 2009:5); which has long perpetuated the idea of prison as abject to the societal body. However, paying attention to what kinds of horror iconography are at work in prison's narrativization—enclosed, wet spaces; dissolution; bodily injury; abortive rebirth—reveals how prison can be considered as abject in a new sense—namely as the monstrous womb of the societal body. This finding complicates the established notion of imprisonment as re-masculinization of a disobeyed, patriarchal state (Wacquant 2010), since it highlights how prison exhibits

the principle workings of the maternal castrator; “it presents us with a graphic, explicit, disturbing image of the mother carrying out the law, enforcing retribution” by reclaiming, incorporating, and dissolving subjects (Creed 1993:148).

The next chapter goes on to deal with how subjects resist this incorporation into the **mother**, and takes a closer look at how successful incorporations cannot be unmade. To explore these facets, the next chapter analyses how subjects eject one another as abject in order to try to maintain their own sense of self, as well as how subjects characterize the **other** bodies that prison is set to eject back into society. As such, where Chapter 4 has dealt with prison as an abject body, Chapter 5 deals with (the creation of) abject bodies within prison.

CHAPTER 5

SUBJECTIVE ABJECTION

*From cell to cell I pass the graveyard of the living dead,
the silence broken only by intermittent savage yells and the piteous bleating of Mike.*

Berkman 2015:347

As prison threatens assimilation into the same undifferentiated mass, attempts to eject the abject are also visible within prison, as a form of attempted resistance. Here, narrators attempt to differentiate themselves from the assimilated people around them. This is evidenced by how narrators, given their often relatively privileged subject position, attempt to **other** the other bodies in prison. This monster-making is an example of the bestial language explored elsewhere (Higgins & Swartz 2018), and expresses cis-sexist, racist, and homophobic narration given its alignment with hegemonic, patriarchal views regarding belonging and otherness (cf. Halberstam 1995). Monster-making often centres on defining the bodies that narrators ‘see’ in terms of *what they are not*. In this way, narrators establish a relationship between themselves as complete, individual subjects, and others as more or less undifferentiated monstrosities (cf. Halberstam 1995:22). As gothicized fictionalizations, prison autobiographies thus fit the image of how “most Gothic novels lack the point of view of the monster” (Halberstam 1995:21). The figure of the monster here functions as a way “to condense as many fear-producing traits as possible into one body”, especially in terms of gender, sexuality, race, age, and class (Halberstam 1995:21).

In the novels explored here, this condensation of traits is often the case when narrators characterize imprisoned people and those who guard them as **other**. At the same time, narrators often lament either their own incarceration or imprisonment more generally. Narrators thus occupy the seemingly incompatible positions of criticizing prison on the one hand,

and maintaining that some of the imprisoned people are somehow less-than and deserving of penalization on the other.

When narrators create monsters, either from the people or the space around them, this enables them to establish themselves as the superior party, or a clean and proper subject (cf. Kristeva 1982; Kramer 2007), in the relationship they have with their surroundings (and their audience). In this way, prison autobiographies engage in abjection as a display, much in line with Kramer's discussion of abjection (2007). Kramer points out how abjection not only expels the abject *from* the subject but also delivers the abject *to* the subject (2007:121). By both distancing and displaying the abject, the subject's supposed superiority can be made visible. Through the act of viewing the abject (Kramer 2007:121), difference and superiority is cemented through observation, definition, and description. This protects the borders of identity, by providing the narratorial subject with a visible counterpart it can compare itself to. Monsters, then, do not have to be frightening as such—rather, they are made as a relational attempt to maintain clean and proper subject status. The threat is thus not the monster itself, but the threats to individual subjectivity that are displaced onto it.

As this chapter will show, prison novels often narrate the **other** as a shifting, ambiguous body, while establishing the narratorial self as a “total subject against whom the stereotype [i.e. the monstrous **other**], the dark and evil other cannot prevail” (Halberstam 1995:81). Noting how monster-making in popular culture and (criminal) policy coextends, Halberstam suggests exploring how such narratives produce monstrosity:

I want to ask how the Gothic novel and Gothic monsters in particular produce monstrosity as never unitary but always an aggregate of race, class, and gender. I also want to suggest that the nineteenth century discourse of anti-Semitism and the myth of the vampire share a kind of Gothic economy in *their ability to condense many monstrous traits into one body*.
Halberstam 1995:88

The ability to condense multiple monstrous traits into one body is a central theme for this chapter's analysis of prison novels. Here, making **other** bodies monstrous is a form of resistance. For instance, narrators might resist recognizing their own violence or their privileged positions in a violent system, or their uncanny similarities to the **other**. Moreover, abjection becomes the narratorial subject's response to the threat of

assimilation into the *mass of others* explored in Chapter 4; a form of resistance to the assimilation imprisonment entails. However, this resistance to merging with monstrosity is rarely successful.

UNSTABLE GENDER AND IMPROPER SEX

An example of narrative monster-making through queer ageing can be found in *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*, namely in the characterization of Young Harry. Harry, at age nineteen, “has not seen a day of liberty since early childhood”, having been moved “from reform school to reformatory” and then to prison (Berkman 2015:448). Having grown up incarcerated, Harry is described as both unsettled and unsettling in relation to his age. From the narrator’s point of view, Henry is an eerily liminal body—he is not quite a boy, a teenager, or a man:

His appearance is pitifully grotesque. The sickly features, pale with the color of the prison whitewash, resemble a little child’s. But the eyes look oldish in their wrinkled sockets, the head painfully out of proportion with the puny, stunted body. Now and again he turns his gaze on me, and in his face there is a melancholy wonder, as if he is seeking something that has passed him by. Often I ponder, is there a crime more appalling and heinous than the one Society has committed upon him, who is neither man nor youth and never was child? Crushed by the heel of brutality, his plant had never budded.
Berkman 2015:449

With *features that resemble those of a child, old eyes in wrinkled sockets, and a puny, stunted body*, Harry comes across as oddly ageless. At the same time, he seems to span all possible ages at once. Additionally, Henry is characterized with a focus on disease and disability, with his unnatural pallor, otherworldly gaze, sickly features, and puny, stunted body. As such, his characterization also has ableist tones, in focusing on how growing up in prison has disabled Harry’s body. The imagined threat to the clean and proper narrator (and narratee), then, is related to able-bodiedness, as well as to gender, age, and sexuality. Here, Harry does not threaten *as a monster*, but rather as an example of *the monstrous results* of prison’s assimilation.

Being nineteen years old has little to nothing to do with Harry’s social, or even physical, age. Since Harry’s head is described as too large and heavy for his small body, his body is given similarities to that of an infant. At the same time, his face is elderly, but it still retains the features and expressions of a child. Growing up—or not, or both—in perpetual

imprisonment has fixed him in a liminal position. While Harry is not quite a man, a teenage boy, or a child, he has elements of all three. This liminal position also influences his masculinity, since his childish features, large head, and stunted growth render him boyish rather than manly. By noting that “his plant had never budded” (Berkman 2015:449), Alexander implies that Harry is stuck in a limbo of sorts, in terms of age as well as gender and its implications for his equally stunted sexuality. This narration of his *boyish-yet-oldish* masculinity shows a queer mingling with femininity as well, perhaps especially in the rather effeminate phrasing of his stunted masculinity project as an un-blooming flower.

As a *pitiifully grotesque* figure, characterized by his smallness, gender fluidity and queer mingling of youth and old age, Harry is depicted largely in line with the archetype of the witch (Wisker 2009): he is both elderly, decrepit and unattractive on the one hand, and young, fragile, and innocent on the other, as well as not quite masculine and yet not fully feminine either (Wisker 2009). These similarities show how the characterization of incarcerated people can utilize the same gothic economy as traditional monsters (Halberstam 1995). Halberstam defines what is meant by a gothic economy by describing it “in terms of a thrifty metaphoricality [...] which constructs a monster out of the traits which ideologies of race, class, gender, sexuality, and capital want to disavow” (Halberstam 1995:102). In Harry’s case, this is evidenced by how he fails to exhibit traits like strength and resilience, which would ordinarily be associated with young men. The traits he does exhibit are undesirable to masculinity projects, and are thus rendered monstrous. Like Halberstam’s example of anti-Semitic discourse (above), prison clearly shares this same ability to condense monstrous traits pertaining to class, race, gender, and sexuality into one or several types of bodies—by means of legislation and incarceration, as well as through the stories told about it. Prison autobiographies thus tap into this gothic economy both as stories that exhibit gothic tropes *and* due to how the space they depict already participates in condensing many monstrous traits into certain bodies and demographics.

Age, gender, and able-bodiedness are far from the only liminal, unsettling qualities of bodies that narrators describe as **other** in prison. Bodies are also monster-made by focusing on the interplay of gender and sexuality as a “tricky constellation of uncertain gender and improper sex” (Halberstam 1995:165). For example, Jack’s explanation of *punks* offers peculiar pronouns that hint at ambiguity for everyone concerned:

In prison, if I take a punk, she is mine. He is like a slave, a chattel slave. It is the custom that no one addresses her directly. He cleans my cell, my clothing and runs errands for me. Anything I tell him to do, he must do—exactly the way a wife is perceived in some marriages even today. But I can sell her or lend her out or give her away at any time. Another prisoner can take her from me if he can dominate me.
Abbott 1991:80

Alternating between she/her and he/him pronouns, Jack characterizes *punks* as not quite men or women, but as a merger. As a result, the *punk* is *both man and woman*; as well as a *wife, slave, and possession*. The body in question is both masculine and feminine, as well as human and non-human. All things considered, Jack paints a picture of liminal, queer bodies that unsettle distinctions of sexuality and gender. Clearly, notions of gender and sexuality depend on shifting, unpredictable, and sometimes violent contexts within prison's ruleset (cf. Creed 1993). These uncertain bodies are *traded and fought for amongst men*, making the sexuality (and attempted heteronormative masculinity) of these men equally shifting and ambiguous. Notably, after having spent most of his life in prison, Jack describes this process by placing himself inside of it, rather than observing it from outside. However, the punk still functions as an abjected being, to exist in opposition to (and in possession of). Here, the threat to the subject thus has to do with prison's potential to undo masculine gender projects as a part of its assimilation. Resistance, however, undoes heteronormativity with regards to both gender and sexuality, since the relationship Jack describes makes everyone involved ambiguous in terms of gender and desire.

So far, the **other** bodies explored in this chapter have been narrated by white, well-read, largely heteronormative, imprisoned men. The depiction of **other** bodies thus had to do with what this position does not want to be(come). In the explored novels, otherness surfaces in other ways, and from other perspectives, as well. For instance, in *Orange is the New Black*, Piper (an educated, upper middle-class woman imprisoned for an old drug smuggling charge related to an ex-girlfriend) introduces readers to Vanessa, who she describes as a "male-to-female transsexual" (Kerman 2013:205):

Within the confines of the Danbury plantation, her presence was notorious; the COs insisted on calling her 'Richard,' her birth name. One day the camp was abuzz. 'The he-she is coming up!!!'.

While Piper takes care to call Vanessa *she* and *her* throughout the narration, she nonetheless describes Vanessa in ambiguous terms, and includes *Richard* as a *birth name* rather than a deadname. Introducing Vanessa as a *he-she*, albeit by quoting someone else, functions as the centre of her introduction. This not-quite-ness becomes central to Vanessa's characterization throughout the story. More often than not, she is characterized by a not-quite-ness with regards to her femininity:

I soon got my first glimpse of Vanessa—all six feet, four inches of blond, coffee-colored, balloon-breasted almost-all-woman that she was. An admiring crowd of young women had gathered around her, and she lapped up the attention.

Kerman 2013:206

From Piper's perspective, Vanessa is *almost*, therefore not quite, all woman. Being described as *balloon-breasted* puts particular emphasis on artifice: balloons are plastic, unnatural. Here, Piper reduces Vanessa's femininity to an artificial display, during which *she laps up the attention*. This could also be tied to notions of able-bodiedness, since Vanessa's body is described as less-than abled *as a woman's body*, by being narrated in terms of its masculinity. The novel recounts several instances of other incarcerated women abjecting Vanessa, asking Piper if "that is what [she wants] to see in the bathroom" (Kerman 2013:207) and expressing "disgust" and "outraged noises" at the thought of living with a trans woman (Kerman 2013:206). While Vanessa's introduction as a he-she and any sense of her as outright threatening can be blamed on the narrative voicing other characters, her depiction as an *almost-all-woman* is internal to Piper's narration. Here, it is also interesting to note that Piper is a bisexual woman, having had relationships with women but being in a relationship with a man during her story. The transphobic overtones in her narration are thus presented against a backdrop of both lesbian and heteronormative experiences. This ties Piper's narration to notions of gendered and sexual otherness from a queerer perspective than what is the case in other novels explored here. However, despite Piper's position as a queer woman narrator, Vanessa is characterized through a cis-sexist emphasis on her non-conformism to heteronormative femininity.

The contradictions Piper make use of in narrating who Vanessa is and how she moves through the world emphasize how her not-quite-ness

is the central quality in her characterization.³⁶ For instance, she points out that while Vanessa “spoke in a high, little-girl voice most of the time she could *switch at will* to a booming, masculine Richard-voice” (Kerman 2013:208). Here, Piper is aligned with the officers, who had hitherto been the ones who “insisted” on calling Vanessa by her deadname (Kerman 2013:205). Moreover, the emphasis on choice gives Vanessa a shape-shifting quality, moving at will between feminine and masculine expressions. Throughout the narrative, Piper characterizes Vanessa through contrast: girly *and* booming, Vanessa *and* Richard, Black *and* blonde, and with big breasts on a tall, masculine body that “smelled unmistakably like a sweaty man” (Kerman 2013:207). Vanessa is thus narrated as a shape-shifting character who embodies both feminine and masculine traits, but always in some extreme. However, while the masculine traits are narrated as natural (sweat; height; voice), her feminine traits are described in un-natural, artificial terms (balloon-breasts; switching out of a girly voice at will; dying her hair). Being both-and-neither, not-quite-either in this sense is the predominant aspect of her characterization. Here, Piper turns Vanessa into an example of an “abjected being”, another result of a “tricky constellation of uncertain gender and improper sex” (cf. Halberstam 1995:165).

A similar, undesirable queerness is presented in *Nenjack*. However, where *Orange is the New Black* presents Vanessa as predominantly *well liked* by both the narrator and the other characters (Kerman 2013:208), Ted’s treatment of trans women in *Nenjack* is decidedly more negative. While *Orange is the New Black* is narrated by a queer woman and set in a women’s prison, *Nenjack* is narrated by a heteronormative family-man tasked with overseeing incarcerated men. Unlike Vanessa who was incarcerated among other women, *Nenjack*’s trans women characters are all in a men’s prison. This is a strong indicator of othering in itself. Additionally, the characterization of these women also offers a strong example of narratorial othering.

These incarcerated, Black trans women are described by a straight, white, cis-gendered father from the professional middle class. Describing different women incarcerated in a men’s prison, Ted points out that “all

³⁶ It is important to note here that characterization is an act carried out by the narrator, and should not be confused with Vanessa’s character as such. That something is central to her characterization is thus not the same as it being central to her character.

three seemed to feel they were actually women” (Conover 2011:258). In spite of this, Ted nonetheless insists on referring to them with masculine pronouns throughout the narrative. Moreover, their particular predicament as women in a men’s prison is not problematized structurally, but rather used to emphasize a strangeness in these women themselves and the trouble *they cause* among the men they are imprisoned with.

One of these women, “a black inmate named Sam” is described by Ted as “a big-boned guy with breasts” who “wore his state pants tight and exaggerated his hip movement when he walked” (Conover 2011:258). To Ted, Sam is a *he*—even though she is clearly femme and is described as having straight, male “admirers” (Conover 2011:259). Calling her a man is thus both in direct opposition to her gender and to the sexualities of the men around her. While Sam has straight men fawning over her, the same cannot be said for another “sexually ambiguous personality” under Ted’s supervision: “a transsexual in his forties whom the other black inmates called Grandma” (Conover 2011:259). Grandma, who is later also referred to as *Edward* and “*Janice*” (sic.), is given more space in the narrative than any of the other trans women. She is described as “poor, black, and gay” [for being sexually attracted to men] (Conover 2011:261). As was the case with Sam’s admirers, this depiction runs counter to her (and her partners’) sexuality. Like all the trans women Ted describes, she is perpetually refused her proper pronouns.

Grandma is portrayed as being “by far the most freakish” of the “sexually ambiguous” imprisoned people Ted works with (Conover 2011:259), due to her appearance and demeanour. Although Ted finds Grandma freakish, “he was also, strange as it is to say, a refreshing sort of female presence in a place where macho was the rule” (Conover 2011:260). The constant interplay of masculine pronouns on the one hand and her femme names and *feminine presence* on the other renders Grandma’s characterization ambiguous. This makes her a queer character. Her queerness derives from Ted insisting on masculine pronouns; calling Grandma gay for being attracted to men; calling her by her deadname, while simultaneously emphasizing that she identifies as a woman; using her femme nickname; and acknowledging her as a woman by describing her as *a female presence*. However, where Vanessa was “almost-all-woman” (Kerman 2013:206), Grandma is narrated as an impostor. Ted describes Grandma’s femininity as that of a cross-dressing, gay man rather than that of a straight trans woman:

Under his sagging, mango-sized breasts protruded a potbelly. A bun, which he had fashioned out of an uneven coil and tried to angle forward, did not hide the fact that his hairline was in full retreat. His teeth were long and yellow; behind black-frame glasses, you could see he had plucked and then redrawn his eyebrows. He was short and slightly swaybacked.
Conover 2011:259.

This passage paints a picture of a *short, crooked* Black man with *thinning hair, a potbelly, and long, yellow teeth*—an impostor, *freakishly* masquerading as a woman. Like her financial status, Grandma’s femininity is “poor” (Conover 2011:261). Here, we get a clear picture of sexist, racist, ableist, transphobic narration—Ted “constructs a monster out of the traits which ideologies of race, class, gender, sexuality, and capital want to disavow” (Halberstam 1995:102). As will become evident, much of Grandma’s unsettling queerness comes from the combination of her unattractiveness to the male gaze coupled with descriptions of her as possessing a predatory sexuality. Moreover, given her resulting (monstrous) queerness she, like young Harry, is characterized in line with a horror iconography of crones and witches: elderly, unattractive women whose defining traits include masculine features, large noses, crooked teeth, bad posture, thin hair, and gnarly hands, and who engage in various forms of trickery and subterfuge (Wisker 2009). Here, we can see Halberstam’s gothic economy spanning the cultural depictions of fictional monsters as well as imprisoned people.

Ted’s focus on Grandma’s body makes her an abject figure with thinning hair, long, yellow teeth and bad posture. Like was the case with Vanessa, there is also an air of artifice to this characterization, as particular attention is paid to her *plucking and re-drawing her eyebrows* as a form of trickery or disguise. Also like Vanessa, Grandma’s characterization focuses on the artifice of her breasts. However, where Vanessa’s were merely artificial and plastic, Grandma’s are also rendered abject. Ted describes her breasts as mango-sized, thus focusing on an edible (and therefore corruptible) element, conflating food- and sexuality taboos. Coupled with the focus on Grandma as *old*, this gives her body an air of corruption in relation to heteronormatively attractive femininity—showing how her femininity is unappetizing to heteronormativity. Ted’s characterization of Grandma through abjection and artifice also emphasizes her lack of nurturing, maternal functions: her breasts are food-sized, but both fake and past their expiration date. As such, they would not be able to supply

food to babies within a heteronormative, patriarchal logic that prioritizes natalist notions of nuclear family, procreation, and nursing (Kristeva 1982). Ted's narration thus expresses how breasts that lack both natalist and sexual functions become a source of anxiety to heteronormativity. Ted's characterization of Grandma as a non-woman also centres a heteronormative anxiety about "borderline natures" (cf. Wisker 2009:128), where Ted's heteronormative view struggles to see Grandma as anything other than an unsettling example of corrupted non-masculinity as well as non-femininity.

Since Ted's point of view is the only one on offer, it is impossible to straighten out the ambiguity of Grandma's characterization. Using masculine pronouns throughout the narrative undermines Grandma's femininity, rendering her a non-woman. Meanwhile, her characterization in all other respects renders her a non-man, too, especially from Ted's heteronormative, family-man point of view. Taken together, Grandma's gender and sexuality are made ambiguous, and mark her as **other** to men and women alike. This ambiguity makes Grandma's gender project uncanny and unknowable. Again, we see a conflation "of uncertain gender and improper sex" (Halberstam 1995:165). Ted's focus on Grandma's body as a source of disgust due to its nonconformity with (white, young, male gaze-oriented) feminine attractiveness seems to be the source of her abjection. Grandma's age is an important marker of otherness in this, as is her decrepit body. For instance, she is called Grandma despite *being in her forties*; arguably a young age when compared to the image generally associated with grandmothers. Moreover, her nickname seems to be more of a comment on her appearance and supposed male-ness than on her physical age:

The birth date on the card showed that "Janice" had been born just two years before me, though from his appearance, I would have guessed that he was at least ten years older than that. Prison had that kind of effect on many men. He had been in and out of it for most of his adult life, he told me—mostly arrests for prostitution.

Conover 2011:260

Again, Grandma's femininity is undermined, not least by the quotation marks around her name. Furthermore, her appearance as someone *who looks older than she is* becomes explicitly linked to *a masculine prison experience*, which again highlights Ted's resistance to the idea of Grandma being a

woman. Not only does her perceived age make her unattractive, it also makes her a manly non-woman since *prison ages men*, which Ted means accounts for her grandmotherly looks.

Additionally, Ted describes how most of Grandma's arrests have been for prostitution. This description seems to add to the wrongness of Grandma's femininity—Ted does not question sex work as such in this description, but rather questions how Grandma in particular could find customers. This is painted as both unlikely and oxymoronic, since the narrative emphasizes Grandma's unattractiveness as both a woman and a man, to either women or men. As a result, the overall image of Grandmas sexuality is one of impossibility.

Apart from having been imprisoned for sex work, Grandma is sentenced for having murdered an ex-lover. However, she maintains her innocence and says that she has "been falsely convicted" (Conover 2011:260). Given Grandmas kindly demeanour and her deviance from normativity, the story makes it easy to picture her receiving unfair judgement throughout a legal process—especially considering that she wound up in a prison for men. Despite this, and even though we are never told of any instance where Grandma enacts violence or comes across as physically threatening, Ted has "no trouble imagining him capable of murder" (Conover 2011:261). Like all the other ambiguities and contradictions in Grandma's characterization, the question of her guilt is never resolved. Moreover, the narrative focus on her ambiguities is in line with how previous studies have noted that women accused or convicted of "violent crimes, are depicted as not women, bastardizations of women, or counterfeit women" (Picart 2006:2). Clearly, Ted's characterization of Grandma is a portrait of a counterfeit woman. This also relates to how Ted views her as racialized, which evidences how cis-sexist and racist ideologies are entwined in this characterization. As Halberstam notes, making monstrosity a visible, physical condition of racialized bodies, and "linking it to sexual corruption" binds "foreign aspects to perverse activities" (Halberstam 1995:13).

Grandma's characterization elucidates a merger of racist, sexist, and transphobic views on gender, sexuality, race, class, (dis)ability, and age, and there are several intertextual ties to be made through the gothic economy at play in this othering. For instance, the monster-making aspects of Grandma's characterization, along with her nickname, make her reminiscent of another literary Grandma with noteworthy teeth: The Wolf

in *Little Red Riding Hood*. The intertextual ties to *Little Red Riding Hood* emphasize how Ted's point of view—that of white heteronormativity—ascribes a predatory or duplicitous nature to Grandma's character. She might present as a Grandma, but to Ted, she is a Wolf. This shows how a gothic economy envelops both 'true stories' and outright fictions—as well as imprisonment practice when it comes to non-conforming bodies.

Describing an aging, fragile, and decrepit body as capable of violent, strength-requiring murder adds to an air of suspicious duplicity, furthering Grandma's description's alignment with witch- and wolf motifs. With some variation, these motifs tend to centre on teeth as a marker of threat and disgust, since these motifs embody threats of being devoured (Wisker 2009; Warner 1995). In other words, Grandma is depicted as another expression of the monstrous-feminine, nested within the monstrous-feminine presence that is prison itself.

When Ted draws attention to Grandma's long, yellow teeth, he aligns her depiction with the gothic economy of werewolves and cannibalistic witches of fairy tales and horror stories (Wisker 2009). The witch- and wolf motifs evidenced in her characterization foreground how white-supremacist heteronormativity cannot handle the ambiguities of her sexuality; age; and fluid gender, making her ageing and masculine traits constitutive of a repulsive, monstrous Black femininity (Wisker 2009; Warner 1995). The demonization of such traits stems from both racist and ableist ideologies, and these demonizations are often evidenced through animalistic connotations (cf. Higgins & Swartz 2018). In Grandma's case, this animalism comes across by the narrative's focus on her teeth, skin, hair, and posture—details that emphasize the wrongness of her body not only as feminine, but also as *human* (Wisker 2009; Warner 1995). Here, Ted's characterization of Grandma as **other** shows how the prison novel has affinity with the gothic novel, since in both genres “[m]onsters have to be everything the human is not”, which in turn creates “the negative of human” and the subsequent “invention of human as white, male, middle class, and heterosexual” (Halberstam 1995:22).

Note how this shifts the focus away from Grandma as an **other**, and onto Ted as the otherer. It emphasizes how this narration is a collection of attempts to eject her as abject, making her more villain than victim—thereby making Ted, as part of prison, more hero than villain (cf. Higgins & Swartz 2018). This offers one example of how oppressive definitions of oppressed groups render them monstrous and threatening in order to

legitimize violence against them (Khair 2015:8, 55; Higgins & Swartz 2018). As such, an intertextual reading can place Grandma's characterization within the wider framework of the West's patriarchal, (post)colonial, and heteronormative imagination (cf. Halberstam 1995). This shows how, while there are common themes within the texts explored in this study, these themes are by no means exclusive to prison stories. For instance, the sexual ambiguity and supposed murderous past in Grandma's characterization aligns her with a contemporary, popularized figure in fictional crime stories: the feminized, often mentally unstable, male killer. Notable examples of this character type include Norman Bates in *Psycho* (1960), and Buffalo Bill in *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), who have both been analysed as violent expressions of gendered and sexual anxieties that corrupt both feminine and masculine gender projects through dressing up in 'wrong' clothes, hair, or skin (Halberstam 1995; Picart 2006).

ANIMALS AND CANNIBALS

Much like in Ted's description of Grandma, other narrators also focus on teeth, hair, and skin to characterize the monstrous **other**, especially when it comes to the interplay of race, gender, and sexuality. For instance, in *Papillon*, the titular main character and narrator befriends a man named Antonio during one of his incarcerations:

I made friends with a guy in the courtyard who wore handcuffs all the time. [...] He was a man of thirty-five; his arms were hairy and his chest was covered with a mat of very black curly fur; he must have been most uncommonly strong. There was such a layer of thick horny skin on the soles of his bare feet that I often saw him pull out bits of glass or a nail which had gone right in without reaching the flesh.

Charrière 2005:149

While Antonio is someone the narrator befriends, he is also depicted as potentially violent—he is *most uncommonly strong*, and since that strength must be contained, he *wore handcuffs all the time* (unlike everyone else). As such, he is presented as someone who, unlike the narrator, might belong in prison. Moreover, despite characterizing Antonio as friendly and helpful, Papillon relies on animal analogies when he describes him. Antonio is described as having “wolfish teeth” that “[shine] in the shadow”, and easily rip through tough foods that he finds in the wild (Charrière 2005:151; 153). With his seemingly instinctive knowledge of nature, his *mat of very black curly fur* and the *thick, horny skin on the soles of his*

bare feet, he is painted as a helpful beast rather than a friend or equal. Antonio is characterized as the narrator's subordinate, and is depicted largely through a focus on his naked, animalistic body. It is noteworthy how this correlates with the narrator's white perspective. The racist overtones of this relationship are palpable; Antonio's body is the site of "everything the human is not" from the "white, male, middle class, and heterosexual" perspective of the narrator (Halberstam 1995:22). When Papillon and Antonio eventually escape together, Antonio's animalistic characterization is extended through portrayals of him as an inexplicable, natural phenomenon. For example, this comes across in Papillon's description of his navigational skill:

Antonio, that phenomenon, could somehow guide himself through the downpour that prevented us from seeing anything ten feet away. [...] From time to time he lay down and set his ear to the streaming ground. And then we'd go on again.

He had an odd way of getting along. It was neither running nor walking, but in a series of little jumps one after another, all the same length, with his arms out as though he was rowing through the air. He must have heard something, because he pulled me into the bush. It was still raining. And true enough, before our eyes there appeared a roller pushed by a tractor, to flatten the earth on the road, no doubt. Charrière 2005:151

Along with his *wolfish* appearance and uncommon strength, Antonio is also a navigational phenomenon, seemingly *instinctively* finding his way through *blinding weather* and *bushy landscapes*. When listening to the ground to navigate, he has a proximity to nature that borders on oneness. His heightened hearing also suggests a non-human, animalistic proximity to nature. Moreover, his movements through nature *mystify* the narrator. This alignment with nature is further in line with the focus on Antonio's feet having thick soles—both his body and his motions are in tune with the nature around them. Moreover, this oneness with nature goes hand in hand with the narrator's focus on Antonio's *black, curly fur* and *white, shining teeth*. While this alignment with nature is animalistic, it is also reminiscent of the witch- and werewolf motifs—especially as it gets the pair through their escape safely by means that seem phenomenal, uncommon, and almost magical to the narrator. However, where Grandma was made unsettling through being depicted as *unnatural* and *artificial*, Antonio is

instead depicted as less-than due to being *too natural* (and therefore uncivilized).

The narrativization of prison as a space filled with unsettling, monstrous bodies is evidenced by how the explored novels make use of animal analogies to create the **other**. This is not limited to the description of incarcerated people, however, but also includes depictions of guards. For instance, Jack's story depicts guards as animal in their relationship to imprisoned people:

Among themselves, the guards are human. Among themselves, the prisoners are human. Yet between the two the relationship is not human—it is animal. [...] What I am saying is that the prisoner is closer to humanity than the guard: because he is deprived by the guard. That is why I say that evil exists—not in the prisoner, but in the guard.

Abbott 1991:60

This echoes Halberstam's assertion that monsters are a relationship, rather than a trait (1995:102). It is in the need to separate between categories that violent otherness arises. Moreover, the animalistic portrayal of guards permeates Jack's story, as they are referred to as pigs throughout. "The only time they appear human is when you have a knife at their throats. The instant you remove it, they fall back into animality" (Abbott 1991:62). Moreover, animalistic tendencies also become part of the monstrous transformation the Jack himself undergoes during his imprisonment:

I once caught myself considering the arm of a pig, and became excited the way, I guess, a carnivorous beast becomes excited to see his dinner on the hoof. It was as if I could smell his blood.

Abbott 1991:32

Here, Jack's feeling like a *carnivorous beast* is coupled with a view of prison officers as edible, which both underscores and subverts a cannibalistic tone to this novel: guards are edible, but they are not human. At least not when they are entered into a relationship with prisoners. In wanting to eat them, Jack, too, feels like an animal. Here, the novel exhibits the conflict between othering to remain separate from the monstrosities of prison, and being assimilated into said monstrosity, by showing how hunting monsters makes monsters. By focusing on the *relationship between guards and prisoners*, Jack attempts to keep his sense of self separate from abjection as a relational process. Meanwhile, in contemplating the edibility of guards, he is *the one who would deprive rather than the one being deprived*, thereby existing on

the monstrous, or evil, side of the relationship as per his own definition. In this sense, resistance to assimilation into prison, through maintenance of a clean and proper subjectivity, is failing. Jack is not maintaining a “total subject against whom the stereotype, the dark and evil other cannot prevail” (Halberstam 1995:81), but rather (as in Chapter 4), enters and becomes a part of it. Like Ted’s descriptions of Grandma, Jack here exemplifies aspects of devourment *within* devourment.

Guards being referred to as animals is not at all uncommon across the novels under study. While pigs are the most common across the explored texts, they are not the only animal used to convey a non-human guard in the novels. *The Great Escape* relies on ferrets, instead:

The Germans became escape-conscious too, and “ferrets” appeared in the compound—German security guards dressed in over-alls and armed with torches and steel pikes to probe for tunnels.
Brickhill 2012:10

Notably, the animals used in these characterizations are associated with certain undesirable traits. Where pigs are often used to embody dirty, gluttonous, and stupid characters in Western culture, ferrets are generally reserved for embodiments of the sharp and sneaky. As such, the use of animal analogies is symbolic in these narratives, as one of the ways that abjection functions to attempt a boundary between the human and what the human is not (cf. Halberstam 1995). This shows how the monster-figure embodies and articulates a relationship between belonging and otherness.

VIOLENCE

The Enormous Room offers another example of narration that characterizes animalistic, monstrous otherness through metaphors and metonymies. This is often evident in the narrator’s encounters with non-white, and/or non-heteronormative, bodies. This story is narrated through the eyes of Edward, a young, white, Harvard-educated American imprisoned in France during World War I. *The Enormous Room* is set, as the title would imply, in a prison where everyone is imprisoned in one, open space instead of individual cells.

Edward often refuses to use proper names when characterizing the people imprisoned alongside him. Instead, the narrative de-humanizes and demonizes characters by using derogatory nicknames and frequent animal

analogies. Focusing on the animalistic and monstrous characters that prison is home to (and who are made to seem at home there) thus heightens the abjectivity of the space. *The Enormous Room* contains several instances of othering characterization, which combine to create the atmosphere of this prison space. As previous studies have pointed out, such narratives turn prison into a “dark house of ghosts and monsters” (Smith, C. 2009:29). One of the most prominent examples of monstrous othering in this story is the depiction of an “utterly repulsive” character called “The Fighting Sheeney” [henceforth called The Fighter] (Cummings 2014:187), sheeney being a derogatory term for a Jewish person. Again, Halberstam’s notion of a gothic economy comes into play. Here, its “identification of bodies in terms of what they are not” (Halberstam 1995:19) is put in relation to the image of Jewish people in 19th and early 20th century discourse:

Gothic anti-Semitism makes the Jew a monster with bad blood and it defines monstrosity as a mixture of bad blood, unstable gender identity, sexual and economic parasitism, and degeneracy [...]

The monster Jew produced by nineteenth-century anti-Semitism represents fears about race, class, gender, sexuality, and empire – this figure is indeed gothicized or transformed into an all-purpose monster. Halberstam 1995:91-2

Here, the relationship the monster-figure embodies is that between anti-Semitism and Jewishness, where the Jew has been made into a condensation of *race, class, gender, sexuality, and empire*. In so doing, this discourse inscribes otherness onto Jewish bodies. Seeing as how *The Enormous Room* was first published in the early 1920’s, it must be considered as influenced by this discourse. Importantly, the notion of a gothic economy at work in this discourse is not to say that Jews are characterized as monsters, but rather to elucidate how both of these forms of cultural othering rely on the same processes and tropes in creating distance between a perceived ‘us’ and ‘them’. Drawing on Kristeva, Halberstam goes on to consider how Kristeva “[identifies] abjection with the Jew of anti-Semitic discourse. Anti-Semitic fantasy, she suggests, elevates Jewishness to both mastery and weakness, to ‘sex tinged with femininity and death’” (Halberstam 1995:18). Here, anxieties of sex, death, and gender coalesce. This conflation of politics and horror tropes, moreover, evidences how the “power of literary horror [...] lies in its ability to transform political struggles into psychological conditions and then to blur

the distinction between the two” (Halberstam 1995:18). Political struggles, and relationships between groups of people, are thus reduced to and conveyed through monstrous tropes, and explained as ‘given’ rather than ‘(re)created’. In *The Enormous Room*, Edward’s description of The Fighter is a clear example of how sexuality, gender, race, and class all coalesce, and are made to coextend with violence and undesirability. He is introduced as an *utterly repulsive* body; an abjected being. Edward goes on to create an image of The Fighter as abject in depictions of both his body and actions:

“[A] creature whom Ugly does not even slightly describe. There are some specimens of humanity in whose presence one instantly and instinctively feels a profound revulsion, a revulsion which—perhaps because it is profound—cannot be analyzed. The Fighting Sheeney was one of these specimens. His face (or to use the good American idiom, his mug) was exceedingly coarse-featured and had an indefatigable expression of sheer brutality—yet the impression which it gave could not be traced to any particular plane or line. I can and will say, however, that this face was most hideous—perhaps that is the word—when it grinned. When The Fighting Sheeney grinned you felt that he desired to eat you, and was prevented from eating you only by a superior desire to eat everybody at once.

Cummings 2014:188-9

There is an air of unfathomability to this encounter, since the profound revulsion Edward feels *cannot be analysed*. It is overwhelming and incomprehensible, all at once. That this Fighter is an overwhelming character is also emphasized by Edward’s focus on an insatiable hunger; this man had a desire *to eat you*, which seems second only to his *desire to eat everybody at once*. Yet again, we see an example of these novels depicting threats of devourment *within* threats of devourment. The narration thus paints a picture of The Fighter, who never gets a proper name, as *brutal* and *repulsive* by using details as metonymic signifiers of the whole: grins, teeth; coarse features. Edward draws on several details in the subsequent characterization that keep building the image of The Fighter as an abjected collection of undesirable traits (cf. Halberstam 1995).

The passage above depicts violence, brutality and hunger. However, *this brutality cannot be traced to any particular plane or line*, which underscores an interplay between abject details and unknowable, unsettling entireties. In the excerpt above, the narrator focuses specifically on teeth and hunger to convey a menacing, animalistic image. This gives the impression of The Fighter as having an insatiable and untiring lust for

violence, giving his particular brand of monstrosity an element of unreasonable greed—aligning him with prejudiced stereotypes of Jewishness (cf. Halberstam 1995; Kristeva 1982). Moreover, The Fighter is depicted as an unintelligent and easily confused “slave” to, and violent protector of, another, richer, imprisoned man (Cummings 2014:189-90). In another dehumanizing as well as homophobic stroke, Edward points out that The Fighter would “sleep stark-naked” near his master (2014:90), unlike the rest of the imprisoned men who would remain clothed. This comingling of *nakedness* and *snarling violence* adds to the characterization of The Fighter as animalistic. Here, Edward furthers the image of The Fighter as uncivilized, and of uncivilization as synonymous with deviance from heteronormative whiteness. The Fighter’s slave status vis-à-vis another man gives him a submissive status, which along with his deviant nakedness paints a picture of him as sexually queer. This also echoes Halberstam’s observation that the gothicized image of the Jew in anti-Semitic discourse centres on “sexual and economic parasitism” (1995:92), since the master-slave relationship is also depicted as socio-economically beneficial to The Fighter. Moreover, this monstrosity-as-uncivilization can also be tied to the abject status of (male) nakedness, and Chapter 4’s analysis of how being stripped of clothes becomes allegorical of being stripped of social, or even human, status.

The combined focus on nudity and violence contributes to making this characterization animalistic. This is made explicit, and coupled with notions of eerie automation, in the recounting of a fight between The Fighter and another incarcerated man:

The Sheeney was swinging like a windmill and hammering like a blacksmith. His ugly head lowered, the chin protruding, lips drawn back in a snarl, teeth sticking forth like a gorilla’s, he banged and smote that moon-shaped physiognomy as if his life depended upon utterly annihilating it.

Cummings 2014:224

In addition to animalistic traits, there is something mechanical about these actions. The Fighter, *snarling and ape-like*, is *swinging like a windmill*, adding an uncanny, automated air to an already animalistic depiction. Moreover, like in The Fighter’s introduction, his teeth are a prominent feature of his description. In both cases, the narrator focuses on teeth as a symbol of violence and brutality; metonymic of a monstrous entirety. Adding to

Edward's introduction of The Fighter as having "an indefatigable expression of sheer brutality" and a "desire to everybody at once" (Cummings 2104:188-9), in this event he is described as an embodiment of potentially endless, mechanic, and annihilating violence through the blurred images of an *automated, perpetually moving windmill* and a *toothy, naked, and violent gorilla*. As studies have pointed out, a common feature in narratives of otherness is the space it creates for white heteronormativity to assert itself through bestial language (Higgins & Swartz 2018:92). This is accomplished through the aforementioned identification people and their bodies "in terms of what they are not" (Halberstam 1995:19), in order to produce a counterpart, a "perfect figure for negative identity" as compared to the viewing subject (Halberstam 1995:22). In *The Enormous Room*, such monstrous bestiality becomes explicit through the likening of The Fighter to a queer, subservient gorilla, while the narrative also renders him inhuman through imagery of mechanistic automation. As a result, The Fighter is an image of what heteronormative masculinity desires not to be; subordinate and unthinking. Moreover, given the mixture of abject, monstrous characterization on the one hand, and the sometimes-humorous tone present in *The Enormous Room* on the other, this narrative articulates a sense of narratorial superiority—Edward both mocks and fears people around him, all the while creating a picture of a space where, while he should not be imprisoned, **others** should (cf. Kramer 2007). Like all the other novels, this exemplifies how assimilation into prison is resisted by implicitly narrating the *differences between* the (human) narratorial subject and the (monstrous) abjected beings around it (Halberstam 1995).

UNMAKING SOUP

So far, we have seen examples of how narrators attempt to resist assimilation into prison by means of abjection of **other** bodies in the same space. Through creating "the perfect figure for negative identity" (Halberstam 1995:22), narrators try to establish a boundary between themselves and unsettling examples of otherness. This image of assimilated bodies as abject extends to the depiction of bodies once assimilated and subsequently ejected by prison, as well. These stories then delve into questions of what is released from prison at the end of its enforced, dissolving punishments. Following incorporation and assimilation into a monstrous-feminine space, what is it that is released?

How are the bodies prison ejects back into society imagined and characterized?

Imprisonment has been narrativized and explained as a form of suspended animation (cf. Smith, P. 2008; Smith, C. 2009). Viewed as abject in a monstrous-feminine sense, ejection from this space becomes a “reworking of the birth scenario which is represented as a fearful experience”; where subjects exit a secluded space, “bursting forth into the unknown” (Creed 1993:56). Anxieties about what manner of **others** will burst forth as prison (r)ejects them is visible across all the examined prison stories. For instance, in *Newjack* Ted expresses concern regarding what effect imprisonment has on those subjected to it:

But can rite of passage possibly be the correct term for a kind of suspended animation that leaves you older, weaker, less sexually attractive, and less connected to community than before you went in?
Conover 2011:287

In line with what we have seen from the quotes in Chapter 4, here too there is concern for the lessening, diminishing, and de-humanizing effects of imprisonment. The results of imprisonment are summarized as a lessening of the human, civilized traits of clean and proper subjects (cf. Kristeva 1982). *A Prison Diary* returns to this theme throughout its story as well:

He then tells me a story about an occasion when he was released from prison some years ago for a previous offence. He decided to call into his bank and cash a cheque. He climbed the steps, stood outside the bank and waited for someone to open the door for him. He looks up from the end of the bed at the closed cell door. ‘You see, it doesn’t have a handle on our side, so you always have to wait for someone to open it. After so long in prison, I’d simply forgotten how to open a door.’
Archer 2002:118

Having spent a long time in prison, and acclimatized to its particularities, this man forgot the simple act of opening a door. Stories like this show a prison that is not rehabilitating, creating new life, or reinstating clean and proper subjects (cf. Creed 1993, Kristeva 1982). Instead, it *unmakes them*. Another example of this can be found in *Papillon*:

In the lag’s language they say you have to get rid of your convict’s shirt. But it’s more than that, because prison clothes are only a symbol. It’s

not only your shirt you have to get rid of, but the brand made with a red-hot iron on your heart and spirit.
Charrière 2005:500

In other words, prison enacts assimilation rather than rehabilitation, and the assimilation into prison life these stories present is not easy, if it is even possible, to reverse. Undoing the effects of imprisonment seems about as doable as unmaking soup. In *In The Belly of the Beast*, too, incorporation into prison sticks, lingering post-release:

Why do you steal when you get out of prison? Why do you commit crimes you never dreamed of being able to commit before you entered prison? You have changed so that you are not even aware there was a time you were incapable of such things.
Abbott 1991:122

This story, like all the others, points to prison as worsening rather than rehabilitating. Incorporation into prison life entails an *irrevocable change*. This change makes the impossible possible, but only in a destructive way. Returning to society envisioned as the symbolic order becomes impossible, since prison as a nightmarish double of the pre-symbolic space—incapable of teaching the subject clean and proper behaviours (Creed 1993; Kristeva 1982). Rather than preparing subjects to leave, this pre-symbolic space assimilates and makes a successful return or ejection into the symbolic order near impossible. A similar worry is evident in Piper's story:

Our system of 'corrections' is about arm's-length revenge and retribution, all day and all night. Then the overseers wonder why people leave prison more broken than when they went in.
Kerman 2013:205

Like so many other prison stories, *Orange is the New Black* exhibits a prison that reduces and dissolves rather than strengthens and rebuilds (cf. Douglas 1996; Fiddler 2007). These stories thus articulate anxieties about the effects of imprisonment. Reform is shown to imply deterioration, rather than improvement (Conover 2011:19). Those who are ejected back into society are imagined as returning *subhuman*. In this way, these stories are in line with how previous studies have regarded imprisonment as civil death and undeath (Smith, C. 2009). In this light, the return from civil death is imagined as something more akin to traditional zombie iconography than a rehabilitated citizen.

The dehumanization of criminalized and imprisoned people in popular culture bears a striking resemblance to the horror icon that is the zombie. Embodying fears of the *disintegration* of the brain, “the organ associated with the production and organization of identity” (Chaplin 2011:248), zombies are symbolic expressions of violent, instinctive, and animalistic humanity, devoid of reason. This image corresponds with how the explored novels characterize the bodies and minds that prison produces. Such themes can be found in all the explored imprisonment stories, offering images of more or less violent and animalistic effects of imprisonment. Take, for instance, Alexander’s description of Wingie and prison’s effects on him as well as many others:

Poor Wingie has disappeared. Grown violently insane, he was repeatedly lodged in the dungeon [underground cells with no light], and finally sent to an asylum. There my unfortunate friend had died after two months. His cell is now occupied by “Irish Mike”, a good-natured boy, turned imbecile by solitary. He hops about on all fours, bleating: “baah, baah, see the goat, I’m the goat, baah, baah.” I shudder at the fate I have escaped, as I look at the familiar faces that were so bright with intelligence and youth, now staring at me from the “crank row”, wild-eyed and corpse-like, their minds shattered, their bodies wasted to a shadow. [...]

From cell to cell I pass the graveyard of the living dead, the silence broken only by intermittent savage yells and the piteous bleating of Mike.

Berkman 2015:347

Wingie grows *violently insane*, and is locked in a lightless underground cell until he has to be shipped to an asylum, where he eventually dies. In his place, Mike *hops about on all fours, bleating piteously*, among other *wild-eyed and corpse-like* incarcerated people. Here, Alexander characterizes **other** bodies and people in prison as *once familiar faces* that prisonness has turned into *the living dead*. Like the zombie, horror icon that it is, these characters are the living dead: emaciated, sometimes violent walking corpses with shattered minds and wild eyes. This also exemplifies how monsters do not have to embody direct dangers to the narrator, since these monstrous **others** rather embody the *threatening results of imprisonment*. By pointing out the difference between these zombified people and *himself as having escaped their fate*, Alexander’s narration draws boundaries around the sense of narratorial, subjective wholeness. Another example of prison turning a man into something less-than is given attention in Alexander’s story. Lancaster, a

young Black man, deteriorates quickly when his release date is stolen from him:

In the basket cell, a young coloured man grovels on the floor. It is Lancaster, Number 8523. He was serving seven years, and working every day in the mat shop. Slowly the days passed, and at last the longed-for hour of release arrived. But Lancaster was not discharged. He was kept at his task, the Warden informing him that he had lost six months of his “good time” for defective work. The light-hearted [Black man] grew sullen and morose. Often the silence of the cell-house was pierced by his anguished cry in the night, “My time’s up, time’s up. I want to go home.” The guards would take him from the cell, and place him in the dungeon. One morning, in a fit of frenzy, he attacked Captain McVey, the officer of the shop. The Captain received a slight scratch on the neck, and Lancaster was kept chained to the wall of the dungeon for ten days. He returned to the cell, a drivelling imbecile. The next day they dressed him in his citizen clothes, Lancaster mumbling, “Going home, going home.” The Warden and several officers accompanied him to the court, on the way coaching the poor idiot to answer “yes” to the question, “Do you plead guilty?” He received seven years, the extreme penalty of the law, for the “attempted murder of a keeper.” They brought him back to the prison, and locked him up in a basket cell, the barred door covered with a wire screen that almost entirely excludes light and air. He received no medical attention, and is fed on a bread-and-water diet.

The witless [Black man] crawls on the floor, unwashed and unkempt, scratching with his nails fantastic shapes on the stone, and babbling stupidly “Going, Jesus going to Jerusalem [...] Going home, going home.” As I pass he looks up, perplexed wonder on his face; his brows meet in a painful attempt to collect his wandering thoughts, and he drawls with pathetic sing-song, “Going home, going home; Jesus going to father’s home.” The guards rise their hands to their nostrils as they approach the cell: the poor imbecile evacuates on the table, the chair, and the floor. Twice a month he is taken to the bathroom, his clothes are stripped, and the hose is turned on the crazy [Black man]. Berkman 2015:268³⁷

This is a fairly long excerpt, and a lot happens in it. For one thing, as Lancaster deteriorates the narrator shifts his tone, from talking about him as a *young coloured man* to a *crazy, drivelling imbecile*. Moreover, the events that take place in this excerpt show how prison incorporates Lancaster through

³⁷ This quote has been altered. Probably due to the age of the text, it uses the N-word to describe Lancaster as a Black man. While there are arguments in favour of keeping texts in their original, unaltered states, it seems needlessly dehumanizing to keep this word alive, as it were, by including it in contemporary research.

a series of deprivations and disrespects of his boundaries. He is chained in a dungeon, deceived, and fed on bread and water. In the end, the abjection of this image is complete—Lancaster has become a *crawling, rambling, unwashed imbecile, scratching* at the floor, locked in a space covered in bodily waste. As his (personal and physical) borders are defi(l)ed, *he unbecomes*. This shows the effects of prison’s assimilation into otherness, as well as the ways this assimilation can be brought about through arbitrary changes in prison’s rules (Creed 1993). To add insult to injury, this encounter is juxtaposed with the prison’s official, rehabilitative aims on the next page of the novel:

Returning to my cell in the evening, my gaze meets the printed rules on the wall:

“The prison authorities desire to treat every prisoner in their charge with humanity and kindness. The aim of all prison discipline is, by enforcing the law, to restrain the evil and to protect the innocent from further harm; to so apply the law upon the criminal as to produce a cure from his moral infirmities, by calling out the better principles of his nature.”

Berkman 2015:269

This contrast highlights how prison, while “attempting to create new life” through reform and rebirth, succeeds “only in creating monsters” (Creed 1993:56). The deterioration of the mind, along with the grime and filth of prison space mentioned in all of the explored texts, results in an image of prison as a site that produces mindless, dirty bodies. Prison might, at least officially, intend reform, but instead imprisonment threatens to turn individuals into abjected, raw physicality—creatures of instinct rather than intellect:

The twice-daily pill line in Danbury was always long, snaking out of the medical office into the hall. Some women were helped enormously by the medication they took, but some of them seemed zombified, doped to the gills. Those women scared me; what would happen when they hit the streets and could no longer go to pill line?

Kerman 2013:204

Piper worries what will happen when these women, whom prison has *zombified*, return to society. This worry is a recurring feature of her story, and she questions how anyone could “do significant amounts of time in a setting like this without losing their mind” (Kerman 2010:306). This is further exemplified in Jack’s narrative, as he points out that “by the time

you get out—*if* you get out—you are capable of *anything*, any crime at all” (Abbott 1991:122). Again, prison proves incapable of creating anything but monsters (cf. Creed 1993). This complication of the rebirth- or return-narrative is echoed across the novels under study here. Alexander offers yet another example:

The sweet odor of May wafts the resurrection! But the threshold of life is guarded by the throes of new birth. [...] Anxiety tortures the sleepless nights; the approaching return to the living is tinged with the disquietude of the unknown, the dread of the renewed struggle for existence.

Berkman 2015:334

Here, returning to the *world of the living* is a source of anxiety for Alexander. The idea of prison-as-death or unlife and a frightening rebirth scenario is present here, too. Returning to the living after spending years in prison becomes a return to something unknown, and a struggle to exist in this unfamiliar outside world. This entails a “bursting forth into the unknown” (Creed 1993:56), which is line with monstrous-feminine iconography. Like Fiddler suggests, prison can be understood as a “maternal space or as the locus of a rebirth” (2007:198). However, this chapter adds nuance to how prison is a *monstrous* uterine space, and accordingly offers *monstrous* rebirths—if it offers any, at all.

As such, this rebirth scenario is a failed attempt to create civilized life, instead creating something less-than. Prison here becomes conceptualized as a space that enacts “harrowing forms of resurrection” (Smith, C. 2009:61; 209) in the form of monstrous rebirth. Moreover, also in line with the monstrous-feminine, this rebirth is both a frightening experience for those it (r)ejects, and a creation of frightening bodies to those who observe it (Creed 1993). By unveiling this, this study shows how stories of imprisonment draw on monstrous-feminine iconography when they narrativize both prison space and (r)ejection from it. This ranges from more implicit use of the “symbolization of the womb as house/room/cellar or any other enclosed space” filled with blood and other bodily matter that “drips from walls, fills cellars” or runs along the floor (Creed 1993:55), like in Jack’s story of the hole, to explicit metaphors such as Alexander summarizing prison as the “nursery of crime” (Berkman 2015:466). Attempting to enforce one’s own ejection from prison, in the form of escapes, is also narrativized as a monster-making endeavour. Jim

describes how Cretzer and Coy, who are described as two of the more violent and aggressive men he is incarcerated along with, begin to carry out an escape attempt that has been long in the works:

It was time for Coy to accomplish the task he had been starving himself for. He stripped off his clothing to reveal an emaciated body he had to squeeze through a nine-inch gap in the bars. While Coy stood naked, trembling in fear, excitement, and anticipation, Cretzer helped him apply a thick layer of grease. Special care was given to coat his head, shoulders, and hips - the most difficult parts to work through such a small opening.

Quillen 2015:204

Becoming what he needs to be in order to escape, Coy has become an *emaciated, naked, and greasy body*. In line with a monstrous rebirth scenario, this jarring body is greased up to ease his expulsion into the 'real', outside world. This, coupled with the sheer violence of his (futile) escape attempt (which we will return to later), makes him a monstrous figure in Jim's narrative. Like most of the explored novels, Coy exemplifies how monsters in prison stories are neither more nor less than what imprisonment, and the description of them as part of the narrators' experiences thereof, makes them.

DISCUSSION

Across the explored autobiographies, there were several instances where white, heteronormative, cis gender narrators portrayed **other** characters through dehumanizing nicknames, animal analogies, or by implicitly dehumanizing them by focusing on their hair, skin, teeth, or other body parts. These types of narration are at home in a gothic economy, "a thrifty metaphoricity [...] which constructs a monster out of the traits which ideologies of race, class, gender, sexuality, and capital want to disavow" (Halberstam 1995:102). In other words, these narrative constructions of otherness make monsters out of the abjected traits that narrators (and, presumably, their narratees) do not want to associate with themselves. This results in images of racialized otherness, improper sexualities, unstable gender projects, and bodies marked by age(lessness) and disabilities. Rather than merely eject such traits as undesirable, the stories inscribe them on **other** bodies, and make them meaningful *as otherness*. This creates a space for narrators-as-subjects to eject the abject as well as view it (and

thereby view themselves as superior) from a safe distance (cf. Kramer 2007).

These abjected, monstrous **others** “have to be everything the human is not and, in producing the negative of human, these novels make way for the invention of human as white, male, middle class, and heterosexual” (Halberstam 1995:22). In this case, they also have to be what the narrator does not wish to be: assimilated by prison.

Teeth frequently functioned metonymically in depictions of sexual and racialized otherness (see Rimmon-Kenan 2002:52-3). This reliance on bestial and monstrous traits results in a representation of these characters as less-than people; as abject, monstrous bodies, rather than as individuals. This narration is an example of the “bestial language” used in cultural othering of Black and other non-white bodies (Higgins & Swartz 2018:92). This can be considered as part of a gothic horror iconography or logic in crime and punishment discourse. As such, the pop-cultural field aligns with criminal policies and incarceration practices that largely target minorities (Halberstam 1995; Hill Collins & Bilge 2016:39).

Moreover, this narratorial othering is in line with Jewkes’ study of how prisoners are constructed as **others** in order to “make some of the most punitive actions seem both ordinary and acceptable” (2007:454). This, in turn, echoes Higgins & Swartz observation that “writing and reading the colonized as grotesque monsters in crime stories” allows those with the power to punish (and narrate) to deny both the victim-status of those imprisoned and their own complicity in maintaining abusive power structures (Higgins & Swartz 2018:94).

By making monsters of certain imprisoned people, narrators show how there is a layer of assumed guilt and innocence present in these stories. While most narrators explored here are sceptical of prison as such, this scepticism is not always abolitionist enough to include all of the incarcerated characters in the story. In other words, while the narrators never feel like *they* should be imprisoned (and indeed often feel that others should not be, either), some of the characters they introduce are made monstrous in ways that present them as *belonging* in, and to, prison. They are part of that universe, assimilated by and coextensive with it.

Moreover, these stories also exhibit how a gothic economy is at work in the cultural imagining of the bodies that prison produces through assimilation, and which it subsequently rebirths (cf. Creed 1993; Duncan 1996). Especially when it comes to questions of release from prison,

narrators depict prison's effects as irrevocable and worsening. Returning to society becomes a question of trying to unmake the soup, or "human stew" (Kerman 2010:69), that prison creates. Moreover, the notion of prison as a lessening, dehumanizing space also ties into scholarship critiquing prison's reintegrative aims:

A more cynical reading of reintegration in this regard is that ex-prisoners are deliberately kept in the margins – they are to re-enter society by being returned to the same marginalised position that got them into prison in the first place – which can explain why reconviction is more common than change post release (cf. Carlen 2012).

Gålnander 2020:74

Importantly, this view of prison as ejecting and returning **other** people *whence they came* resonates with a view of prison as a monstrous-feminine institution that dissolves and worsens, and where resistance to this dissolution becomes yet another way of monster-making through subjective abjection of **other** bodies. In short, prison is bound up in numerous processes of "creating monsters" (cf. Creed 1993:56), both through its own unmaking, assimilative processes and through the monster-making resistance it brings out in narratorial subjects.

The next chapter moves on to explore how prison's monster-making properties linger and haunt both those subjected to it and the people and spaces around it. Here, the study explores how prison destabilizes categorizations, and unfamiliarizes things both in- and outside of itself.

CHAPTER 6

PRISON AS A HAUNTING HOUSE

*I was doing well at keeping work off my mind
until I noticed his younger sister with her hands on the slats of her crib, looking out.*

Conover 2011:114

If the abject prison is one where people are undone, unmade, and unborn, the uncanny prison is one where people as well as places are haunted by these processes. Prison's uncanniness surfaces in a number of different ways in the titles explored in this study. All of them have to do with eerie uncertainties, and difficulties of boundary maintenance. This chapter focuses on how prison unsettles, and haunts, other places as well as people. This, in turn, relates to previous scholarship on prison as a liminal space (e.g. Comfort 2003; Moran 2013), and to the question of whether or not prison should be considered a total institution (e.g. Farrington 1992; Goffman 1961; Moran 2012; 2013).

Broadly speaking, there are two layers to how haunting is expressed in prison autobiographies. One is personal, and the other socio-political. On the personal level, haunting is expressed as individual pasts or futures taking on haunting qualities in, or because of, prison. It can also surface as unsettling similarities between self and **other**. On the socio-political level, prison haunts (and is haunted by) other institutions. Prison novels thus express a "weaving of historical and socio-public events together with the personal and even deeply private" (Bakhtin 2014:247). For both of these entwined layers, haunting is visible in the texts through prison's comingling of time(s) and space(s), as well as its merger of people and places.

The notion of haunting has been used in previous studies to explore unsettling and temporally ambiguous aspects of isolated and isolating spaces (Janicker 2015; McKay 2020; Royle 2003). Specifically,

places marked by transition, where a multitude of people occupy space both simultaneously and over time, such as hotels, schools— or prisons— give rise to particular, haunting tensions stemming from their crowded nature (Janicker 2015:122). As a result, institutions like prison become haunted by both the histories of everyone who has been incorporated into them over time and their own socio-political histories (e.g. reforms or expansions).

Moreover, prison conceptualized as a haunting space that seeps into other spaces can be seen between the lines of previous studies, as well. For instance, Moran notes that “the prison wall is in fact more porous than might at first be assumed” in her study of prison visitation spaces (Moran 2013:348). She notes that visitation spaces are liminal “spaces of betweenness” that enable a “metaphorical threshold-crossing [...] between outside and inside” (Moran 2013:348). Given how these spaces blur the lines between inside and outside through merging freedom with incarceration, and unsettling distinctions between (un)freedom, it would be easy to configure the liminality that Moran discusses as an aspect of prison’s haunting, uncanny properties.

Furthermore, configuring prison as haunting can be used to interrogate the notion of total institutions. While total institutions are generally defined by their similar actions and control functions, adding the uncanny to this definition opens up a space for viewing total institutions as interlaced, seeping, and haunting. Goffman defines total institutions as spaces “where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable length of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life” (Goffman 1961:11). As such, we can regard total institutions as distinct, separate entities that have similarities between them. This also bears striking similarities to Janicker’s definition of haunted spaces as *apart from the ordinary* and enabling *experiences that are otherwise unattainable* (2015). However, as this chapter will show, prison is not only a distinct space apart from the ordinary, but also a lingering, haunting presence.

A key element of haunted space is that it is defined as a shifting, crowded space, a space apart from the ordinary, and a space that can corrupt or subvert symbols of (domestic) safety (Janicker 2015). This is not only a spatial but a spatiotemporal kind of apart-ness. Basically, haunted space is disoriented in time: it lacks both a sense of the past as separate from the present, and any meaningful future orientation.

Relatedly, it causes disorientation when it comes to questions of life and death (as the end of time). As a result, haunted space is fraught with uncertainty. It leads to confusion about what is what, and whether haunted space can ever really be left behind. This chapter deals with this last point, by building on Janicker's notion of haunted space to explore how prison space, in turn, also haunts.

THE HAUNTING PRISON

While prison is haunted (cf. Smith, C. 2009), it is also haunting. It lingers, sticking to those who have encountered it. As Chapters 4 and 5 emphasized, it is impossible to unmake the soupy dissolution prison enforces, and what prison ejects is a far cry from a rehabilitated or rebirthed citizen. This entails that, while prison is a space apart from the ordinary, it does not stay apart—it also *seeps into* the ordinary. This haunting comes across in several ways in the novels this study analyses. For example, prison haunts the family home. As a space that sticks to and seeps into the world around it, prison blurs the lines between itself and domesticity. This is evidenced throughout *Nenjack*, where part of prison space's narrativization hinges on how prison haunts Ted when he leaves it. Having worked in prison for a while, Ted notices that it exerts an unwelcome influence on his family life. While taking off his guard uniform is supposed to establish a boundary between his function at work (i.e. as a part of prison) and his personal life (i.e. as his own individual) (2013:4), prison still lingers—seeping through the stitches and into the skin (Conover 2013:243). That prison seeps through the uniform and into the fabric of everyday life becomes especially apparent when Ted deals with his children. For example, he starts seeing his daughter's crib as the bars of a cell:

I was doing well at keeping work off my mind until I noticed his younger sister with her hands on the slats of her crib, looking out. Unnervingly, it reminded me of the same view I had all day long. Like an inmate, she was dependent on me for everything. These two jobs were too much the same, I thought with disgust.

Conover 2011:114.

This passage superimposes prison imagery like bars onto the domestic imagery of a crib. Here, the abject-maternal elements of prison have followed Ted home. As a result, he equates *children with inmates*, in that both *are dependent on Ted for everything*. These similarities between prison and

domesticity give rise to *disgust*, emphasizing how these two things are not similar in a pleasing way. Rather, the reveal of this similarity causes *unsettling feelings of loathing*. For imprisoned people to be reduced to a child-like status has been discussed as a pain of imprisonment (Sykes 1958). In this excerpt, *children* also receive the status of *inmates*. The result is a comingling, where one uncannily doubles the other. While Ted views inmates as “a nightmarishly large brood of sullen, dangerous and demanding children” (Conover 2011:234), this passage also unveils his actual children as dependent, needy, and locked up—a child is like an inmate is like a child is like an inmate. This haunting merger of the penal and parental realms recurs in the narrative. To add another example, when Ted’s son “announced that he was going to wake up his sister” (Conover 2011:244), and refuses to take no for an answer, this also actualizes the haunting effects of prison on family life:

Something in me sort of snapped. All day long I was disrespected by criminals; I felt that home should be different. I ran up the stairs and picked him up by his pyjama tops outside her door.

"When I say no, you will listen!" I whispered angrily, giving him a spank, surprising myself.

I had never done that before, and it surprised him, too. He burst into tears. This woke his sister. I was furious, and I ordered her go back to sleep. She didn't obey, either. The house filled with sobs.

"Into your room," I ordered my son, and carried him bodily when he "refused to comply".

Conover 2011:244

Home *should be different*, but in this case, *it is not*. Much like the classic haunted house, prison has corrupted domesticity (cf. Janicker 2015). The difference, however, is that while haunted space is haunted *within itself*, prison clearly reaches beyond its own walls to haunt. Ted becomes haunted, and prison itself is the ghost. As a result of this slippage between realms, Ted feels disrespected by all of his charges, whether children or imprisoned people. This uncanny blurring of boundaries causes Ted to *snap*, revealing aspects of himself that he finds *surprising* and unfamiliar to who he is as a father—yet familiar to him as parts of who he is as a prison guard. Home thus becomes unfamiliarized by all too familiar visions of prison. This haunting is a constant through Ted’s narrative, and he summarizes it by noting how prison has an atmosphere that gets “into your

skin, or under it”, which makes it a place where if “you [stay] too long, some of it probably [seeps] into your soul” (Conover 2011:243):

All I knew then was that even though my body was two thousand miles away, my mind was still trapped in Sing Sing.
Conover 2011:115

The notion of a lingering, haunting prison is mirrored in all of the explored texts. For Sister Helen, even a brief visit to prison necessitates attempting to *wash the place off her* once she gets home. Both Ted and Sister Helen thus emphasize the physicality of the feelings elicited by prison. The atmosphere seeps through them, and seemingly sticks to the skin:

I have never been in such a strange place in my life. When I get home, I promise myself, I'm going to take a bath to wash the place off me.
Prejean 2013:31

Sister Helen has *never been to such a strange place in her life*, and the encounter leaves her feeling dirty. Unfortunately for her, it must be brought home in order to be washed off. As this chapter will return to, her narrative then goes on to conflate images of home and prison throughout the story. This *strange place* thus does not stay in place.

Similar to how prison blurs the lines between penalty and domesticity, it also blurs the lines between imprisonment and death. Previous studies have discussed imprisonment as civil, or living, death (e.g. Smith, P. 2008; Smith, C. 2009). In *Dead Man Walking*, the idea of prison as a form of death is clearly exemplified by its proximities and similarities to physical death. This scene takes place when one brother has been executed, and the other is set to be returned to prison after the funeral:

Eddie is not allowed to go to the graveyard. The guards are about to lead him to the vehicle that will take him back to Angola. Family members line up to kiss him good-bye near the door where the hearse is waiting. Two farewells are happening here—Pat's and Eddie's. I know that most of these family members will never see Eddie again. Two brothers in two vehicles are now taking leave of each other: one going into the ground and one going into Angola for the rest of his life.
Prejean 2013:99

Here, civil and actual death are equated. The service is haunted by the fact that both brothers are, in some sense, dying. Temporally, both brothers are *severed from the world*. Spatially, they are going into different boxes. While

Pat's death is physical, Eddie's is a civil, living death, *going into prison for the rest of his life*. The narrative focus on Eddie's eerie proximity to the hearse underscores this, adding a sense of interchangeability to death and imprisonment. The effect of these different deaths on these men's family is the same: *no one will see them again*. Here, prison and tombs are equated as both become symbols that emphasize how these brothers are severed from the world of the living (cf. Bronfen 1992). As a result, death and imprisonment come across as uncanny doubles. *Going into the ground* and *going into prison* are essentially the same; either way, these men are dead to the world. Here, visions of prison effectively haunt the funeral service by the narrative's commingling of social and physical death.

SHIFTING DOUBLES

While the outside world can be haunted by prison, prison also shifts the shapes and meanings of things inside it. In these cases, reminders of the outside world take on uncanny properties since they turn up where they should not be, as denotations of safety in a threatening place. As a result, things like prison chapels become corrupted, uncanny doubles of the churches of the outside world. Here, uncanniness springs from seeing signs of the self, or proper society, *within* the **other**. Jeffrey exemplifies this uncanny doubling when he describes an interaction with the prison Chaplain:

When the hour is up—everything seems to have an allocated time—he blesses me, and tells me that he hopes to see me back in church on Sunday.

As it's the biggest cell in the prison, he most certainly will.

[A guard] is waiting at the chapel door—sorry, barred gate—to escort me back to my cell.

Archer 2002:101

Rather than an image of a chapel within prison, this paints a picture of a prison cell masquerading as a chapel. This gives prison a shapeshifting quality, where the idea of a safe haven has been broached and corrupted. Church services in prison are thus *part of prison*, not a break from imprisonment. Instead of a different kind of space, the chapel is just *the biggest cell*.

Prison can also be seen masquerading as a home in many of the explored novels. Where Ted encountered prison in his home life, Sister Helen sees a twisted mimicry of home life in prison:

As I approach the visitor door I see that the guard stationed to watch Pat has moved down closer to TV to catch the critical play. Pat is inside his cell. A moment, a silence, the snap of the ball, and the two men cheer. They could be two friends in somebody's den on a Saturday afternoon. But then the guard moves back to the end of the tier and assumes his position.

Prejean 2013:75

In cases like these, similarities to the outside world highlight a *wrongness* in prison space. These would be scenes of domesticity, if not for their setting in prison. Zooming in on domestic details provides an image of familiar, domestic life, but zooming out to include the prison context corrupts these images of familiarity. As such, prison becomes haunted by visions of domesticity. Sister Helen offers another example of this:

Maybe it's the unreality of the place, the sun shining so bright and all of [Robert's mother's] boys sitting around, teasing each other, appreciating each other—except that Robert will soon be dead, this could be a pleasant family visit.

Prejean 2013:200

Again, Sister Helen returns to the *strangeness* and *unreality* of prison. Here, this unreality unfamiliarizes the otherwise pleasant view of a family outing. When Robert's family visits him on death row, the view of a *pleasant family visit* is out of place in this setting. As such, the family visit does not offer any contrast to imprisonment. Instead, it emphasizes the wrongness of prison space and its functioning as a "waiting place for death" (Prejean 2013:27). Another example of how domestic 'doings' become undone and corrupted when they take place in prison is offered in *Prison Diary*, where Jeffrey notes the new meaning of his breakfast:

I settle down to enjoy a bowl of cornflakes swimming in fresh milk. This is the meal I would normally have in my kitchen at home, an hour before going to the gym. I'm used to a disciplined, well-ordered life, but it's no longer self-discipline because someone else is giving the orders.

Archer 2002:77

The same meal and process take on a distinctively different meaning now that it takes place in an *unhome*. The familiar habit of a disciplined life becomes something else, something unfamiliar, now that it happens in prison. This unsettling of the familiar can work both ways. It can unsettle ideas of domesticity as well as ideas of punishment. Seeing the (collective or individual) self in the **other**, and the **other** in the self, can destabilize either

(or both). As a result, the idea of imprisonment as a way of keeping the **other** at bay, and who the **other** even is, becomes unstable. Several of the novels exemplify this on a more interpersonal level. For instance, Piper notes how she does not *look the part of a convict*:

In the worldview of these burly, clean-cut young [guards], I was clearly not supposed to be resident in this fortress. I probably looked too much like their sister, their neighbor, or their wife.
Kerman 2013:322

Looking to much like an ordinary, proper member of society belonging to the world outside of prison, Piper unsettles the idea of prison as successful abjection of the unwanted **other**. If the **other** looks like the self, the boundaries that this abjection requires become impossible to maintain. Piper, by looking like the sister, neighbour, or wife of any of the guards (as representatives of normalcy), destabilizes the view of *who and what a prisoner should look like*. Moreover, and perhaps more eerily, it also destabilizes the view of what 'our' sisters, neighbours, or wives might be capable of. This view of domesticity in prison thus unfamiliarizes both the domestic and penal spheres. A similar experience is echoed in Jeffrey's narrative, where he describes one of the other imprisoned men:

If you were to come across Paul at your local, you would assume he was a middle-class successful businessman (he's in jail for credit-card fraud). He's intelligent, articulate and charming. In fact he doesn't look any different to the rest of us, but then why should he?
Archer 2002:140

Here, Jeffrey aligns both himself and Paul with *us*, that is, clean and proper society outside of prison. Excerpts such as these highlight the precariousness of concepts like the **other**. In looking *no different from the rest of us*, Piper and Paul underscore the fact that the **other** can look like anyone, which makes the **other** into an uncanny double of the self. This aligns the **other** as something frightening *out there* with the doppelgänger as something frightening *in here*, that could replace any one of us. This complicates attempts at solidifying a border between self and **other** through imprisonment, since the self can be an **other** in disguise, and the **other** can look like a self. This shifting duplicity is evident in the instability of the border between punisher and punishee, as well. As Jim puts it:

While it is true this prison housed violent men, many of whom had killed during the commission of their crimes, they were still human beings - a fact that seemed to be forgotten once incarcerated at Alcatraz. Also a fact: not all of the violent and vicious men found at Alcatraz wore numbers. Some wore uniforms and were protected by laws, society, and the wall of secrecy that surrounded that grim prison. Quillen 2015:133

Here, Jim's narrative highlights two important things. Firstly, the transformation of a still-human self into an **other** by means of imprisonment involves unseeing and *forgetting their humanity*. In other words, imprisonment entails making these former-humans unfamiliar *as human*, and instead familiarizing them as **others**. As such, they become repressed parts of the collective self (cf. Fiddler 2007). Secondly, this excerpt emphasizes how the boundaries between the punished **other** and the punishing self are unstable: not all violent men in prison are imprisoned **others**—some belong to *the clean and proper side of society*. Swapping these men's uniforms would swap the *meaning and identity* of their violence. Similar examples of the self and **other** as uncanny doubles are prevalent in Jack's story:

If society punishes its members by death and imprisonment, why is anyone surprised when a member of society punishes his enemies with "death and imprisonment"?
Abbott 1991:127

Stories like these emphasize how violent acts are given meaning by the bodies that enact them. Violence perpetrated by imprisoned people is viewed as something **other** than violence perpetrated by guards—uniforms and their symbolic separation of men and monsters become the only thing keeping the meaning of violence in place. This emphasizes how the **other** is a relationship to reconsider, rather than a reality to be dealt with (Halberstam 1995). Another example highlighting the **other's** refusal to stay in place appears when Sister Helen discusses the death penalty with a man on death row:

[Robert Willie] says, "I'm gonna be honest with you, ma'am, I believe in the death penalty in some instances, like for people who rape and torture little children. Messin' over adults is one thing, but little innocent kids? I'd pull the switch on them myself."

I have heard that prisoners are hardest on child molesters. I guess everybody's got a code of evil, a line beyond which they consider redemption impossible. But the irony jolts me. Here's a man

condemned to death by the state and here he is defending the death penalty—not for himself, of course, only for truly heinous killers.
Prejean 2013:147-8

Here, much like the narrators explored in Chapter 5, Robert attempts to move away from otherness by cementing the existence of another **other**. Rather than dismantle the idea of himself as an abject **other** by arguing in favour of humanity and against the death penalty, he argues that other people *deserve it*, whereas *he does not*. The **other** is *always someone else*. This provides a haunting mirror for both the narrator and the narratee, since it emphasizes the violence of the othering practices that underpin notions of normalcy: the one who agrees with our punishing practices is the monster we sought to punish. What does that say about us?

HAUNTING VIOLENCE

Prison does not only haunt through uncanny doubles of bodies or spaces. Another aspect of imprisonment as a form of haunting has to do with its slow, creeping, or lingering violence. Piper notes that prison “is so much about the people who are missing from your life and who fill your imagination” (Kerman 2013:122), emphasizing how the prolonged violence of imprisonment conjures up ghosts both for those imprisoned and for those outside, who lack someone. However, not all ghosts are of things that are missed or lacking—many are more malevolent, and haunt like a guilty conscience. For Piper, this leads to uncanny realizations that something violent and unsettling was present within herself all along:

I finally understood the consequences of my own actions. I had helped these terrible things happen.

What made me finally recognize the indifferent cruelty of my own past wasn't the constraints put on me by the U.S. government, nor the debt I had amassed for legal fees, nor the fact that I could not be with the man I loved. It was sitting and talking and working with and knowing the people who suffered because of what people like me had done. None of these women rebuked me—most of them had been intimately involved in the drug business themselves. Yet for the first time I really understood how my choices made me complicit in their suffering. I was the accomplice of their addiction.

Kerman 2013:204-5

Here, Piper finds herself haunted by her own past actions. Moreover, her insights are uncanny since they are not about something *new*, but something that *was there all along* (cf. Trigg 2014). Seeing her own actions

(drug smuggling) as part of a bigger, more violent whole (disenfranchised women's drug dependency), thus unfamiliarizes Piper's old sense of self as someone who *had not been that bad*. Her past actions take on new meanings, weighed down by their *cruel indifference*. In this light, Piper sees the **other** within herself. Moreover, by her familiarity with other imprisoned women, *who had been intimately involved with the drug business*, the idea of these women as **others** (as we saw examples of in Chapter 5) dissolves, as well.

Cruel indifference as an aspect of how prison is a haunting, and haunted, space surfaces on institutional levels as well. One aspect of this is how the question of slow, lingering state violence often surfaces through motifs of haunting in the explored novels. For example, Sister Helen notes how the ghost of enslavement lingers on the vegetable fields in Angola, which in turn gives this prison a haunting air:

I see a column of inmates, most of them black, marching out to soybean and vegetable fields, their hoes over their shoulders. Behind and in front of the marching men, guards on horseback with rifles watch their charges. In antebellum days three cotton plantations occupied these 18,000 acres, worked by African slaves from Angola. The name Angola stuck. Since its beginnings in 1901, abuse, corruption, rage, and reform have studded its history.
Prejean 2013:24

Sister Helen's observation of prison could just as easily be a historical account of enslavement. This passage shows how prolonged, sustained violence haunts the space—the prison is haunted by the plantation. This comes across in several ways; visually, narratively, and linguistically. First, the visuals of this scene invoke the past within the present. The vegetable fields at Angola conjure images of the enslavement that previously took place in that same space. Secondly, the unclear narration adds to the temporal ambiguity of the scene; it is uncertain from this excerpt whether Sister Helen is picturing the past or looking at the present. Context eventually makes it clear, however, that this is a present image rather than a past imaginary. The events we are confronted with gives the impression that enslavement *lingers* here, as the text shows how—in the present, just like in the past—*black men are marched out to soybean and vegetable fields*, overseen by *armed guards on horseback*. Angola is enmeshed in the historically repetitive work of guards managing their prisoners. This work predates the prison built there, but nonetheless continues within it. As such, this image has a way of stretching back through time. Imprisonment thus becomes a

repetition of enslavement, different only in name. This leads to the final, linguistic expression of haunting in this excerpt: euphemistic language. *Dead Man Walking* shows how *the same* dehumanizing actions are repeated over time, changing only in label. In light of this, dubbing the site ‘prison’ rather than ‘slave plantation’ comes across as a euphemistic re-write, rather than socio-political progress. Adding insult to injury, or emphasis to euphemism, Angola not only occupies a space that is historically associated with enslavement, but the prison *kept the name*, which further invokes the lingering, present-day effects of the past. As such, this example offers visual, narrative and linguistic expressions of social, institutional haunting. The contemporary violence of this space is possessed by the spectres of past violence carried out in the same place, under the same name.

Additionally, this repetition of violence against racialized lower classes through imprisonment stretches both backwards and forwards through time. This is also exemplified through motifs of haunting in the explored novels, but in the shape of uncertain futures. In such cases, prison haunts visions of the future. Prison thus evidences how institutions are haunted by the ghosts of those “alive and dead, and even not yet born” who are tied to them (Royle 2003:56). In other words, prison’s ongoing repetition of violence, *its insatiability* (Creed 1993), has no end in sight. An interesting example of this future-oriented haunting can be observed in a discussion between the narrator and an imprisoned man in *Nenjack*:

‘You don’t want to see this place improve?’

‘No. The money should all be put back into the poor neighbourhoods, back into education for children, to change the things that send people here.’ He held out the articles he had loaned me.

‘You read these, right?’

I nodded.

‘Then tell me, Conover, if I understand correctly. It says here in this article that the government is planning right now for the new prisons they’re going to need in ten or twelve years. I got that right?’

Again, I nodded.

‘That’s wrong.’

‘What’s wrong about planning ahead?’

‘Because, dig this. Anyone planning a prison they’re not going to build for ten or fifteen years is planning for a child, planning prison for somebody who’s a child right now. So you see? They’ve already given up on that child! They already expect that child to fail.’

Conover 2011:233

In this exchange, the future haunts the present. Planning an expansion of prison systems becomes synonymous with *planning for a child*. Planning for a child is to plan for the inevitability of future **others** and continued institutionalized violence. Violence against those “not yet born” thus effectively haunts prison space (cf. Royle 2003:56), while the idea of a need for more imprisonment haunts societal futures. *Dead Man Walking* also exhibits future haunting. For example, Pat gives Sister Helen his bible before he is set to be executed—in which he has inscribed his own, impending death date (Prejean 2013). Here, both Sister Helen and Pat are haunted by Pat’s future death. Such stories showcase how both *past and future violence* coalesce in prison, giving it a haunting atmosphere.

Alexander adds another example of how state violence gives prison an unsettling air, by noting how this violence has turned imprisoned people into ghostly manifestations rather than men:

The melancholy figures line the doors as I walk up and down the hall. The blanched faces peer wistfully through the bars, or lean dejectedly against the wall, a vacant stare in the dim eyes. Each calls to mind the stories of misery and distress, the scenes of brutality and torture I witness in the prison house. Like ghastly nightmares, the shadows pass before me.

Berkman 2015:266

These men are described as ghosts or *ghastly nightmares*, as *shadows*—not as people. They are *haunting reminders* of *stories of misery, distress, brutality, and torture*. As such, they do not exist within this story as their own people, but as symbols, as stand-ins for their haunting (hi)stories. They are mere shadows of state violence.

To add another example of haunting, violent prisonness, and how it reaches outside prison walls, Sister Helen is haunted by it in the shape of a letter. This letter shows how prison’s violence can both kill subjects and then summon their subsequent ghosts. The letter arrives after quite some time has passed since Pat’s execution:

One day I receive two letters. One is from Patrick Sonnier. It’s an Easter card, the kind the prison chaplains give to inmates. It must have been in limbo for a while on some chaplain’s desk. On the front of the card is a bouquet of flowers and inside is a quote from the Gospel of St. John about eternal life. Pat had written: “I can’t begin to express how much your friendship means to me. But I thank the good Lord above for sending you into my life.”

Prejean 2013:109

Here, prison holds uncanny control over life and death. Dead people do not write letters, but as a result of prison's slow-paced control of communications, Pat effectively speaks from beyond the grave. By stretching Pat's voice into the afterlife by means of its violence against both his person and his external communications, prison summons his ghost. Prison's violence thus lingers and reaches, haunting Sister Helen in her home.

DREAMS, DEATH, AND FREEDOM

The uncanny doublings and unsettlings of life and death in imprisonment take many forms in the novels this study analyses. Adding another aspect to the shapes and meanings of death in prison, the narratives explored in this study frequently show how death and freedom double one another. Here, a key facet of prisonness is the desire to escape it—in terms of time as well as space. While imprisonment is often likened to death in different ways (cf. Smith, C. 2009), the usual connotation is to a different kind of death than the one equated with freedom. Where imprisonment is being dead to the world, dying in prison can become a way of reclaiming lost autonomy, and escaping into death.

In *In the Belly of the Beast*, Jack expresses this as follows: “I would be almost ready to kill myself. I wanted to be free so badly” (Abbott 1991:84). While this desire is one of escaping prison space, it is also a desire to escape from prison time. Across the explored texts, this desired escape can be achieved in various ways—including death. The desire to escape is thus more intense than the desire to stay alive. This view of death and escape as coextensive is present in several of the narratives. In *Dead Man Walking*, a river next to the prison has become a symbol of both death and escape:

It is a rainy, blustery day. I see a dark line of trees on the edge of the horizon. Behind the trees is the Mississippi. The river figures prominently in escape stories told around here. Most escaping prisoners meet one of two fates: the bloodhounds sniff them out in the swamps surrounding the prison, or they drown in the river.

Prejean 2013:72

The river, being a focal point of *many failed escape stories*, becomes a bridge between life and death. Like a version of the River Styx, it is a deadly body of water that divides prison as a land of civil death from the rest of society as the world of the living (cf. Smith, C. 2009). Imprisoned people risk

drowning in it in their attempts to reach the other side, yet this outcome too entails a form of release from imprisonment.

Given that a liminal state of death-as-life or life-as-death is already part of the prison experience, viewing the death of the body as analogous to the mind's release highlights how the point is simply to no longer be imprisoned. Hence, death and release become uncanny doubles; they are treated much the same in terms of how they put an end to prison time across several of the novels in this study. For Alexander in *The Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*, imprisonment is a draining, impossible experience that can only be escaped in one of two ways:

The authorities are determined that I should remain in the prison, confident that it will prove my tomb. Realizing this fires my defiance, and all the stubborn resistance of my being. There is no hope of surviving my term. [...] I still have over nine years to serve. But existing is becoming increasingly more unbearable; long confinement and the solitary have drained my vitality. To endure the nine years is almost a physical impossibility. I must therefore concentrate all my energy and efforts upon escape.

Berkman 2015:355

In this case, prison becomes synonymous with a tomb. Alexander is expected, and seems to expect himself, to *die while imprisoned*. Moreover, this is not the expectation of some sudden death. Rather, imprisonment *slowly drains* Alexander of his vitality to the point that nine more years is a *physical impossibility*—he simply cannot exist in prison for nine more years. As such, planning to escape becomes a form of resistance, and the only hope for an identity and existence as a physical, *living* being. However, the unbearable impossibility of prolonged existence within prison space aligns death and freedom in the sense that either will allow Alexander to avoid his remaining nine-year sentence. Eventually, this escape attempt proves to be a failure. As does a later attempt, which comes to an end that further mingles death and escape through Alexander's accomplice, Tom. Suddenly, when the time for the planned escape is drawing near, Tom stops answering Alexander's attempts at communication:

Again and again I knock on the wall, calling for a reply to my last note. Tom remains silent. Occasionally a heavy groan issues from his cell, but my repeated signals remain unanswered. In alarm I stay awake all night, in the hope of inducing a guard to investigate the cause of the groaning. But my attempts to speak to the officers are ignored. The next morning

I behold Tom carried on a stretcher from his cell, and learn with horror that he had bled to death during the night.

The peculiar death of my friend preys on my mind. Was it suicide or accident? Tom had been weakened by long confinement; in some manner he may have ruptured a blood vessel, dying for lack of medical aid. It is hardly probable that he would commit suicide on the eve of our attempt.

Berkman 2015:397-8

We later learn that Tom was suffering from paranoid delusions, and that “it may be that in a sudden fit of despondency, Tom had ended his life” (Berkman 2015:398). As a result, Alexander feels that “the last hope of escape has departed” along with Tom (Berkman 2015:399). Hope itself has escaped along with the death of his friend. Tom’s escape-in-death thus renders Alexander “doomed to perish” in prison (Berkman 2015:399). No longer hoping to escape while living, Alexander instead turns to thoughts of dying:

Bereft of the hope of freedom, I grow indifferent to life. The monotony of the narrow cell daily becomes more loathsome. My whole being longs for rest. Rest, no more to awaken. The world will not miss me.

Berkman 2015:399

Here, death slowly moves from being part of prison’s punishments to being a way out of said punishments. However, “thoughts of the enemy’s triumph fans the embers of life” (Berkman 2015:400), and Alexander eventually decides against death qua freedom.

In *Inside Alcatraz*, the interplay of death and freedom is exemplified as well, by how Jim discusses ways to escape. For Jim, escape attempts are “one form of suicide” (Quillen 2015:178). Escape and death often become interchangeable in this narrative:

The longer the sentence and the more the degradation, the more the feeling Why do I continue to exist? became part of one’s everyday thought.

The only solution to the dilemma was escape, and this always was accompanied by the thought of death.

Quillen 2015:187

Here, Jim’s thoughts of *why he continues to exist* in prison are dealt with through the thought of escaping. However, thoughts of escape are always linked *to the thought of death*. Hereby, dying and escaping become

theoretically interesting as a set of temporal twins. As each other's doubles, they perform the same key function; putting an end to prison time.

This interchangeability is present in all of Jim's accounts of escape attempts (his own as well as others'). Throughout *Inside Alcatraz*, escape attempts are envisioned as an enterprise with two outcomes—men were “predestined to escape or die in the attempt” (Quillen 2015:193). Either way, they would be out of prison's (spatial and temporal) grasp. In a more detailed description, Jim recounts an escape attempt by other imprisoned men:

They were caught in the corridor and their only escape now was not to the “free world”, but in death. They gave up any hope of making it out of the corridor.
Quillen 2015:252

While failing to escape to the *free world*, these men instead escape *into death*. Unable to *make it out of* prison, death becomes *their only escape*. Escaping is thus not only about reaching the *free world*; but predominantly about leaving prison. Escape is not about achievement, but about avoidance. Moreover, *escaping in death* grants some form of control over one's own fate—something that imprisonment sorely lacks. In this sense, death will suffice as both a means of escape and a means of control (and resistance to being controlled). This is also mirrored in *The Great Escape*, where several imprisoned men (try to) choose death over their imprisonment:

There was another one who cut his wrists on two occasions with a razor blade to finish it all, but there is no privacy in prison camp and he was seen bleeding and it was stopped. The Germans took him away to sick quarters, but he got out of his bed one night and climbed up on the roof where a guard spotted him, challenged him and, as he ran across the roof, caught him with a burst of machine-gun fire.

Another one was to be taken away by train for treatment, but at Sagan Station, as the train came in, he wrenched himself away from the guards and jumped onto the tracks right in front of the engine which had no time to pull up. Over in the east compound, a man could suddenly stand it no longer, jumped over the warning wire, and ran for the fence. He was tearing his hands to pieces on the barbed wire when the machine guns put him out of his anguish forever.
Brickhill 2012:127-8

This passage is ambiguous when it comes to suicide- and escape attempts. The first of these three prisoners is shot by a guard, but only after *two suicide attempts have failed*. While this death might read as the guard putting an end

to a final escape attempt, the story makes it clear that this was a case of suicide-by-guard. Here, the prisoner uses *escape from prison* (as far as the guard knows) as a means to bring *escape in death*. As a result, death and escape become further conflated. The third prisoner is similarly shot dead during what might be an outright escape attempt, but is more likely a form of assisted suicide—given his *sudden despair* and knowledge that *crossing the warning wire will guarantee gunfire*. Using the motions of an escape attempt disguises the desire for escape in death, which in turn helps bring that escape about. While it might seem intuitive to consider dying in an escape attempt as a failure, the narratives explored here paint a different picture. Instead of failing to *reach the outside world*, dying is another kind of successful *escape from prison*:

Sometime in the early morning we were startled by a sudden outburst of rifle and shotgun fire in the main cell-house. Hundreds of rounds were fired as rapidly as possible. Each of us instinctively knew that it was over and our friends were dead. The block was suddenly silent and quiet. I believe each of us gave thought at that time to these friends whose dreams of escape had now been fulfilled.

Quillen 2015:264

Knowing that his friends have been shot dead by prison guards during their escape, Jim considers their *dreams of escape as being fulfilled*. Dying thus fulfils the dream of escape. This is not the only way in which dreams, death and escape become coextensive. While “trying to escape” is sometimes framed as a deliberate “form of suicide” (Quillen 2015:178), this is not the only way that dreams of dying become tied to dreams of escaping prison. A link between death, escape, and dreaming while asleep is also established in Jim’s story. This link elucidates the liminality and intermingling of such categories. When an imprisoned man “calmly and deliberately found a way to slash the major arteries in his wrists and elbows” (Quillen 2015:178), he is presented as sleeping, dying, and escaping all at the same time:

He lay down on his bed, covered himself with a blanket, and silently bled to death. He had found his escape through a means that was often present in the minds of most hopelessly incarcerated inmates.

Quillen 2015:178

Dying in bed is presented as a peaceful means of escape, contrasted by an environment marked by violent encounters. Moreover, the slow pace of this death fits in with the slow-paced temporality of the prison as a whole.

Unlike the loud and violent deaths qua escape attempts, this man dies silently, tucked in his bed.

Apart from death qua sleep, sleeping as such is also a frequent form of escape from prison time, albeit while still stuck in prison space. In such stories, sleep and dreams offer a brief respite from the realities of waking life in prison:

For all inmates, the day began with the usual routine: the ringing of the “wake-up bell” and the first count of the day. It also began with the usual cursing and swearing of the inmates who, for a few short hours while asleep, had escaped the routine, boredom, loneliness, and regimentation of the prison through dreams and an imaginary rejoining of the free world, their loved ones, and a normal life. The bell signaled the end of this escape and brought them back to the world of reality—prison.

Quillen 2015:188-9

Sleep and dreams serve as *a few short hours* away from the waking temporality of prison. Having *escaped in dreams*, prisoners are brought back to their *harsh realities* by the wake-up bell. With that, they are brought back to prison life lived in “long hours” (Quillen 2015:189). Chapter 7 will return to these long, dragging hours in its discussion of a prison chronotope. For now, it is enough to note that sleep is yet another way of escaping prison, albeit temporarily. Taken together, sleeping, dreaming, dying, and escaping all become forms of resistance to the punishment-as-incorporation that imprisonment entails. As breaks from prison in terms of both time and space, they are manifestations of the relative power imprisoned people can still have over their own situation within a “hopelessly incarcerated” setting (Quillen 2015:178). Where Chapter 5 discussed resistance in the form of cementing a clean and proper self through othering, this chapter shows how resistance to prison’s threats of devourment can surface in the form of dying on one’s own terms.

Additionally, the difficulty of escaping prison time(spaces) extends to guards, as well. *Dead Man Walking* mentions how it is a “prevalent pattern” for guards to work in prison their whole working lives, and then pass the job on to their sons like a curse— “families working here for two, three, four generations” (Prejean 2013:71). Similarly, *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* offers another example of how prison time impacts guards as well as inmates:

The great majority of the keepers, however, have been employed in the penitentiary from fifteen to twenty-five years; some even for a longer period, like Officer Stewart, who has been a guard for forty years. This element is unspeakably callous and cruel. The prisoners discuss among themselves the ages of the old guards, and speculate on the days allotted them. The death of one of them is hailed with joy: seldom they are discharged; still more seldom do they resign.
Berkman 2015:271

Like those imprisoned, *those who imprison leave by dying more often than by discharge*. Death remains the main way of breaking free from prison, regardless of people's official function within it. This narrative also ties guards' exposure to prison time to their violence. The longer a guard spent working in prison, gradually being engulfed by it, the more violent they become. Comparatively, new recruits are "almost without exception lenient and forbearing"—unless they are drafted from the police (Berkman 2015:271). Over time, however, any new guard is made to participate in prison's inherent violence. Through these enforced enactments of violence, "the poison" of prison "is instilled in the new guard" over time (Berkman 2015:272), only leaving them in death. All in all, these stories show how prison is a place people are dying to leave—figuratively and literally. Death thus becomes an eerie alternative to freedom, and offers a breaking away from prisonness that makes it impossible for prison to linger or return to haunt subjects after this break.

DISCUSSION

This chapter shows how prison is a haunting space, that causes unsettling and outright frightening encounters both with prisonness and with things that ought to—but no longer—contrast it. Building on Janicker's definition of haunted space as apart from the ordinary (2015), this chapter goes on to show how prison is also haunting, seeping into and unfamiliarizing things outside itself.

Previous studies have noted different aspects of how prison is a liminal space that merges freedom and incarceration (e.g. Comfort 2003; Moran 2013), and this chapter's findings adds to this body of research by emphasizing how prison is not only liminal but can actively haunt both spaces and people linked to it. In addition to blurring freedom and incarceration, this chapter shows how prison also causes haunting mergers of imprisonment and freedom on the one hand, as well as death on the other. As such, prison is an ambiguous timespace when it comes to its

treatment of death. Death can be both part of prisonness, and a way to escape it. While prison haunts the outside world by its conflation of social death through life in prison and physical death (cf. Smith, C. 2009), death also comes across as a way to leave prison without it being able to subsequently haunt the subject in question. The chapter thus shows how the meanings of death in imprisonment are ambiguous and shifting, embodying both prison's power and the possibility to resist said power. In light of prison's lingering, haunting properties, it is perhaps unsurprising that the explored novels posit death as one of few possible ways to break free from it permanently. In short, the novels analysed in this chapter show how one form of death is avoided by means of another.

This chapter also shows how prison subverts and destabilizes notions of normalcy and deviance; past, present, and future; as well as safety and danger. Here, this chapter has explored how prison is haunted by past and future cruelties such as enslavement and planned prison expansions (cf. Janicker 2015), however, it has mainly focused on how prison also haunts, lingering like a spectre or a curse. As a haunting institution, prison is impossible to leave behind. This is exemplified by how homes and symbols of domesticity are haunted and corrupted by imprisonment. Both people and objects take on haunting properties when their *familiarity as safe* is undone by their *familiarity as parts of prison*. Visions of prison in family homes unfamiliarize domestic life, while visions of home in prison can unfamiliarize both the supposed safeties of domestic life and the notion of punishable **others**.

These haunting qualities are in line with previous prison scholarship, noting how “the prison wall is in fact more porous than might at first be assumed” (Moran 2013:348). By showing how prison is not only haunted but also haunts, this chapter has explored this porousness as a form of seepage, where prison does not stay in place. Instead, it is uncanny and shifting.

This leads to how the present chapter's findings might add to the discussion about how prison's porousness has been used to critique the idea that prison is a space apart from the ordinary—or a total institution. In previous research, the notion of prison as a total institution has been critiqued because of these institutions' porousness; they are rarely as cut off from the rest of society as they might seem (e.g. Farrington 1992; Moran 2012; 2013). For instance, Farrington states that the idea of total institutions is “fairly inaccurate as a portrayal of the structure and

functioning” of prison, since it “is not as completely or effectively ‘cut off from wider society’ as Goffman’s description might lead us to believe” (1992:6). However, this chapter’s findings suggest that prison’s haunting, lingering uncanniness is bound up in an overall uncanniness of total institutions. When prison doubles other institutions such as the family home, it seeps through the boundaries meant to keep it in place—meant to keep it apart (cf. Goffman 1961; Janicker 2015). As such, while it is an abject, immersive and dissolving space apart from the ordinary, it is leaking. If it was not *both* a seeping, haunting space *and* a different or apart one, it would not cause such uncanny, destabilizing encounters.

Prison’s capacity to create uncanny doubles and haunting unsettlings, in turn, often hinges on similarities in actions or routines—which is in line with the total institutions-thesis. As such, total institutions can be regarded as fundamentally uncanny, since the total institutions-thesis presupposes that seemingly separate spaces have fundamental, interchangeable similarities (e.g. in the form of routines). As spaces apart, they are well-defined units. As interchangeable or eerily reminiscent units, they are uncanny, since their doubling of- and seepage into one another calls the nature of seemingly separate spaces into question. Rather than staying apart, they blend.

This uncanniness is exemplified, albeit not articulated as such, by how Moran lists several different fields that have been studied as total institutions, such as “homes for the elderly [...], psychiatric units [...], the home [...], the mass media [...], the military and the police [...] and sport” (Moran 2014:36). The fact that the total institutions-thesis has been utilized to study such a wide range of spaces is generally used to critique it. However, instead, its broad application could speak to its inherent uncanniness: it emphasizes how these spaces can be eerily similar, seeping, and even coextensive, despite their differences. This sheds an uncomfortable light on their supposed differences, since part of how total institutions become uncanny is through their repetition of *the same thing all over again* in spaces that *should* be different and apart from one another *but are not* (cf. Trigg 2014:81). These similarities thus become especially unsettling across spaces that connote different feelings and values, such as prison and domesticity.

Another aspect of prison as a haunting, and also insatiable, space has to do with the sense of eternity that its haunting properties imply. As this chapter shows, prison embodies haunting repetitions throughout both

personal and socio-political histories, reaching into the past as well as the future. As such, the stories explored here exemplify aspects of Wacquant's assertion that "prison presents itself as an indispensable and immutable organisation, operating since times immemorial" (2001:402-3). As the stories analysed in this chapter show, part of this seeming endlessness has to do with prison's lingering, and far-reaching, violence. This haunting property, in turn, is also in line with how prison comes across as its own point of reference in the analysed novels, perpetuating itself across time and space through a force of its own (cf. Creed 1993).

The next chapter will look more closely at prison's temporalities, and how they both construct and are constructed by prison space. How is a timespace that seems to have operated "since time immemorial" narrativized (Wacquant 2001:403)? To analyse this, the next chapter will explore how prison autobiographies narrativize prison space as an embodiment of time-control as well as an embodiment of time itself. Exploring these traits, in turn, leads to the articulation of a prison chronotope.

CHAPTER 7

A PRISON CHRONOTOPE

To walk ten miles in an enclosed space of ten feet is not really movement.

There are not ten miles of space, only time.

Abbott 1991:49

Prison space is largely defined by its temporalities, and because of this it has been defined as a timespace. Studies have pointed out that viewing prison as a timespace is “a useful conceptual tool for advancing understanding of what incarceration is”, and that this understanding cannot “adequately be achieved by focusing either on time, or on space, in isolation, or even, perhaps, in combination” (Moran 2012:313). This chapter follows this assertion, and explores how prison embodies, enforces, and enables certain spatiotemporal experiences. How does one ‘do time’ in a haunting, devouring prison, and how does this prison itself ‘do’ time?

As the previous chapter showed, prison time as something to escape is one of the key features of prison. Additionally, the (personal and socio-political) past and future exerting a haunting influence on the present is another of prison’s spatiotemporal features. Along with waiting, repetition, and uncertainty, these features can be used as a starting point for the formulation of a prison chronotope. Chronotopes reveal how atmospheres stem from the particular confluences of time and space in narratives. In short, chronotopes capture “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (Bakhtin 1981:84). Therefore, a prison chronotope can be a useful critical device for unpacking how the narrativization of prison functions in Western societies, and how we might better understand “what incarceration is” through them (cf. Moran 2013:313).

Experiences of time have given rise to a great many metaphorical turns of phrase; for instance, we are killing, doing, and wasting it (Corfield 2007:xv). As Chapter 6 showed, we might also try to escape it in dreams or even in death. Studies have pointed out how the phrasing of time intersects with social hopes and fears. This phrasing highlights emotional aspects of how time is experienced and made sense of:

... with many colloquial variations to invoke a subjective awareness of temporal unfolding, that intersects with human hopes and fears. So it is possible to talk of 'gaining time' or 'making time'. Or 'doing time' or 'wasting time'. Or even, on the part of bored people idling restlessly with nothing to do, 'killing time', although no one so far has managed to strike a fatal blow.

Corfield 2007:xv

The familiar phrase 'doing time' is often applied to prison. Moreover, while prison is a space for 'killing time', it is also a space for being killed by it—either literally or figuratively (e.g. by being 'bored to death'). This relates to prison studies that have shown how prison enforces timelessness, repetition, and boredom (cf. Moran 2016; Steinmetz, Schaefer & Green 2017). Prison's repetitive, boring aspects have also been discussed in studies of eighteenth-century prison fiction, where prison is narrativized as a timespace that lacks "order or progress beyond the barren fact of empty repetition" (Powell 2015:7). As this chapter will show, this empty repetition remains, stretching into later prison novels as well.

Prison embodies time as punishment, through converting crimes into seemingly arbitrary units of time that prison then enforces spatially (cf. Wacquant 2001:403). As such, prison is a manifestation of time as a form of power. As has been pointed out, time constitutes "an integral dimension of power in relationships" where some control time and others do not—both "their own and that of others" (Gluckmann 1998:243). Given its particular type of punishment, prison controls the time of those imprisoned, both in terms of how long they stay there and in terms of how they must occupy their time while incarcerated. Time is thus an integral part of what prison space is and does, making it decidedly temporal.

This chapter will explore prison's coextension of time and space in its narrativization, by formulating a prison chronotope. The formulation of a prison chronotope fits neatly into the ongoing discussion of "what time might mean in the carceral context" (Moran 2012:305). In the interest of defining a prison chronotope, this study will draw on certain traits

Bakhtin used to articulate other chronotopes, such as the castle, which is oriented towards the past, and the provincial town that exhibits slowness and endless repetitions (Bakhtin 2014:246-7). How these pre-existing chronotopes fit into the narrativization of prison—and which new traits are particular to the prison chronotope—will be articulated as this chapter progresses.

LABYRINTHINE TENDENCIES

One of the ways in which prison is depicted as a disorienting timespace in the novels explored here has to do with its unnavigable, repetitive twists and turns. This shows how the prison chronotope is heavy on confusion. Moreover, this uncertainty, coupled with repetitiveness, actualizes questions of endlessness. This comes across in the novels when they express doubts about the limits of prison, and how long it will take to reach the end of the time spent there. Here, the prison chronotope resonates with Bakhtin's chronotope of the provincial town (Bakhtin 2014:247), which is characterized by endless, repetitive 'doings' and a sense of stagnation. These spaces lack any sense of a trajectory that is going somewhere, or leading towards something. Like the small town's repetitive 'doings', the labyrinthine prison loops back on itself. In addition, the prison chronotope also emphasizes the uncertainties that prison's repetitiveness give rise to. This leads to uncertainty with regards to how to navigate space, time, or rules in prison. These spatiotemporal uncertainties can unsettle concepts like day or night, up or down, and sameness or difference. In short, prison's labyrinthine tendencies show how its simultaneous control of time and space makes it difficult to ascertain where, or when, you are.

As studies have pointed out, the “most fantastic imagining of the prison as a space of labyrinthine nightmares is contained in the *Carceri d'Invenzione* series of etchings published by the architectural engraver Giambattista Piranesi in 1750” (Carrabine 2012b:54). Across the stories explored in this study, prison is often narrativized as operating in similarly labyrinthine, nightmarish ways, disorienting anyone who tries to navigate it. Importantly, to be disoriented by prison is to lose track of both time and space. Narrow corridors, the lack of overview, strange rules, and the impossibility of ascertaining the passage of time all add to this. Not knowing who might be dangerous, and where they might lurk, furthers the notion of a labyrinthine space by invoking the image of the Minotaur.

Prison is often narrated in ways that invoke the image of a labyrinth in the novels this study explores, both in terms of the building as a timespace and in terms of the logics that govern it. One of the most explicit examples of both the prison timespace and its rules being labyrinthine can be found in *Newjack*, where Ted reveals how maps are forbidden in a space that is impossible to memorize:

The interior of most corridors was painted brick and cinder block. No one could memorize this layout in a day—perhaps not even a week—and yet we weren't allowed to bring our maps inside; they were thought to be a security risk. Still, we didn't need them to wonder what had happened to 6-Building or 3-Building or 4-Building, the gaps in the number sequence, buildings perhaps constructed but then abandoned or renamed.

Conover 2011:66

Ted's story presents narratees with a space where *all the corridors look the same*, making it near *impossible to memorize or comprehend the prison's layout*. Any *memory* of this odd layout is likely to be faulty, which emphasizes the temporal difficulties of navigating a maze. Furthermore, there are *unexplained gaps in the number sequence*, which add even more disorientation to the space—buildings have come and gone over time, but the available information has not been updated to make sense of these additions and absences. Despite this disorientation, no one is allowed to bring a map. Maps, as manifestations of knowledge, logic, and orientation, *are considered a security risk*. As a result of labyrinthine environments as well as (un)explained logics, everyone is kept in the figurative (and sometimes literal) dark.

As for the number sequence of the buildings, this passage shows disorienting aspects of prison in both structure and bureaucracy: these buildings, difficult to navigate without maps, are numbered for clarity—but there are seemingly arbitrary gaps in the sequence. As a result, these numbers create confusion rather than comprehension. Similarly, *Inside Alcatraz* offers a labyrinthine view of both prison space and its logic:

Each of the cellblocks consisted of three tiers, the "flats," as the bottom tiers were called, and the two tiers above. Each of the inner cellblocks (B and C) were approximately 150 feet long and divided at midpoint by a barred, empty area called the "cutoff". [...] The cutoff, as its name implies, separated the two sections of each block. It was a large, barred area that extended from the floor to the ceiling of the building. What its purpose was I have never understood.

The purpose of the layout is *shrouded in mystery*. All it accomplishes is to further divide the space, creating more walls and more confusion. Additionally, both *Nenjack* and *Inside Alcatraz* include maps of their respective prisons in the pages of these stories. While this might serve as an orienting tool, it also emphasizes the confusion in these narratives. The inclusion of a map communicates the *need* for it in order to make sense of the space (and stories about it). However, these maps do not really add more information. Rather, they visualize the confusion that the narrators describe. *The cutoff*, for instance, is not even labelled on the map. It is merely a blocked-out space that receives no comment. Moreover, these maps are snapshots that might not offer much help in shifting places like the one Ted describes, where *buildings come and go* without explanation.

The labyrinthine theme, and the need for maps to make sense of prison space, is also found in *A Prison Diary*, where Jeffrey describes the layout of Belmarsh; a prison that is “all right-angles” and cannot be successfully navigated without blueprints (Archer 2002:157):

Actually if you tried to escape from Belmarsh—and the roof is the furthest anyone has managed—you’d need an architect’s plan; the whole building is a maze. Even if you work here, I imagine it would take several weeks before you could confidently find your way around. Sometimes I wonder how the prison officers find their way out at night.
Archer 2002:156

This passage echoes Ted’s mapless experience in *Nenjack*. How *prison officers find their way out at night* is a mystery, since the space is too confusing to navigate—even in the light of day. Finding your way out in the dark of night seems impossible. This passage emphasizes how prison is vast in its dimensions as well as in its repetitiveness—*the whole building is a maze of repeating, right angles*, making it near impossible to navigate. The resulting image is one of a space that is too confusing for either those punished or those enforcing said punishment to make sense of. Regardless of people’s official label or function, prison remains overpowering and disorienting. Between Ted’s, Jim’s, and Jeffrey’s stories an image of prison as impossible to be on the right side of emerges. With its repeating right angles and illogical sequences, it disorients every subject. This resonates with the observation that prison devours indiscriminately, and operates on an internal logic, as its own point of reference (cf. Creed 1993).

Orange is the New Black provides yet another image of prison as a labyrinthine space. For one thing, when Piper is first indicted for money laundering and drug trafficking she describes it as the “beginning of a long, torturous expedition through the labyrinth of the U.S. criminal justice system” (Kerman 2013:22). Here, navigating the labyrinth is explicitly temporal—it is a *long, torturous* undertaking. For another, once Piper is incarcerated, she encounters another confusing, disorienting, and frightening labyrinth within the prison itself:

One evening the PA system boomed ‘Kerman!’ and I scurried to Mr Butorsky’s office, ‘You’re moving down into B Dorm!’ he barked, ‘Cube Eighteen! Miss Malcolm will be your Bunkie!’ I hadn’t been down into the Dorms [...]. In my imagination they were murky caves populated with seasoned convicts. [...]

I gathered my belongings and nervously advanced down the stairs to B Dorm, aka ‘The Ghetto’, clutching my pillow and laundry bag stuffed with uniforms. I would have to retrieve my pile of books on a second trip. The Dorms turned out to be large, semisubterranean basement rooms that were a maze of beige cubicles, each housing two prisoners, a bunk bed, two metal lockers, and a stepladder.
Kerman 2013:82-3

Piper expects the Dorms to be *murky caves* full of *seasoned convicts*. Once she arrives, she instead finds that these basement rooms are a *maze of identical, repeating cubicles*. Moreover, it is “LOUD down in B Dorm”, (Kerman 2013:84), and Piper worries that she might “lose [her] marbles in the cacophony” (Kerman 2013:84). In this instance, we can see how the atmosphere of echoing, maddening noises emphasizes the labyrinthine nature of prison space. Piper goes on to describe how, when the lights go out, her room becomes filled with the “breathing of forty-seven other people” (Kerman 2013:85). In other words, both the space and people in it are difficult to locate, and potential threats seem to come closer once the lights go out.

Piper also describes the Dorms as a “warren of cubicles” that she has to “slither through” (Kerman 2013:264), both due to their narrow layout and to avoid disturbing others who live there. Taken together with her idea of this space as inhabited by *seasoned convicts*, this gives the space a threatening air, where Piper needs to sneak and slither in order to avoid potentially dangerous confrontation. In cases such as this, we can discern the shadow of a Minotaur in the maze. Articulating prison as labyrinthine thus underscores both its spatiotemporal incomprehensibility and its

potentially looming, hitherto unknown threats. In formulating a prison chronotope, this notion of prison as disorienting, looping, and illogical is important.

REPETITIVE TIME(LESSNESS)

Prison's labyrinthine tendencies are not the only way that it expresses disorienting repetitiveness. Another aspect of how prison is a disorienting timespace has to do with stagnant, fragmented time, and related absences of progress or linearity. While prison both controls and embodies time in different ways across the explored texts, it also seems to (dis)orient time in several directions at once. As a result, there is no sense of progress from *here* to *there* or *now* to *then*. Instead, there are only repetitive routines that stretch out across both individual and historical layers. As such, even though prison measures punishment in units of time 'to be done' (cf. Corfield 2007:xv), it lacks a sense of temporal linearity or progression—there is no sense of 'getting it done'. Instead, prison is a timespace where the past, present, and future merge in a disoriented, perpetually repeating *now*.

This repetitive timelessness is a feature of the prison chronotope that recurs in all of the novels this study explores. They all narrativize prison as a time capsule of sorts, slow enough to be stagnated, as well as cyclical and repetitive. In short, prison is a space where time does not pass. If it does, it moves at an imperceptibly slow rate, or passes up to a certain point and then resets, starting all over again. For example, Jack finds that being incarcerated is to be stuck in a hellish cycle of repeating punishments:

For years they have put me through this cycle over and over again: captain-doctor-broken-rule. Over and over. A pig pushes me, I instinctively push back, sometimes slug him. That starts it. Eventually I end up stammering like an idiot and staggering about - usually for six months to a year at a time - on the drugs, until finally I'm taken off the drugs and turned loose with the "normal" prisoners in the main prison population. I go along there until the next "incident" that leads to my "discipline", and once more the cycle begins, like a crazy carousel, a big "merry-go-round".

Abbott 1991:37

Over and over again, Jack rides the *crazy carousel of state violence*. For years, he has *relived the same cycle*. Furthermore, he goes on to note that it is difficult

to find any underlying *reason* for this violence—the *broken rule* in question can always shift and change without explanation, exemplifying prison as adhering to its own, inexplicable rules (cf. Creed 1993; Gordon 2008). This repetitive cycle, moreover, leads to an overall sense of stagnation since it entails year after year of the same thing, again and again.

A similar sense of repetition weaves its way through multiple narratives. This interlaces individual fates with historical time, and personal perspectives with an overall view of prison. This merges individual incorporations into prison with a broader, socio-political repetition of imprisonment practice—evidenced by how all the stories here narrativize similar, repetitive and timeless prisonness despite their spread across times and places. As such, the novels exemplify how prison stories exhibit the “weaving of historical and socio-public events together with the personal and even deeply private” (Bakhtin 2014:247). This weaving together of the historical and the deeply private comes across most clearly whenever narrators hint at how the mindless, dull repetition they experience on a personal level is part of a larger, institutionalized timelessness, where ‘doings’ never change:

The following is a daily routine for the long days at Alcatraz, Monday through Friday, year in and year out:

After breakfast, the inmates returned to their cells, single file, tier by tier, just as they had entered the dining hall. Each inmate entered his cell, the doors were closed, and a count was taken. After a correct count, one could relax until the doors were “racked” open and it was time for work.

Quillen 2015:124

Year in and year out, inmates keep enacting the *same routine*. The individual repetition of a day in prison is just a drop in the ocean of endless repetitions, carried out by multiple bodies—both simultaneously and historically (cf. Janicker 2015). This repetition thus has a haunting atmosphere, due to all of the previous as well as perpetual repetitions of this same routine. As a result, prison routine turns the personal layer into a repetition of the historical, contemporary, or even future socio-political layer. In outlining a chronotope of the prison, these kinds of uncanny repetitions and their blurring of the individual and socio-political layers are a central characteristic. This blur also articulates the temporal dimensions

of prison as a monstrous-uterine space, where individuality becomes incorporated into a larger, insatiable whole.³⁸

Furthermore, the ongoing repetition of past events aligns prison with another one of the chronotopes Bakhtin discusses, namely the castle. The castle chronotope is defined by its “organic cohesion of spatial and temporal aspects and categories” with regards to how it incorporates the past into the present (Bakhtin 2014:246). The castle chronotope marks a timespace where the past seems alive within the present, where “legends and traditions animate every corner” through “reminders of past events” (Bakhtin 2014:246). This resonates with the haunting explored in Chapter 6, where both personal and social ghosts linger in prison space, and prison itself also has the capacity to haunt. This chapter deals with what this haunting, in turn, does for the narrativization of prison as a timespace. The routines exemplified in the aforementioned quotes, which are easily conceptualized as prison-traditions, exemplify how individual fates become part of a larger whole, merging with as well as experiencing the history of the space.

Additionally, examples of the lingering past can not only be gleaned from routine. It can also be seen through physical traces of those who have occupied the space—maintained the routine—before. Jack’s description of *the hole* as covered in the filth of his predecessors can be read in this light (see page 117-8), and Jeffrey offers another example of the past remaining within, and thereby shaping, the present. In this way, time shapes space:

The officer comes to a halt, unlocks a vast steel door, and then ushers me into a cell. The room is about ten feet by five, the walls are still cream, and there is a wooden bench running along the far end. No clock, no sense of time, nothing to do except contemplate, nothing to read, except messages on the walls.

Archer 2002:2

This cell offers no sense of time, or its passing. The only thing to do in order to *occupy the time* (and space) is to read messages on the wall—the traces of those who came before, and whose messages still linger. As such, while this space offers no sense of the present time, it does offer messages from *past times* as organic parts of the *present space*. This exemplifies how aspects of the castle chronotope figure in the formulation of a prison

³⁸ See Chapter 4.

chronotope. Like the chronotope of the castle, a chronotope of the prison needs to include the haunting qualities of the past staying alive within the present. Adding another example of both repetition and past-orientation, *Newjack* offers a view of the past within the present as a form of historical repetition, where the present is only the latest in a seemingly endless series:

You feel it along the walls inside, hard like a blow to the head; see it on the walls outside, thick, blank, and doorless; smell it in the air that assaults your face in certain tunnels. [...] You sense it all around in the pointed lack of ornamentation, plants or reason for hope—walls built not to shelter but to constrain. In the same way that a murder forever changes a house, Sing Sing has its own irrevocable vibe, a haunted feeling [...] rooted in the ground and in history: thousands upon thousands of lashings meted out by my predecessors in the nineteenth century; hundreds of prisoners executed there by the state while strapped down in an electric chair built by other inmates; and for the untold numbers of prisoners who were locked inside, an enforced experience of the glacial slowness of time.

Conover 2011:171

Similar to Sister Helen's account of Angola (see page 171), this account of Sing Sing focuses a lot of its attention on how *past cruelties* shape the *haunted vibe* of its present. Ted finds himself re-enacting these repetitions, by focusing on how cruelty is the work he inherits from *his predecessors* in prison space. The past lingers in ways that directly shape and influence the present. Like Jack's and Jim's stories, Ted's thus also shows how prison 'does time' through repetition, enacting the same cruelties again and again.

Moreover, this quote exemplifies "doing time" as a lived experience (Corfield 2007:xv). Here, doing time, as well as trying to comprehend how prison itself does time, is an experience of *glacial slowness*. Endless, violent 'doings' repeat themselves *slowly*, with *little to no change* across or between individual perspectives. This echoes Bakhtin's provincial town chronotope, where time "drags itself slowly through space" (Bakhtin 2014:247). The novels under study are rife with examples of such repetitive, slow-moving prisonness. Yet another example can be found in *Orange is the New Black*:

It was easy to lose track of what day it was—there were no newspapers, no magazines, no mail, and since I avoided the TV rooms, no significant way to tell one day from the next. [...] I learned to understand the true punishment of repetition without reward.

Kerman 2010:306

The idea of *repetition without reward* in a space where *the days are interchangeable* is a defining characteristic of the prison chronotope, and is prevalent across all the explored narratives. This can be added to the list of the prison chronotope's traits: there is no light at the end of its repetitive, twisting, turning tunnel. Looping back to the definition of prison as monstrous-uterine, this emphasizes the temporalities of how prison's repetitive labours are fruitless. When there is only repetition, rather than progression, this creates a form of timeless, cyclical, and slow violence without reward (or rebirth). There is no foreseeable end, no future reward, and no change of pace, only perpetual repetition where time drags itself heavily through disorienting, claustrophobic space (cf. Bakhtin 2014; Creed 1993).

Another clear example of *repetition without reward* as a central aspect of how time(lessness) comes across in the narrativization of prison space can be found in *Inside Alcatraz*:

I decided to ask for an assignment in the brush shop. I put in a job change application and in a few days was given the assignment. I was soon to discover, however, that I had made a horrible choice. To a highly-strung, young and energetic individual such as myself, it was pure undiluted boredom and monotony. To make a hair brush, the type used to sweep long corridors, an inmate was supplied with a board with a hundred or more tapered holes drilled into it, a crochet hook, a spool of very fine copper wire, a vise, and two pounds of horse hair. You clamped the board in a vise, pushed the hook through the hole so it was double, opened the loop in the wire, then pulled the wire taut until the hair doubled over and seated itself in the tapered hole, without breaking the fine copper wire. This procedure was repeated over and over again, until all the holes were filled and the wire was tied off so all the hair could not fall out of the brush. A cap was screwed over the face of the wire, the brush was trimmed so that all the hair was even, and the brush was complete. Picture doing that over and over again for seven hours a day, five days a week. This job proved to be the most frustrating and boring, not to mention aggravating, work I have ever done - before, during, or after my release from prison. After about six months, I could no longer stand it. I honestly thought I was going to go insane.

Quillen 2015:148-9

Here, repetition causes *maddening, undiluted boredom and monotony*. Trying to find something to do in order to pass the time turns out to be a *horrible mistake*. Performing the same, monotonous task *over and over* again for seven hours a day, five days a week nearly leads to *insanity*. Jim is subjected to both *repetition without reward* and the *glacial slowness of time* in performing

this maddening, mindless task. Working in a brush shop five days a week thus becomes a twisted, gothic double of the ‘ordinary’ jobs available outside of prison. Outside, a job might offer freedom, meaning, or reward, but inside, it only occupies—and repeats—time. Jim’s narrative offers another example of repetitive, meaning- and mindless tasks as an inevitable part of his imprisonment:

We did heavy, hard, manual labor, which was usually pointless work that served no purpose other than to make you work and sweat. We would dig a large deep ditch, move all the dirt to another location, then move it back again and refill the ditch.

Quillen 2015:56

This paints a picture of *pointless, repetitive* work that *amounts to nothing*. Like for Piper, there is only repetition and no reward. Moreover, there is no reason for this task, other than keeping busy and *passing the time*. However, due to the repetitive, mind-numbing nature of the task, no time seems to pass while enacting it. Instead, Jim is stuck in a time loop.

In emphasizing prison’s slow, repetitive pointlessness, these examples all mirror Bakhtin’s provincial town chronotope; “the locus for cyclical everyday life” where “there are no events, only ‘doings’ that constantly repeat themselves” (Bakhtin 2014:247). As the novels show, prison is full of such repetitive ‘doings’ that do not qualify as events or breaks in the monotonous routine. However, in prison, these repetitions take on a more sinister tone than in the small town. In essence, prison has elements of the small town chronotope, but with the addition of confinement, punishment, disorientation, and the castle chronotope’s historical cruelty and muddled distinctions between past and present. While the view of prison as a nightmarish double of a small town and the occupations it offers is brought up in Jim’s story, this likening is also made explicitly in *Nenjack*, where Ted states that in a way, “prisons were like little towns”, but that more than that, they are places of “storage”, keeping people in the same loops until their eventual release (Conover 2011:41).

Like in Bakhtin’s small town chronotope, repetition is a foundational aspect of prison’s atmosphere. However, the notion of malicious *repetition without reward* as a form of punishment adds another layer to this notion. Not only is prison a timespace defined by its repetition, but rather by its *punishing* repetition, that *leads nowhere*. The prison

chronotope thus exhibits affinities with the Sisyphus myth, dooming people to repeat a hopeless situation for eternity.

A related aspect of prison's spatiotemporality has to do with how prison complicates the meaning, in addition to the passage, of time. While repetitive doings make the passage of time uncertain, prison also brings about uncertainties about the idea of linear, measurable temporal progression itself:

I was informed that my sentence of forty-five years could be served in thirty years if I did not forfeit any of the fifteen hundred days of good time I could earn during that period.

Quillen 2015:136

Here, prison time has its own logic, separate from how time is measured outside prison: 45 years could be 30 years, if Jim plays by the rules (whatever they may be). Moreover, the value of *good time* is relative to the contrary *bad time* spent inside prison:

An inducement for working in the industries was the opportunity to earn additional good time. Industrial good time was computed on the basis of two additional days each month for the first year, four days each month for the next three years, and five days each month for the fifth and following years. For the inmate serving a short sentence, it was a great incentive. For the long-term inmate (fifty to one hundred years) with a detainer for another state, it meant little or nothing.

Quillen 2015:147

The value of *good time* is clearly relative to the fixed amounts of prison time from which to deduct it. This also highlights the arbitrary calculations of prison time: here, a *long-term sentence* can be longer than an entire expected lifetime. This means that while *good time* might be considered to counter feelings of *repetition without reward*, the sheer length of sentences can render any form of *good time* an impossibility. This also resonates with Alexander's story about Lancaster, who was consistently robbed of his release date. When the day came for him to leave, he "was not discharged. He was kept at his task, the Warden informing him that he had lost six months of his 'good time' for defective work" (Berkman 2015:268). Here, *good time* disappears without warning, and similar misfortunes continue to plague Lancaster until he is unmade and dissolved by the space, "[crawling] on the floor, unwashed and unkempt, scratching with his nails fantastic shapes on the stone" (Berkman 2015:268). As such, the stories explored here also

show how the arbitrary definitions of time that prison exhibits can add time, as well as deduct it. This shows how prison adheres to its own, disorienting logic, which is a recurring theme in the explored texts. One of the clearest examples of this is offered by *In the Belly of the Beast*. Here, the unpredictability of prison time is subject to inexplicable whims, which in turn makes it impossible to tell how to get from *now* to *then*:

From here to there is five years. Each day closes the interval between my imprisonment and my freedom, which lies a moment beyond those five years.

At any point in that interval, I must stop and start counting all over again, over and over again.

For almost twenty years I have had to stop and start over many times. And I am not serving a life sentence. I have merely a nineteen-year indeterminate sentence—yet I have served, to this date, ten years of it. That is not all, however. I have now been in prison for eighteen years because before I started counting my federal time, I counted eight years in state prison.

Abbott 1991:113

Here, prison time seems both impossible and *pointless* to calculate. The notion of *five years* is not the same inside prison walls as it is outside them. Inside prison, *five years could take 20 years or more to pass*. When the conventional means of measuring time are lost, the repetitions of everyday life lose their potential for an end goal. Again, we see prison's *repetition without reward*. There is no future *then* to focus on to get through suffering in the *now*. Furthermore, this means that getting from *now* to *then* becomes coextensive with getting from *here* (prison) to *there* (freedom), emphasizing prison's coextension of time and space. This also shows how the prison chronotope's merger of time and space foregrounds both incomprehensibility and hopelessness.

THE ENDLESS IN BETWEEN

In addition to prison exhibiting arbitrary, slow, hopeless, and repetitive spatiotemporalities, the texts explored in this study also show how time in prison is an endless, and weighty, waiting. Prison is narrativized as a “forced idleness” where the “hours grow heavy and languid”, and the “days drag in unvarying sameness” (Berkman 2015:229). As a result of prison's combination of disorientation and *glacial slowness*, “time drags in torturing uncertainty” (Berkman 2015:478).

For Alexander, “[t]he lengthening chain of days [...] drags its heavy links through every change of misery” (Berkman 2015:222). As such, both *waiting for a break* in repetitive patterns and the *potential changes themselves* are marked by a heavy, slow, and hopeless temporality. By its recurring reliance on weight-metaphors to convey slowness and stagnation, Alexander’s story shows how both the *pace* and the *weight* of waiting is *glacial*. Alexander goes on to note the endless atmosphere that this creates:

The days are unbearable with nervous restlessness, the nights hideous with the hours of agonizing stillness, - the endless, endless hours. Feverishly I pace the cell. The day will pass, it must pass.
Berkman 2015:479

Here, prison is narrativized as enforced, *agonizing stillness* endured in looping, *endless hours*. Pacing the small space available becomes another desperate attempt to pass these endless hours by occupying the time(space). Similarly, Jim notes how “a day in the hole was like an eternity” (Quillen 2015:174), and Piper summarizes prison as being “all about waiting in line” (Kerman 2013:94). Together, these stories show how a central part of the prison chronotope is waiting—for time to pass, or for a break in the endless routine. As such, waiting is both a feature of prison’s enforced repetition of the same ‘doings’ over and over again, and something that happens *between* these ‘doings’ (cf. Bakhtin 2014:247). Time that is ordered around waiting, either as a repetitive ‘doing’ or a languishing in between, is prevalent across all the explored texts. Furthermore, this aspect of prison influences punisher and punishee, alike:

But mainly, [the officer] said, prison work was about waiting. The inmates waited for their sentences to run out, and the officers waited for retirement. To [him], it was “a life sentence in eight-hour shifts”.
Conover 2011:21

Prison time, then, is about *waiting for the end*. Everything else is a repetitive, endless expanse in between events, where the only events are the beginning (entering prison) and the end (leaving it). The heavy dullness of this waiting is seemingly not lightened by being broken *into eight-hour shifts*. More accounts of this endlessness are readily available, and Jeffrey’s story adds yet another example that emphasizes waiting as an endless in between:

What is almost impossible to describe in its full horror is the time you spent banged up. So please do not consider this diary to be a running commentary, because I would only ask you to think about the endless hours in between. Heaven knows what that does to lifers who can see no end to their incarceration, and do not have the privilege of being able to occupy their time writing.

Archer 2002:82

Here, the text focuses on the *horror of endlessness*. As such, the horrors of prison are not only what happens, but also *when nothing does*. In between the repetitive, looping non-events of imprisonment, *there is a terrifying nothing*. This nothing, moreover, is a highly present, active lack. Additionally, by focusing on the horrors of the indescribably long hours in between, Jeffrey's story emphasizes how written narratives can only really offer insight into the repetitive 'doings' of prison. It is near impossible for narratives to fully relay this palpable nothing in between. For a text to convey the *endless emptiness in between* the repetitive 'doings' that at least have a defined shape with clear edges, it would have to

leave

a

lot

of

space

empty.

Maybe then, the repetitive turning of pages might approximate the dull, repetitive, *endless hours in-between*. This points out how textual narratives might struggle to convey the temporalities of prison. The endlessness in between ‘doings’ can be hinted at, described, but never really *shown*. However, a prison chronotope could account for this by acknowledging that this is one of the ways that time is marked by uncertainty in prison narratives: readers, like narrators, cannot be sure of the full extent of the diegetic passage of time.

By focusing on the infinite in between, these stories also articulate how another part of the prison chronotope is its pointed, palpable lacks. It is a space where, as Jim puts it, “I felt something was lacking, and could not help but feel like somehow life was passing me by” (Quillen 2015:159). Together, these stories show how prison timespace is marked by the present absence of both comprehension and linear progression. They show how prison lacks meaningful ways to pass, mark, or tell the time; to really know what one misses out on; to make sense of the layout (Archer 2002; Conover 2011; Quillen 2015); as well as decoration, comfort, and hope for the future (Conover 2011:171). Jack’s story elaborates on how imprisonment is a present, palpable nothing:

You sit in solitary confinement stewing in nothingness, not merely your own nothingness but the nothingness of society, others, the world. The lethargy of months that add up to years in a cell, alone, entwines itself about every “physical” activity of the living body and strangles it slowly to death, the horrible decay of truly living death. [...] Time descends in your cell like the lid of a coffin in which you lie and watch it as it slowly closes over you.

Abbott 1991:44-5

In the Belly of the Beast exemplifies how the spatiotemporal experience of prisonness is one of nothingness—in terms of both time and space. It is infinite time, embodied by finite, confining space (Abbott 1991:43). Exemplifying imprisonment as living death (cf. Smith, C. 2009), Jack emphasizes the *glacial slowness* and *horrible decay* of prison time as akin to death. Time *descends like the lid of a coffin*, in a space marked by a keenly felt presence of *nothing*. Time spent *stewing* in, and *becoming one with*, this *nothing*, is likened to death and unbecoming. However, since there is still an experience of this palpable nothing, it is also a prolonged dying; it is an experience of *living death*. As such, it is an endless expanse *between* life and death. Here, again, we encounter the *glacial slowness* or prison time. Jack,

like Alexander and Ted, points to how the prison chronotope is defined by its decidedly *heavy* spatiotemporality. Time descends like a coffin lid; drags its heavy chains; and smothers subjects with its glacial weight and pace. This excerpt's focus on slow, gradual death in(to) prison in the form of stewing in a vast nothing also articulates the temporalities of the devourment and dissolution that prison enforces.

In addition to its heaviness, Jack's narrative emphasizes how prison shares a key trait with the provincial town chronotope—it has a “viscous and sticky time that drags itself slowly through space” (Bakhtin 2014:247). This stickiness is important for the prison chronotope, and it is evident as both temporal and spatial in Jack's focus on *prolonged stewing in decay and living death*. He goes on to note how this slow, heavy, and sticky prison enforces non-events:

But something happens down there in the hole, something like an event, but this event can only occur over a span of years. It cannot take place in time and space the way we ordinarily know them.
Abbott 1991:45

The viscous nothingness Jack stews in comes across as *similar* to an event, yet decidedly different from one since it takes *several years* to occur. Again, we are faced with repetitive ‘doings’ that stretch through time, showing how if (or when) events do occur in this endless, repetitive timespace, they too occur at a glacial pace. A prison-event is thus not the kind of event that takes place in time and space the way we *ordinarily know them* (i.e. within a defined moment), but rather, it is an unfamiliarizing, prolonged event that is *particular to prison* as an abject and uncanny timespace.

A TIMESPACE APART

Imagining prison as a *viscous* and *sticky* timespace further adds to Chapter 6's contention that prison seeps into ordinariness to haunt those around it, as well as the notion of prison as abject, dirty, and incorporating (cf. Creed 1993).³⁹ All of the explored novels narrativize prison as a place where time and space come together in experiences of stewing, stickiness, and slow, liquid suspension in seeping, murky, foul-smelling, constricting and threatening environments. Papillon summarizes this sticky, slow-paced timespace that all the novels evidence most succinctly: prison is “a pit full of sticky liquid that was to dissolve me slowly and cause me to

³⁹ See Chapters 4 and 5.

disappear” (Charrière 2005:462). This points to how the dissolution explained in Chapter 4 is a key trait of the prison chronotope.

To add more examples of this sticky, dissolving, viscous timespace, Alexander’s narrativization of *slow, heavy time dragging itself through space* happens in places such as a filthy underground “dungeon”, which “smells foul and musty” (Berkman 2015:316). Moreover, Jack describes how the *slow death of stewing in nothing* is only broken up by life in regular cells, next to neighbours who “refuse to flush toilet tissue down the toilet—you see heaps of shit-stained toilet tissue go past your cell in the wake of the trustee’s pushbroom when he sweeps the corridor”, and as a result, “[f]lies move in herds, like miniature cattle grazing a few feet above the floor” (Abbott 1991:142). Likewise, *Orange is the New Black* shows prison as a dirty, *sticky* space filled with “human stew” (Kerman 2010:69), where it is hard to tell one day from the next (Kerman 2010:306). Piper describes how the “Hell-mouth” bathroom in her dorm is riddled with dirt and rust, infested by “little black maggots” that would “eventually hatch into evil little flies”—indicating some passage of time. Between the dirt, rust, and insects, the bathroom seems “built over a direct route to hell” (Kerman 2013:91-2). Maintaining a clean and proper body over time thus becomes impossible in an unclean, improper space. Together, these narratives show how prison, as a timespace, is sticky and hard to move around in. Moreover, this *bellish* picture is painted in other texts as well:

As we draw up to the entrance gate, I see a sign declaring BELMARSH PRISON. Someone has put a line through the B and replaced it with an H.
Archer 2002:4

Here, prison is introduced and entered into in the narrative through drawing on notions of *hell and damnation*, adding to prison’s atmosphere as a punishing, repetitive chronotope. Similarly, Jim begins *Inside Alcatraz* by recalling that “the prison being referred to as ‘Hellcatraz’ and ‘Devil’s Island of America’” (Quillen 1991:5). Drawing parallels to hell and damnation adds detail to the idea of time loops and repetition otherwise found in the provincial town chronotope, since the notion of hell says something about what *kind* of events will be infinitely repeated, and in what kind of space they will take be perpetuated. This articulates how a prison chronotope would be one of perpetual punishment, and *sticky* in every conceivable way in terms of time, space, and bodies.

The invocation of hell also exemplifies another aspect of the prison chronotope, which is its separation from, and situatedness *underneath*, other timespaces. This downward-orientation is present in all the explored novels. For example, Ted notes how prison is both hellish and layered, and how the “downstairs” areas were like “the lowest level of hell” (Conover 2011:128).

Because of prison’s *glacial slowness*, it also falls out of synch with the temporalities of other places. Being in this hellish place, in other words, is to be in a timespace apart. *Life passes by outside*, while prison exists apart from ordinary space and time:

In my utter isolation, the world outside appears like a faint memory, unreal and dim. The deprivation of newspapers has entirely severed me from the living.
Berkman 2015:401

Life not only *passes by outside*, but prison also makes the *outside world an unreal, faint memory*. When all links to the outside world are broken, the result is an existence *severed from the living*. The outside world is nothing but an unreal memory, while the present self is *something other than living*. This sets a haunting scene where Alexander is stuck in an undead state, haunted by *unreal* memories of his *living* life, while being assimilated into prison as his only tangible reality. This notion of prison as a space apart from the outside world is echoed in all of the explored texts. For instance, Ted’s narrative describes a “wall between the hermetic world of prison and the universe outside” (Conover 2011:151), while Piper expresses prison space as an alternate dimension that *hardly even exists* to the outside world. When Piper first prepares for her sentence, she tries to get her “affairs in order, preparing to vanish for over a year” (Kerman 2013:33). Once her narrative is set inside prison, it continues to offer examples of prison described as a space apart from the ordinary:

I tried to use the pay phone to call Larry or my parents to tell them I was alive, but the phone would place only collect calls, and no one’s phone service would accept them, which intensified the feeling that I had been dropped into a plane of being that didn’t exist to the rest of the world.
Kerman 2013:301

Here, too, ties to the outside world have been severed. Moreover, having been *dropped into a separate plane of being* furthers the notion that prison is not

only a space apart, but also *below*, the outside world. This echoes the hellscapes painted by other novels explore here, as well as the *descent* into a *subterranean prison* explored in Chapter 4. The separation of prison and the outside world is expressed in Jeffrey's narrative as well, where, after a meeting with his legal representation he notes how: "I leave them to return to their world, while I am escorted back to mine" (Archer 2002:90). Relating back to the previous chapter, these excerpts narrativize prison as a timespace apart in a complete, total sense, thereby actualizing the total institutions-thesis in its extreme. Contrary to critiques of prison as a total institution, here, prison is clearly narrativized as cut off from the rest of society (see Farrington 1992; Moran 2012; 2013). Jack, too, narrativizes prison as a timespace apart from the *real world*:

The real world is out of place in the hole, but the hole is nonetheless really there. It is time that no longer moves forward in human experience. You can walk, placing one foot before the other, across eternity in time. All the space you need is six or seven feet. The hole furnishes only that provision: you are living a demonstration of the infinite within the finite; the dream within the reality.

But the hole is not the stuff of dreams, of fantasies: it is all quite real. In fact, it is so real it haunts you.

Abbott 1991:49

The notion of perpetual, but undirected, motion highlights the unending repetition of prison time, and the way that space is enmeshed in this temporality. In the hole, movement is not really movement in the sense that *you never get anywhere*, no matter how many steps you take. And while you move but do not get anywhere, *time itself no longer moves*, either. Neither time nor space changes with the motions. Walking thus becomes an uncanny case of motion *within* stasis:

Let us say a kind of movement that is not really movement exists there.

To illustrate: to walk ten miles in an enclosed space of ten feet is not really movement. There are not ten miles of space, only time.

Abbott 1991:43

Movement is not really movement, time is not really time, infinity is given by the confines of the finite. This paints an uncanny picture of prison, where many distinctions have become uncertain. Like Piranesi's prison labyrinths, this space is disorienting and confuses notions of progressive, linear movement through either time or space (Carrabine 2012b:54). Meanwhile, the *reality* of these uncertainties are *haunting*. This atmosphere

shares its endless repetition with the small town chronotope. However, the prison's endless repetition differs since it hinges on a decidedly haunting, threatening air and a sense of labyrinthine disorientation where neither time, space, nor movement leads anywhere.

Another feature of prison as a timespace that somehow exists *below* and *outside* of linear time is the air of stress that this apartness adds to its atmosphere. Such stress is exemplified by Piper's story, when she notes that the outside "world kept going despite the fact that [she] had been removed to an alternate universe" (Kerman 2013:212). Time moves slower, if it moves at all, on the inside, while things progress as normal on the outside. This stressful slowness is also clear in cases where impending releases from prison cause anxieties tied to (the lack of) progression. The experience of sticky, viscous slowness, especially during lengthy sentences, causes anxieties about leaving prison-time and entering into a stream of time that has kept going while prison time stood still:

Pop had been down for more than twelve years, since the early 1990s. She remembered a world with no cell phones, no Internet, and no probation officer to report to. She was nervous as hell.
Kerman 2013:278

While prison enforces a sticky, dragging timelessness in a dirty, stagnant space, the outside world has seen social and technological developments. Being stuck in the repetitive, glacial slowness of prison, release equates to entering an unknown, *faster-paced* space. Similar anxieties about entering the unknown after years of enforced immersion in prison's particular spatiotemporalities are evident in Jeffrey's story:

He's actually quite fearful about how the world will have changed when in October he steps out of prison for the first time in a decade.
Archer 2002:173

Here too, the notion of prison as slow and cyclical is made evident. After *a decade in a different time*, entering normalcy is a question of being out of synch. Piper goes on to exemplify this further, again equating time spent with a deterioration in civilized humanity:

It's the insidious, cruel paradox of lengthy sentences: for women doing seven, twelve, twenty years, the only way to survive was to accept prison as their universe. But how on earth would they survive in the outside world when released?
Kerman 2013:176

Accepting the *slow, sticky below* of prison as one's universe is the only way to *survive it for long periods of time*. But this makes leaving it, being ejected into a faster-paced unknown, an impossibility. This focus on the temporal aspects of leaving prison thus offers yet another view of how prison cannot be expected to rehabilitate and prepare those it devours for a rebirth into the outside world (cf. Creed 1993). As such, a prison chronotope, much like the monstrous-feminine view of prison, helps interrogate the paradox of expecting imprisonment in abject, disorienting spaces to lead to betterment. Here, like in Chapter 6, prison lingers and seeps—threatening to stick to subjects once they leave it, if they leave it. Taken together, these novels show how prison's time, space, and rules all come across as immersion in viscous, sticky disorientation.

DISCUSSION

The prison chronotope fits neatly into discussions of “what time might mean in the carceral context” (Moran 2012:305), as well as discussions of how imprisonment can be made sense of as an experience of both weight and depth (Crewe 2011). This chapter follows Moran's assertion that conceptualizing incarceration as a timespace is “a useful conceptual tool for advancing understanding of what incarceration is”, and that this understanding cannot “adequately be achieved by focusing either on time, or on space, in isolation, or even, perhaps, in combination” (Moran 2012:313). As such, this chapter explores how viewing prison not only as a timespace, but as a haunting and devouring one, might develop our understanding of *what incarceration is* even further. By defining a prison chronotope, this chapter has added to the understanding of what, and how, incarceration is, by exploring how its particular spatiotemporality is presented and made sense of through narrativization.

This chapter articulates the central features of the prison chronotope—the ways that prison is narrativized through “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships” (Bakhtin 1981:84). This chronotope is defined by a sticky, viscous time, that drags itself heavily through twisting, turning and uncertain space and inexplicable rules. It is defined by repetition, stagnation, descent, disorientation, disintegration, confusion, claustrophobia, and punishment. As such, it is both an abject, incorporating and uncanny, unsettling timespace.

As this chapter shows, the prison chronotope hinges on both time and space being disorienting and illogical. It is labyrinthine, thus

complicating attempts to orient oneself in either time or space. Moreover, this labyrinthine timespace is one where time is stagnant as well as cyclical—it is cyclical at such a slow pace on a socio-political level that it seems stagnant on individual levels. The repetitions it enacts, moreover, are without break or reward. As such, it is a hopeless timespace that lacks future orientation (or, indeed, any linear temporal orientation at all).

Within this slow-paced, repetitive, and punishing space, time is also defined by uncertainty. Prison makes time a shifting, floating construct, making it seem both pointless and eerily arbitrary. In this shifting timespace, another defining trait of the prison chronotope is endless waiting. Given prison's looping, repetitive tendencies, waiting does not lead anywhere. As such, the prison chronotope is defined by its pointed, palpable lacks. Prison is marked by the present, keenly felt absence of hope, comprehension, and linear progression.

Moreover, the explored texts all point to prison as a space apart from, as well as *below*, the rest of the world—both in terms of speed and space. Prison is both a lower velocity and a lower plane of existence. As such, these narratives show how prison is *oriented downwards*, which aligns it with cellars, tombs, and hell. This, in turn, aligns it with prison as the “buried, repressed, repository of social fears” (Fiddler 2007:198). Additionally, through its repetitions of ‘doings’ that link the deeply personal to the historical (Bakhtin 2014), the prison chronotope is also oriented towards a perpetually repeating, thus ever-present past.

This downward, backward, and distant timespace is marked by its own, slow-moving and repetitive temporality. The notion of prison as a lingering, seeping timespace apart from the ordinary also aligns it with both the notion of prison as a haunted and haunting space, as well as the conceptualization of prison as an isolating, devouring womb that defies proper individual, spatial, and temporal boundaries. These links are especially evident by how the prison chronotope is defined by its stickiness. As this study has shown overall, prison is a viscous, sticky entity. Both its spatial and its temporal being is characterized by this stickiness—the space is filled with sticky, dirty traces of the past, and time's slow, viscous drag is difficult to disentangle oneself from even after leaving prison behind. The prison chronotope, then, is also characterized by its seeping, since it lingers and reaches outside of itself. As such, the chronotope ties together with the previous chapters' findings of haunting

and incorporation, by emphasizing how these aspects of prisonness are simultaneously spatial and temporal.

Prison's sticky, viscous time that drags itself heavily through space, if it moves at all, ties into how notions of boredom and (endless) waiting have been observed in studies of how people make sense of dull, repetitive prison life (e.g. Ferrell 2004; Rocheleau 2013; Steinmetz et al. 2017). Moreover, prison's repetitive aspects have also been discussed in previous studies of prison literature. In her study of fictional depictions of eighteenth-century prisons, Powell points out how prison time in these texts lacks "order or progress beyond the barren fact of empty repetition" (Powell 2015:7). Given that this chapter makes similar findings in newer novels, this study adds insight into how these repetitive aspects stretch out across the genre of prison fiction, repeating itself for centuries on the extradiegetic plane. The same story of endless, fruitless repetition that was evidenced in the eighteenth-century novels in Powell's study still lingers today. The prison chronotope thus appears steady and applicable across prison's narrativization over time, as well as exhibiting affinities with studies of prison experience (e.g. Ferrell 2004; Moran 2012; Rocheleau 2013; Steinmetz et al. 2017). As such, it could be a useful tool for exploring how prison is narrativized and made sense of more broadly, and in different types of storytelling.

CHAPTER 8

PRISONS OF STONE AND STORY

The empirical chapters at the heart of this study have explored several tensions that make up prison as a storyteller: between the surfaces and depths of narration; between normalcy and deviance; boundary maintenance and collapse; safety and threat; the real and the imagined; and between abject ejection and uncanny return. This speaks to how prison narratives, such as the autobiographies explored in this study, “speak to ‘real’ and ‘imaginary’ pain in significant ways” (Carrabine 2012b:68). In the societies that use and imagine them, prisons exist as both stone and story. In its myriad cultural forms, ranging from the building itself to the tales told about it, prison tells many stories. In terms of time as well as in terms of depth, prison is a storied institution—many-layered tales have been told about it since its inception. A prominent theme of these stories, moreover, is the question of belonging and otherness (see e.g. Cecil 2015; Duncan 1996; Fiddler 2011b; Garland 2012; Gordon 2008; Smith, C. 2009). Building on existing prison research in cultural-, narrative-, and ghost criminology (Fiddler et al., forthcoming), this study has explored how abjection and uncanniness are central to this socio-cultural, storytelling function. This chapter looks back across the study’s empirical chapters, to discuss themes and findings that have been prevalent throughout the analysis. In so doing, it pieces together the overarching story that this study has unveiled about what the Western prison is and does.

THE HORROR-STORIED PRISON

This study has analysed 10 popular prison autobiographies, and found an overarching story about what, and how, prison is. Together, these novels narrativize a horror-iconographic prison that reaches out, hungrily, and devours people with an insatiable appetite. It threatens to incorporate, dissolve, and assimilate those it devours. Where previous studies have

configured prison as a uterine, nurturing locus of rebirth (Duncan 1996; Fiddler 2007), this study has articulated how prison functions as the monstrous womb of the Western societal body (cf. Creed 1993). This has showed how prison primarily threatens to assimilate subjects into the abject **other**, rather than eject and exclude them from clean and proper, normative society (cf. Sykes 1958; Crewe 2020). This assimilation, moreover, is a key feature of how prison (as well as those it houses) is presented as abject through pop-culture displays. As such, this process is an ingrained part of cultural, communicative boundary work keeping the **other** both at a distance *and* in view. In this light, rather than enforcing exclusion, prison threatens a culturally visible incorporation into otherness—it still includes subjects in society, but only as cautionary tales and a form of **others** society can compare itself to in order to see itself as ‘more’ or ‘better’ than (cf. Kramer 2007). This study thus shows how prison expresses different social fears than what is commonly attributed to it, by elucidating how it embodies fears of being devoured, assimilated, and incorporated into the undesirable, rather than merely excluded from the desirable.

Moreover, articulating prison’s monstrous-feminine traits has shown how prison threatens to devour and assimilate on both an individual level where the bodies and minds of those who enter it are devoured, and on a societal level. On a societal level, prison threatens to expand and devour as an insatiable, uncontrollable institution. The explored novels repeatedly depicted it as an insatiable, uncontrollable maw; an ever-expansive mass. As such, it is part of social, subject-formative processes as a present, as well as future, threat. At present, it threatens to assimilate those inside or around it. In the future, it threatens to expand and keep devouring, moving its boundaries closer and closer to the clean and proper. Moreover, its monstrous-feminine threat of perpetual, insatiable devourment makes it abject to both those who wish to control it (i.e. patriarchal, white-supremacist power) as well as to those who wish to see it abolished. As such, the abject, monstrous-feminine prison expresses social anxieties about what monster we have wrought, and how, if at all, we can control it. This, coupled with prison’s incorporating, monstrous-feminine forms of punishment, contradicts the notion that prison embodies carefully calculated state re-masculinization (Wacquant 2010).

As this study has also shown, the threat of assimilation posed inside prison is resisted by means of more abjection, where subjects turn on one another and create relationships based on othering and monstrosity (Halberstam 1995). In an attempt to resist monstrous assimilation and assert their own wholeness, subjects thus engage in monster-making. To resist assimilation into the abject, narratorial subjects characterize other people as abject in order to differentiate between themselves and **others**. This often results in stories where **others** (whether captor or captee) belong in prison, while narrators themselves do not (Kramer 2007). This monster-making was formulated from a heteronormative, cis-sexist, white-supremacist, and patriarchal viewpoint, regardless of the narrators' own subjectivity (Halberstam 1995). As such, prison novels also show processes such as internalized misogyny at work. As an abject space, it draws out the abject aspects of personalities—which in turn are the traits that seem prone to make monsters out of others through narration. This offered a closer look at how the abject prison causes monster-making processes, where subjects lash out at one another in order to maintain individualism in the face of devourment. As a result, prison still spawns monstrosity.

The monstrous-uterine prison also raises questions of what prison generates, and questions of abortive rebirth. Since its assimilation entails an unbecoming and a dissolution of people, what does it eject back into society? There are clear incompatibilities in how prison is culturally imagined as an abject, horrific space of ghosts and monsters while, at the same time, its continued existence is motivated by ideas of positive reform and rebirth. Worries about what prison gives birth to was evidenced throughout the study. While it spawns monstrous relationships and ejects dissolved messes of humanity, it also conjures ghosts that haunt people and places outside of itself. Its monstrosity thus has haunting qualities, where prison unsettles the very distinctions between (both collective and individual) self and **other**. This haunting was evidenced by the eerie similarities between punishers and punishees throughout the explored narratives, which destabilized notions of whom and how to punish. This further emphasizes how monstrosity is an erratic, shifting relationship (Halberstam 1995).

As a haunted space, prison is shaped by both past and future cruelties, like its links to enslavement and its planned expansions. This showed how anxieties about both past and future violence coalesce in prison. Moreover, as a haunting space, prison creates uncanny doubles and

seeps through the boundaries meant to keep it in place and apart (Janicker 2015). This showed how, while prison is a space apart from the ordinary (Goffman 1961; Janicker 2015), it also seeps into the fabric of ordinary life. Through this theme, the study showed how prison is uncanny when it haunts other, more benign places. Visions of home in prison, and prison at home, both exemplified this, since these visions showed how prison destabilizes the ways that certain spaces are associated with either normative or deviant practices by blurring the lines between the two. This results in shifting, unstable distinctions that unfamiliarize clean and proper aspects of society on the one hand and deviant, undesirable ones on the other.

Another form of uncanny doubling was that of death and freedom. This was exemplified by how prison was repeatedly narrativized as both a timespace of living death (cf. Smith, C. 2009), and as a timespace that people are dying to leave, whether figuratively or literally.

Relatedly, the present study has explored how prison time is a foundational element of what constitutes prison space, while prison space is a manifestation of time (and the control thereof) (cf. Moran 2012). The ways prison is narrativized as a timespace in the novels was examined and articulated by defining a prison chronotope (Bakhtin 2014). This chronotope ties together how prison has been narrativized throughout the explored novels, and it is characterized by punishing, hopeless repetitions, and sticky, viscous time that drags itself heavily through dirty, claustrophobic, dissolving and disorienting space. Moreover, this chronotope exists on a plane below other timespaces—it is both subterranean and slow.

Throughout the novels this study analysed, and across the themes it found while doing so, prison was consistently narrativized as suspension in a murky, liquid, leaking, foul-smelling, and viscous timespace. It is immersive and dissolving, and it enforces repetitive, endless twists and turns that are hard to either predict or comprehend. Its rules, too, prove difficult to make sense of throughout the explored narratives. It also enforces destabilizing lacks, of reason, hope, or comprehension. At the same time, prison also covers other lacks, such as the lack of difference between punisher and punishee once the uniforms come off.

Altogether, the explored novels narrativize a prison where time, space, identities, and rules are all subject to shifting, arbitrary definitions and changes. It disorients punishers and punishees alike, and it sets

incorporated people up to fail if and when they burst forth from this monstrous-uterine prison, into the faster-paced unknown (cf. Bakhtin 2014; Creed 1993).

This study has unveiled how prison is narrativized as a space that disorients, dissolves, haunts, seeps, and sticks, threatening to incorporate both subjects and other spaces into its lingering abjectivity—and haunt them if they ever leave (Janicker 2015). Through these themes, the study also shows how prison is a space of duality—it attempts to draw boundaries, while simultaneously bringing about their collapse. As such, this study adds complexity to the commonly held idea that prison simply threatens to exclude, opens up a new space to interrogate the simultaneous similarities and isolations of total institutions through literature, and adds nuance to the central paradox of imprisonment as a set of worsened conditions that are supposedly aimed at the betterment of incarcerated subjects (Carlen 2012).

All things considered, this study showed how prison stories narrativize prison as a timespace where social fears are made flesh. Furthermore, the study has also shed light on the ghosts that this flesh-making conjures. Regardless of what social fears the novels expressed, prison's gothicness and inherent horror iconography remained key parts of how fears and anxieties are made visible, and made sense of, in prison narratives. Paying attention to this gothicness has helped the present study articulate how prison is abject and uncanny.

IMPLICATIONS

This study has several implications pertaining to the conceptual and practical realms of (studying) penalty. Methodologically, this study has concerned itself with criminology's ways of knowing, and with what narrative criminology could do with an added focus on literary texts as well as with literary critical devices (e.g. the chronotope and the haunted house). Drawing on critical, psychoanalytical approaches, and on literary texts rather than ethnographies or interviews, enabled deep forms of narrative criminological enquiry into the social unconscious (cf. Gordon 2008). It allowed for enquires into what happens in the stories we tell about prison, how it happens, how prison is narrativized through these stories, and how all of these aspects of prison-storytelling speak to questions of social unrest; (un)belonging; and deviance.

This approach was especially suited to questions of social fears and their ways of surfacing in culture since it steps away somewhat from the usual view of narratives as sense-making storytelling. By being focused primarily on the narrativization, rather than narration, of prison space, this study explored prison novels as a way of creating, rather than explaining, prison space. Narrativization, in short, it is a process of making space come alive on the page. While sense-making is an inherent part of such processes, narrativization goes beyond representation by creating spaces for readers to experience through imaginative, affective engagement. How prison is narrativized thus speaks to what, and how, prison is and does—at least in terms of how it comes across to the wider public. As a narrative-criminological approach, this way of studying space in literary texts thus moves the analysis closer to the thing itself, and how it becomes what it is. These ‘hows’, in turn, speak to underlying social fears, since how space is commonly narrativized speaks to how it is culturally, collectively felt about and how these feelings, in turn, shape understanding. In the case of prison autobiographies, this speaks to how prison is perpetuated as a storyteller and an imagined reality. As such, this study’s literary empirical approach, and its methodological focus on narrativization, contributes new avenues for narrative-criminological research.

The results of this study, moreover, have implications for penal practice. If we consider the insights that conceptualizing prison as a site of sticky, repetitive dissolution and disorienting, haunting devourment bring to light, the notion of prison as productive and rehabilitative becomes untenable. As an abject institution, prison both is monstrous and produces monsters. As an uncanny institution, it destabilizes and blends notions of punishable offenses with notions of offensive punishment. The resulting view is one of a sticky, subject-dissolving prison that seeps into and disrupts the fabric of ordinary life, and simultaneously threatens to keep growing and devouring in perpetuity. As such, a critical psychoanalysis of prison’s forms and functions in culture can only result in abolitionist implications.

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PRISON NOVELS

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POPULÄRVETENSKAPLIG SAMMANFATTNING

Fängelset är en bekant figur för många, som syns i såväl popkultur och dokumentärer som i nyhetsmedia. Trots att de flesta människor aldrig personligen kommit i kontakt med fängelset så tror vi oss veta en hel del om hur det fungerar, ser ut, eller känns där inne (Cecil 2015). Studier har dessutom påpekat att fängelset tenderar att förstås och förklaras med hjälp av skräcktematik såsom monster, spöken, och gotiska slott (Garland 1990; Smith, C. 2009). Synen på fängelset, och människorna i det, uttrycks till stor del genom skräckhistorier, både i popkultur och i medias kriminalpolitiska diskurs (Higgins & Swartz 2018; Valier 2002). Över tid så har fängelset fått allt större delar av sin sociala betydelse—vad fängelset är och gör—bestämda genom skräcktematik. Det har i sin tur nått en punkt där allmänhetens föreställningar om hur fängelset är har blivit en inbyggd del av vad fängelset är i sin helhet. Fängelset har alltså blivit mer än en byggnad eller en praktik. Idag är det snarare att betrakta som en sorts blandning av faktiska förhållanden och—ofta skrämmande—fiktions (Cecil 2015).

Den här studien undersöker fängelset som just en blandning av det faktiska och det föreställda, genom upprepade närläsningar av 10 fängelsesjälvbiografier. Studien analyserar kommersiellt publicerade titlar i europeiska och amerikanska kontexter, och då framförallt sådana som fått stor spridning eller uppmärksamhet (till exempel genom att bli filmatiserade). Processen kring kommersiell publicering innebär att berättelser redigeras för säljbarhetens skull—alltså anpassas berättelserna i linje med genrekonventioner och underhållningsvärde. Dessa självbiografier befinner sig således i ett gränsland mellan sanningsanspråk och sensationslystenhet. Med andra ord är dessa berättelser en blandning av det faktiska och det föreställda. Dessutom är detta en blandning som är svår, om inte rent av omöjlig, för allmänheten att reda ut. Studien intresserar sig inte heller för huruvida dessa böcker har rätt eller fel i det de säger om livet i fängelse, utan snarare för hur fängelset skrivs fram som

miljö. Kort sagt ligger studiens intresse i att fånga hur fängelset framställs gentemot allmänheten i en genre som marknadsförs som sann. Dessa sanningsanspråk gör i sin tur något med vilken bild av fängelset som framträder i böckerna, speciellt när den bilden är osannolik och otäck. Fångelsesjälvbiografier har på så vis vissa gemensamma drag med hur spökhistorier gärna introduceras genom att säga att det som ska berättas är *baserat på verkliga händelser...*

Eftersom studien intresserar sig för berättelser och vad som kommer till uttryck i dem så hör den till stor del hemma inom narrativ kriminologi, som intresserar sig för just hur berättande bidrar till hur vi förstår oss på omvärlden. Studien analyserar de 10 böckerna tematiskt, med fokus på hur sociala rädslor tar sig uttryck igenom fängelset.

För att studera dessa aspekter av vad fängelset är och gör i västvärlden så lånar studien metodologiska grepp från litteraturvetenskapen. Med hjälp av verktyg som hemsökelse, monstrositet, och kronotoper fångar studien hur fängelsemiljön 'görs levande' i text. Genom att studera hur fängelset framställs med hjälp av olika berättartekniska grepp undersöker studien även vilka sociala rädslor och orosmoln som hanteras genom fängelset. Vad är det för orosmoment samhället hanterar genom sin användning av, och sina berättelser om, fängelset?

Studien gör antagandet att fängelsemiljön ofta skrivs fram som skrämmande, eftersom tidigare forskning redan pekat ut flera sätt som fängelset kommunicerats som just skrämmande och gotiskt (se t.ex. Garland 1990; Fiddler 2011a, 2011b; Steinmetz 2018). Med detta i åtanke så fokuserar studien på *hur* fängelset framträder som skrämmande på olika sätt i böckerna, och hur det i sin tur kan belysa sociala, samhälleliga rädslor som fängelset är en del av att uttrycka eller hantera. Analysen har således letat efter svar på hur fängelsets atmosfär skrivs fram i texterna, vilka berättartekniska grepp som används i berättelserna för att framställa platsen och personerna som finns där, och huruvida berättarens perspektiv spelar roll för vem eller vad som är skrämmande. I korthet kan studien sägas vara på jakt efter förståelse för *vad och hur fängelset är*, såsom samhället förstår sig på och förmedlar det genom popkulturella framställningar. För att bena ut den frågan tar sig studien an en analys av hur fängelset fungerar som en kommunikativ, hemsökt och hemsökande institution i västvärlden.

Teoretiskt så fokuserar studien framförallt på hur västvärldens sociala rädslor och orosmoln kommer till uttryck genom fängelset, och hur detta i sin tur kan skönjas i hur fängelset kommuniceras genom popkulturella texter. Hur hanteras frågor om tillhörighet och utanförskap, ”vi” och ”dem”, och det (o)bekanta? Hur fungerar fängelset som en gränsdragning mellan det önskade och det oönskade, och vad händer när den gränsen löses upp? För att kunna belysa sådana frågor, som i grund och botten handlar om vad som ligger under eller bakom hur fängelset framställs, tillämpas ett psykoanalytiskt perspektiv med fokus på rädslor på de 10 böckerna (cf. Gordon 2008). Genom det psykoanalytiska perspektivet fokuserar studien på vilka bortträngande, gränsdragande, och gränshotande processer (*abjection*), samt kusliga, (tids)upplösande, främmandegörande processer (*uncanniness*) fängelset är del av (Freud 1919; Creed 1993; Halberstam 1995; Janicker 2015; Kristeva 1982; Withy 2015).

Studien är uppdelad i fyra analyskapitel, som behandlar olika delar av *hur* fängelset berättas och förstås genom skräckikonografi. Det första (**Kapitel 4**) fokuserar på hur fängelset är uppslukande, kladdigt och assimilerande. Kort sagt så framställs det som en monstros, hungrig plats. Här visar analysen hur de rädslor som kommer till uttryck genom fängelset handlar om att assimileras, lösas upp, och slukas av något överväldigande och otäckt, snarare än att avskiljas eller exkluderas från normsamhället, vilket annars är en vedertagen syn på fängelsets funktion (Sykes 1958). Här går studien således emot den vedertagna bilden av fängelset som en avskiljande, maskulin institution (Sykes 1958; Wacquant 2010), eftersom just uppslukande, upplösande processer tillhör det monströsa feminina (Creed 1993). Genom att synliggöra hur fängelset upplöser subjekt nyanserar studien bilden av vad fängelset är och gör, och hur vi föreställer och förstår oss på det. Den här upplösande, uppslukande processen sker dessutom på både individuella och kollektiva plan—fängelset hotar att sluka både kropparna det kommer i kontakt med och andra institutioner. Rädslorna som kommer till uttryck i fängelsesjälvbiografierna handlar alltså snarare om oron för att slukas och därmed tillhöra det fula och farliga, än att exkluderas från det fina, rena, och ordentliga. Detta ger också uttryck för rädslor om identitet och individualitet, eftersom dessa hotas att upplösas inom fängelsets väggar. **Kapitel 5** gräver vidare i den här identitetshotande aspekten, genom att undersöka hur berättarna ger

uttryck för motstånd mot att slukas och assimileras av fängelset. Deras motstånd resulterar nämligen ofta i att de istället beskriver andra personer som monstruösa, och därmed hemmahörande i fängelset. Studien visar här hur berättarna tenderar att beskriva andra människor de möter i fängelset som monstruösa på olika vis som fokuserar på kroppar, tänder, och hårväxt—allt för att själva stå emot det uppslukande och tillintetgörande av individen som fängelset hotar med. Här dras linjer mellan 'oss' (berättaren och läsaren) och 'de andra' (andra karaktärer i berättelserna), ofta på sätt som aktualiserar frågor om normativitet när det kommer till kön, ålder, sexualitet och etnicitet (Halberstam 1995).

Vidare så finner dessa kapitel även exempel på hur fängelset framställs som en plats uppbyggd av lyckad assimilering, där fångslade kroppar såväl som deras röster blivit en del av väggarna och murbruket. Fängelset leder alltså till monster-skapande, både genom sin egen upplösande, korrumperande hantering av kroppar och genom hur det ger upphov till andrafierande beskrivningar och försök till gränsdragningar mellan berättarrösten och 'de andra'. Det här belyser en av fängelsets centrala paradoxer—en plats som förstås som smutsig, nedbrytande, otäck, och monster-skapande kan omöjligt förväntas skapa rena, återanpassade medborgare.

Nästa analyskapitel (**Kapitel 6**) fokuserar på en annan aspekt av fängelsets dubbelhet, nämligen hur det både hemsöks av och hemsöker andra platser och personer. Här visar studien bland annat att fängelset, medan det är en plats med sina egna, ofta bisarra regler och miljöer, också är en plats som på kusliga vis sträcker sig utanför sina egna väggar. Analysen visar till exempel hur berättelserna skildrar hemmets trygga vrå som en plats som både korrumperar och korrumpas av fängelset, och hur rollen som fångvårdare både komplicerar och kompliceras av familjeroller utanför fängelset. Överlag så resulterar dessa berättargrepp i att fängelset figurerar som både en hemsökt plats och en aktivt hemsökande figur i böckerna. En central aspekt av detta är hur fängelsets hemsökelse ställer gränsdragningar mellan 'vi' och 'de andra', såväl som 'trygga' och 'otrygga' platser och nu-, då-, och framtid på ända.

Studien finner också exempel på hur fängelsets tidslighet skrivs fram som beroende av dess rumslighet, och vice versa (**Kapitel 7**). Genom att fokusera på tid och rum som sammanflätade analyserar studien hur inte

bara fängelsets rumslighet, men också dess tidslighet, är kladdig och labyrinthartad. Det här perspektivet på fängelset som samtidigt tids- och rumsligt fångar också hur fängelset aktualiserar frågor om liv och död—både metaforiskt och bokstavligt talat. Till exempel beskrivs tid i fängelse som en sorts levande död i relation till omvärlden (Smith, C. 2009), men samtidigt beskrivs också fysisk död som en sorts befrielse från fängelsets kladdiga, långsamma och repetitiva tidsrum. Genom att observera hur tid och rum vävs samman i fängelset definierar studien en fängelse-kronotop (Bakhtin 1981), för att kunna artikulera vad fängelset *är* som en tidsrumslig plats. I korthet så visar denna kronotop hur fängelset är en kladdig, upprepande, svårbegriplig och utplånande atmosfär. I alla dessa sammanhang framställs fängelset med hjälp av gotiska genrekonventioner—fängelsesjälvbiografier är på många sätt skrivna på samma sätt som skräcknoveller. Fängelset gestaltas sammantaget som en otäck, smutsig, monstruös miljö som också skapar monster, både bland människorna som låses in och människorna som håller i nycklarna.

Sammantaget så visar studien hur fängelset är uppbundet i kusliga och bortträngande processer. Det drar upp gränser mellan o/önskade beteenden, institutioner och personer. Men samtidigt är fängelset också en del av upplösande, uppslukande processer där gränser helt och hållet ignoreras och raderas. Som kusligt tenderar det också att orsaka möten och insikter som förvränger frågan om vad som ens är o/önskat eller o/farligt. På så vis sätts både saker i sig, och definitionerna vi använder för att veta något om dessa saker, ur spel. Den här studien finner exempel på hur sådana gränsdragningar och ifrågasättanden blir synliga i berättelser som både handlar om och utspelar sig i fängelset. Fängelset är således en del av hur samhällen förstår sig på sig själva genom att kategorisera och dra gränser, men det är också ett utrymme där samhällens självbild kan ifrågasättas.

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In terms of time as well as in terms of depth, prison is a storied institution. Many-layered tales have been told about it since its inception. A prominent theme of these stories, moreover, is how they configure belonging and otherness through horror-iconography.

This study pursues how prison is made sense of in stories that present it as both fact and fiction. To study this, it explores how prison is narrativized in commercially published prison autobiographies. It analyses how the narrativization of prison space speaks to social fears and anxieties about deviance and punishment, and how these narratives fit into social, subject-formative processes where prison is an abject as well as uncanny institution.

Through its analysis of how prison is narrativized, the study unveils how prison is a viscous timespace that devours, disorients, and dissolves. It threatens to incorporate both subjects and other spaces into its lingering abjectivity, and haunt them if they ever leave. The study analyses how prison inscribes social fears on flesh, as well as what ghosts this flesh-making conjures. The resulting view is one of a sticky, subject-dissolving prison that seeps into and disrupts the fabric of ordinary life, while also threatening to keep growing and devouring with indiscriminate insatiability.

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